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***THE VISCOSITY OF STIGMA:
MEDIA EXPERIENCES,
INTERSECTIONALITY, AND THE LIFE-
COURSE OF LGBTQ⁺ CONSUMERS***

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**The University of Edinburgh Business School
Marketing Group**

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

“Find out who you are, and do it on purpose”
• Dolly Parton •

*To anyone who has ever been afraid
of being who they are.*

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree.

Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own. It incorporates texts previously published in journals and presented at conferences, all of which are provided in the Appendix. The thesis further includes work previously submitted as part of the PhD mandatory coursework as stated below:

Chapters 4 and 9: Nölke, AI (2015): 1st Supervised Reading: Authenticity

Chapters 2 and 6: Nölke, AI (2016): 2nd Supervised Reading: Intersectionality

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Date: Edinburgh, the 18th of May 2018

Signed:  _____

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ABSTRACT

For six decades, consumer researchers have relied heavily on Goffman's (1963) seminal work on stigma, often limiting themselves to a one-dimensional treatment of it as a static variable that determines the behaviour of homogenous groups. Such views, however, stand at odds with wider paradigm shifts away from modernity, and with feminist considerations about intersectionality. Most importantly, the dearth of studies examining the interplay between structural macro-dynamics and micro-level experiences has meant that rapid changes in societal attitudes have received insufficient attention. Considering the rise of minority portrayals in the past few years and importance of the media in dispersing and ameliorating stigma, there is a need to understand how media experiences differ across generations, sociocultural categories, and individual life-courses.

Focusing on lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and other (LGBTQ⁺) individuals, and building on Bauman's (2000) concept of liquid modernity as well as Bourdieu's (1994) theory of practice, this thesis explores how stigma experiences of two generations of LGBTQ⁺ consumers have changed, how this relates to their experiences of LGBTQ⁺ media portrayals, as well as what this tells us about how (marginalised) consumers navigate their lives and particularly the fragmentation of identity politics through (media) consumption.

I followed an intersectional phenomenological enquiry, employing a meaning-based model of media experience that contributes to the literature by extending Mick and Buhl's (1992) work to account for considerations of intersectionality and intertextuality. Life story- and subsequent media experience interviews were analysed individually and across cases. The sample consisted of eight LGBTQ⁺ members of the Boomer- and ten of the Millennial generation.

This study develops a theoretical framework of stigma as viscous instead of static: in constant flux due to the dynamic interplay between the doxic attitudes in social fields, as well as individual embodied dispositions, the stigma habitus. This provides a richer understanding of how it is enacted in consumer culture, enabling a critical

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analysis of the dialectic relationship between individuals and their environment.

Through this framework, my study challenges generational accounts of difference, which are found to be too simplistic to account for diverging (media) experiences. Instead, it is the dialectic between context and (stigma) habitus that shapes dynamic experiences. For participants facing high levels of stigma viscosity, for example, LGBTQ⁺ portrayals seemed particularly important and experiences revolved around social acceptance. Moreover, lived experiences, as well as doxic beliefs about media, advertising, and a text's 'author' formed an intertextual frame of reference used to evaluate portrayals' authenticity and harmfulness.

Importantly, participants' preference for or rejection of 'radical' vs heteronormative portrayals was shaped by tastes that have become naturalised in their habitus, with disparate doxic beliefs generating reflexive guilt and ambivalence.

My findings suggest that stigma amelioration may ultimately lead to symbolic violence within the LGBTQ⁺ community against those who do not adhere to accepted consumption standards. This study also has implications for consumers more broadly as changes in viscosity affect consumption practices. Adhering to a critical approach, I describe a range of recommendations for practitioners and reflexive practices I engaged in following this study.

LAY SUMMARY

Until now, consumer researchers have often considered stigmatised individuals as a homogenous group, with behaviour focussing on managing their ‘deviant’ identity. Such studies have, mostly, missed that our identities today are more fragmented than before, and different categories of difference, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, intersect to shape our lives. Few studies have been interested in the interaction between wider socio-cultural structures and individual experiences and recent rapid changes in society’s attitudes towards different marginalised communities have received insufficient attention.

Considering the rise of minority portrayals within the media in the past few years, and the importance of the media in normalising what was previously seen as deviant, there is a need to understand how media experiences differ across generations, sociocultural categories, and individual lives.

Focusing on lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and other (LGBTQ+) individuals, and building on the work of sociologists’ Bauman (2000) and Bourdieu (1994), this thesis explores how the stigma experiences of two generations of LGBTQ+ consumers have changed, and how this is intertwined with their experiences of LGBTQ+ portrayals in the media. The thesis also studies what this tells us about how these consumers navigate their lives and their own fragmented identity through (media) consumption.

I used a method of study which is interested in the meanings behind consumers’ media experiences and extends existing work to additionally consider multiple aspects of someone’s identity. It involved conducting life story- and subsequent media experience interviews with eight LGBTQ+ members of the Boomer- and ten of the Millennial generation.

My thesis develops a theory of stigma as viscous instead of static: as constantly in flux due to the interplay between our surroundings and our experiences and actions. This provides a richer understanding of how stigma is experienced in consumer culture, enabling a critical analysis of the dynamic relationship between individuals

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and their environment.

Through this framework, my study challenges the simplistic idea that individual categories, such as someone's age or sexuality, define how they will consume media. Instead, it is the current context as well as an individual's dispositions that affects how they react to LGBTQ+ portrayals in the media. For example, participants who are very aware of stigma against themselves (high viscosity in my terms), LGBTQ+ portrayals seemed particularly important. Furthermore, factors, such as the individuals' own experiences, beliefs about media, advertising, and a text's 'author' all influenced the individuals view of a media text's authenticity and harmfulness. Importantly, participants' feelings towards 'radical' portrayals versus those representing LGBTQ+ individuals who were more culturally "normal" was shaped by tastes developed throughout their life-course. The participant's reaction to these differing portrayals was linked to their own connection to the LGBTQ+ community.

My findings suggest that a reduction in stigma in society may ultimately lead to pressure within the LGBTQ+ community against 'radicals' who do not conform to mainstream standards. This study also has implications for consumers more broadly as changes in stigma viscosity affect consumption practices, and for the media, with regards to how it chooses to portray the LGBTQ+ community.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CCT	- Consumer Culture Theory
GLAAD	- Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation
IMME	- Intersectional Meaning-Based Model of Media Experience
LGBTQ+	- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer + Others
MCA	- Membership Categorisation Analysis
MCD	- Membership Categorisation Device
OITNB	- Orange is The New Black
RTD	- Russel T. Davies
SGNI	- Sexuality and Gender Non-Conforming Individuals
Trans*	- Trans -gender or -sexual
QDAS	- Qualitative Data Analysis Software

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Academic and Personal Origins of The Study

Over the past decade, we have experienced unprecedented societal changes regarding the stigma placed on sexuality and gender non-conforming individuals (SGNIs), culminating in the achievement of a range of civil rights and the exponential increase of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other (LGBTQ⁺) media (Ghaziani et al., 2016). In recent years, this has raised questions about how these changes have affected the identity formation and experiences of LGBTQ⁺ identified individuals (Plummer, 2015). Neither these changes, nor such questions, however, seem to have affected how LGBTQ⁺ consumers in particular, and stigma more broadly, have been studied and described in marketing and consumption studies. In fact, there is a general dearth of consumer research explicitly evoking stigma, a positivistic focus that disregards individual experiences within the limited research on this topic, and little investigation of the structural factors leading to stigma formation or amelioration (Crockett, 2017; Mirabito et al., 2016; Sandikci and Ger, 2010). This study thus aims to explore how stigma has changed and the consequences this has for

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individual identity formation, media experiences, and consumption more broadly.

Since its publication, consumer researchers have relied heavily on Ervin Goffman's (1963) seminal work on stigma as an inherent characteristic of a person, to make sense of marginalised individuals' consumption behaviour. As a consequence, and despite movement towards a more social process-oriented understanding of it (Link and Phelan, 2001, 2013), the marketing and consumption literature has treated stigma as a static variable and stigmatised groups as homogenous sets of people (Tsai, 2012; Visconti, 2008). Gay and lesbian identified individuals are described as one such group, whose behaviour is directed almost exclusively towards the management of their stigmatised subjectivity and group belonging (Kates, 2002, 2004). Within advertising and media consumption studies, gay individuals are described as a passive interpretive community whose members will prefer gay imagery and laud even stereotypical portrayals for the sense of gratification they provide (Oakenfull, 2013; Tuten, 2005, 2006).

As a lesbian identified woman, I began this study out of frustration; I felt that the academic studies I was reading, and media content I was consuming, misrepresented myself and others I knew who identified as LGBTQ⁺. Transparency about the origins and evolution of this thesis, including the interpretative frame for my analysis, requires a brief account of my own experiences of sexuality and stigma (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). As this is a phenomenological study, this ensures that my own experiences can be understood alongside, and as shaping my interpretation of, my informants' stories.

I had a very privileged and loving upbringing. My father co-owns a mid-sized

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business, headquartered in a small German village, while my mother, a proud Spanish woman, left her position as a teacher to take care of me and my brother. At school, however, the fact that my father was ‘well-off,’ in combination with good grades, a tomboyish demeanour, and a habit of standing up for others meant that I was persistently bullied throughout high school. My brother, who remains my closest confidant, had a number of interests traditionally considered to be more feminine, and was therefore harassed with homophobic remarks. I had few, mostly female, friends and distinctly remember my family’s comments that my closeness to them was not “normal”. My mother lamented my tomboyish appearance and hobbies, although apart from not allowing me to play football as it was a “boy’s sport,” neither of my parents actively restricted how I dressed or behaved. It is only in writing this thesis that I have come to realise how much such remarks, despite their good intentions, shaped my subsequent struggle to accept my sexuality.

At 16, I spent a year living with my aunt in Spain to improve my Spanish. It was here that I first considered the possibility of being gay, immediately pushing it into the depths of my mind as it was inconsistent with my sense of the “perfect daughter” I sought to be. When I returned to Germany to finish my A-Levels, I had developed much greater self-confidence, changed my entire friendship group, and started a short-lived relationship with a boy in an attempt to be ‘normal.’ I left to study Business Management at a small private university. Again, I distinctly remember the sensation that sexuality was not something to be discussed in this environment, especially when I heard the homophobic remarks made about an openly gay student.

During my studies, I spent a semester abroad in Bath, where I was finally confronted

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with my repressed sexuality in the form of a bisexual student whose open way of talking about her sexual identity awed and scared me in equal measure. The dawning realisation plunged me into a year-long depression upon my return. I isolated myself from friends and secretly started consuming all lesbian-themed media content I could find, rehearsing possible coming-out scenarios in my head, all of which only added to my despondency. The media thus played an important role in my identity formation, providing the only insights into what it meant to be gay apart from my Erasmus experience and the homophobic remarks I had heard directed at others.

It was not until after my graduation that my brother, having noticed my depressed state, convinced me to talk to him and, later, my parents. While it took my mother, who comes from a religious background, years to actually believe me, my family was ultimately fully supportive. Still, my mother continues to advise me to not disclose my sexuality unless specifically asked about it, in particular not in a professional setting. This, together with my German university experience, may explain why the business world is one of the only fields where I hesitate to divulge my sexuality.

Despite having come out to my brother and parents, I didn't tell anyone else for some time. I spent six months travelling with my closest friends without them knowing, then worked in a large German city, where I managed to keep my involvement with the local LGBTQ⁺ youth group secret for another four months, before gradually coming out to my closest friends who responded positively. During this time, I also had my first experiences of verbal harassment and homophobia, albeit in environments where I felt safe standing up for myself. When I moved to Edinburgh for my Masters studies, I decided to be open but private – telling those who asked,

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but not voluntarily disclosing my sexuality. I joined the LGBTQ⁺ student society, but did not enjoy the exclusivity and ‘drama’ that came with it. My involvement diminished quickly, although I did make some friends. With time, and a new relationship, my confidence and pride in my identity grew, along with my frustration at the injustices against SGNIs.

Following a lecture on vulnerable consumers, which mentioned Kates’ (2002) study of gay male consumption, I started to read further into this topic, and was surprised at both the dearth of relevant research and the content of the few studies. Contemporary research cited studies conducted in the 70s and 80s to claim that “[c]ompared to straight men, male homosexuals are likely to be less masculine, more sensitive, and less dominant. They are also more unconventional and less submissive to authority” whereas “lesbians are usually more dominant, independent, and tough-minded than straight females” (Um, 2010; 136). Due in part to “biological predispositions”, readers were told that “heterosexual men and women tend to have interests typical of their gender, whereas homosexual men and women tend to have interests that are relatively more typical of the other gender” (Oakenfull, 2012: 670-1). Such statements did not necessarily convince me, a decidedly feminine lesbian, of these studies’ validity.

In addition, shortly before, McDonalds had released an ad depicting a gay boy in France, one of the first ads to show an openly gay character in what I saw as a more positive light. The company suffered a backlash from LGBTQ⁺ consumer groups for its depiction of the boy as closeted, as well as the CEO’s statement that such an ad would never be aired in America (Gomstyn, 2010). This backlash stood in stark

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contrast to the academic studies telling me that gay and lesbian consumers craved the attention and societal acceptance conferred by inclusion in advertising.

My interest in this discrepancy ultimately translated into a Masters' and subsequently this PhD thesis. It is worth noting that, from the very beginning to the end of the PhD process, I was advised by various academics not to focus explicitly on LGBTQ⁺ identities in order to avoid being "marked" as the "gay researcher." More than anything, such warnings convinced me that this research was worthwhile and necessary, although, perhaps in conjunction with my mother's warning about coming-out in a business environment, I did consider omitting the term "LGBTQ⁺" from the thesis title, lest I be discriminated against by anyone reading it on my CV.

In theoretical terms, studies that paint LGBTQ⁺ consumers as a homogeneous group also stand at odds with wider paradigm shifts from modernity to late-, liquid-, or (post-), post- modernity (Bauman, 2000; Venkatesh et al., 1993), which seem to have entirely bypassed the study of stigmatised consumers. Discussions about the fragmentation of identities (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Giddens, 1991), as well as feminist considerations about the intersectionality of various categories of difference (Gopaldas and DeRoy, 2015), for example, stand in stark contrast to those painting stigma as a master identity or talk about it as a cumulative form of jeopardy. Moreover, moves to break the subject-object duality are not reflected in studies that, with few exceptions, have focused on stigma management techniques without considering how stigma emerges and evolves in response to societal change (Sandikci and Ger, 2010).

Rapid changes in the western world regarding the stigma placed on SGNIs, and the

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ambivalence associated with these, highlight the need for studies to break the mould of existing stigma consumption research. Previous work has argued that LGBTQ⁺ identified individuals born since the late 80s have vastly different lived experiences to their elders, resulting in distinct world views and beliefs (Russell and Bohan, 2005). Whereas the lives of the Boomer generation and, to an extent, Gen-X, have been shaped substantially by their (stigmatised) sexuality and/or gender identity, Millennials have been dubbed a post-gay generation that has grown up at a time where this no longer defines their identity (ibid).

Consumers today, more than ever, exist at an intersection of various identities that influence their identity and practices, yet, we know little about what this means for (potentially) marginalised individuals. Moreover, considering the importance of the media in forming, spreading, but also ameliorating stigma (Levy, 1981; Smith, 2007), and the exponential rise of minority portrayals in media and advertising over the past decade (McNicholas Smith and Tyler, 2017; Nölke, 2018), there is a need to understand how these representations are experienced today by different generations. Employing the conceptual toolbox of Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984; Holt, 1997; Kraus, 2006), this thesis thus revolves around three main research questions:

- A) How and to what extent has the experience of stigma changed for two generations of LGBTQ⁺ consumers over individual life-courses and across intersectional divides?
- B) How do these lived experiences of stigma relate to individual media experiences?

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C) How do marginalised consumers navigate their lives and experiences of stigma and particularly the fragmentation of identity politics through consumption, including media consumption?

When I embarked on this study, I envisaged two stages. The first would be an intersectional imagery analysis (Gopaldas and DeRoy, 2015) of mainstream advertising explicitly featuring LGBTQ⁺ individuals. I hoped that such an analysis, complemented with the Gay and Lesbian Association Against Defamation's (GLAAD) annual reports on LGBTQ⁺ characters in general mainstream media, would offer insights into the changing nature of such portrayals in recent years, and thus an understanding of the portrayals my informants encounter on a daily basis.

The second phase would involve a phenomenological enquiry, employing a meaning-based model of media experience that built on Mick and Buhl's (1992) seminal work. Through my interest in gender and sexuality studies, I quickly realised that my endeavour had to extend this work to account for critical considerations of intersectionality (McCall, 2005) and the life-course (Elder, 1998). My approach combined life story interviews (McAdams, 1993) with subsequent media experience interviews, to explore how they shaped each other. To facilitate a better understanding of the impact of societal change between generations, the sample would include members of both the Boomer- and the Millennial generations, reflecting the broad spectrum of possible LGBTQ⁺ identities. Through this two-step methodology I wanted to counter the shortcomings of phenomenological enquiry by accounting for the context of the context (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011), as well as feminist concerns of intersectionality and power balance with my participants.

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As I began analysing my interviews, however, it became clear that I would not be able to do justice to the richness of the data if I included both phases, the ad analysis and interviews, in this thesis. After long deliberation, I decided not to include my imagery analysis, which had by then been published in the *Journal of Homosexuality* (Nölke, 2018), in the thesis. Nonetheless, the findings of the intersectional imagery analysis greatly influenced my understanding of my context and the visual materials used in the interviews. Its findings are thus discussed as part of my literature review and I provide the full paper in Appendix 9. Thus, this thesis is devoted to a critical, intersectional, phenomenological enquiry.

1.2. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter two provides an overview of the current literature on stigma. I describe how the conceptualisation of stigma has changed from a static to a processual phenomenon and outline how stigma has been employed in the marketing and consumer culture literature, before critically discussing important shortcomings in the domain.

Moving on from this, chapter three examines how stigma and the experience thereof may change as societal power dynamics shift. I discuss the paradigm shift from modernity to postmodernity, as well as current societal changes based on Bauman's concept of liquid modernity, applying the implications of increasing ambivalence and uncertainty in societal attitudes first to the study of stigma in general and then to the context of the LGBTQ⁺ community. I provide a socio-historic overview of its emergence and change towards postmodern Queer Theory over the past century, finishing with a description of the generational gap that has ostensibly developed

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between an older generation marked by stigma, and a younger generation whose identity development seems no longer predicated on a marginalised identity.

Chapter four delves deeper into the media studies literature with an emphasis on the media's importance for the emergence and amelioration of stigma. I describe the various theories concerning consumers' media readings, interpretations, and experiences, including media effects, uses and gratifications, and cultural studies concerned with ideology and hegemony in media representation and interpretation. In doing so, I focus on those accounting for (a) the media's role in forming or reifying pervasive categories of difference and (b) the media experiences of potentially 'stigmatised' marginalised consumers.

In chapter five, I introduce Bourdieu's theoretical toolbox as an enabling theory that deepens my analysis of the interplay between individual agency and social structures in SGNIs experience of both stigma and the media, thereby addressing previous studies' shortcomings. To illustrate the benefits of this theory, I describe its implications for studies of gender, sexuality, and the media, and address pervasive criticisms.

Chapter six describes my methodological process. I detail my research questions and the philosophical assumptions underpinning my approach. I then describe the data generation process, including my sampling procedure and choices, participant details, the format of the life-story and media interviews, as well as my choice of example advertisements, before discussing ethical considerations and additional sources of data. Next, I outline the iterative analysis process, which involved an ideographic analysis of individual participants, followed by a nomothetic analysis

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across them. Lastly, I critically reflect on the methodology's limitations as well as my status, feelings, and development as a researcher over the course of the study.

Chapters seven to eleven detail the findings of this research. First, I introduce a new framework for the study of stigma that emerged out of my interviews and was developed iteratively by moving between these and the literature – the viscosity of stigma (chapter seven). Using this framework as a point of departure, chapter eight discusses participants' changing media experiences over their life-course. It illustrates the dual role the media played in forming their stigmatised subjectivities by providing positive or negative reinforcements that appeared to shape their identities and affect subsequent media experiences. In Chapter nine, I detail how both pre-conscious dispositions and reflexive evaluations were used to appraise representations' perceived authenticity in a process that takes into account the use of stereotypes, individual and group identification, narrative quality, and authorial intent. Lastly, chapter ten discusses the pervasive narrative of the 'new normal'. This discourse reflects some informants' fear of losing societal acceptance and others' desire to drive inclusion of 'othered' identities. It also indicates the power of embodied heteronormative tastes that explain informants' rejection of radical, explicit LGBTQ⁺ imagery in favour of heteronormative, assimilationist representations and can be used to start to understand in-group discrimination.

Chapter eleven draws these findings together to reflect on the changing stigma experiences of SGNIs and how these changes are navigated through (media) consumption. It further describes a Bourdieusian, intersectional model of media experiences that takes into account the interplay between individual habitus, field

movements, and doxic beliefs and discourses. Lastly, I discuss implication of this study for theory, methodology, and praxis, along with avenues for future research.

1.3. A Reflexive Note on Terminology

One of the big challenges I faced throughout the PhD process has been the use of the correct terminology, both in my dealings with LGBTQ⁺ identified people and in writing the thesis. Therefore, I think it is important to clarify my stance on gender and sexuality and explain why I have decided to use certain terminology.

I see gender as a social construct. While sex is biologically determined, the binary distinction between male- and female sex is a construct of language. According to articles in *Nature*, one of the most reputable scientific journals, however, even biologists now believe there is a wider spectrum of sexes in terms of chromosome combinations (Ainsworth, 2015). Finally, sexuality, far from simply determining attraction, is a function of desires, behaviours, and performances (Plummer, 2015).

The labels we use to define our and others' gender and sexual identity are, especially today, in constant flux as new identities emerge and old ones morph and adapt to social conditions (Ghaziani, 2011; Weeks, 2010). This, however, creates a complex challenge for scholars studying individuals who do not fit into the traditional, binary conception of gender and sexuality. Gay and lesbian became *LGBT*, but even this acronym quickly 'exploded' thanks to the proliferation of identities. Some people now advocate the use of *LGBTIQQA* meaning lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, questioning, asexual, and allies - and this does not even take into account those who identify as heterosexual but still have intimate encounters with those of the same sex, described with labels such as 'heteroflexibility' or 'bro-

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mance' (Ward, 2012).

In recent years, many have opted to use the term *queer* as an all-encompassing term to describe SGNIs as well as the alleged move towards not using any labels at all (Kates, 1999; Ng, 2013). It is important, here, to note the difference between *queer* as an identity, and the upper-case usage of the term that designates '*Queer Theory*,' the postmodern turn in sexuality studies (Warner, 1993). I myself started using this term when I first started writing, calling Millennials *Queer-Y*, for example. Over the course of this research, however, I have come to realise that many individuals do not identify and even actively reject the radical, subversive connotations that accompany this anti-identity category. As a consequence, I realised that there simply are no labels to fully encompass the existing plethora of sexual and gender subjectivities. Simultaneously, I do not agree with the voices who call for their complete abolition (e.g. Butler, 1990). Despite being socially constructed, such labels simply hold too much weight in individual's identity formation to be summarily dismissed.

In the end, I chose to listen to my participants, encouraging them to define their own identity without imposing my own preconceived understanding. This choice will be further discussed in my methodology chapter, but formed the basis for my final decision regarding the terminology I would use. Ultimately, I opted for "sexuality and gender non-conforming individuals" to acknowledge the lingering norms surrounding acceptable gender and sexuality performances, as well as "LGBTQ⁺," an acronym that encompasses all identity labels my participants identify with, while employing the "+" as a reminder of identities that exist but are not necessarily represented in this study.

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2. STIGMA

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the main foundation for this thesis: the study of stigma and its limitations. It first provides an overview over the progression of the wider study of stigma, describing Goffman's seminal work and its limitations, before moving on to more recent studies that describe stigma as a social process. The chapter then focuses on the disproportional interest in stigma management techniques and the dearth of research studying heterogeneity and structural causes for stigma. It introduces the concept of intersectionality as both an example of heterogeneity and a potential remedy to this drawback. I then outline existing work on stigma in the marketing and consumer research domain, with its focus on stigma management and sub-cultural consumption. Finally, I summarise the shortcomings of existing literature: the dearth of explicit research, its contextual vacuum and belief in homogeneity, and lack of interest in relations of power.

2.2. Goffman's Stigma

According to the renowned sociologist Ervin Goffman (1978), the self is created and sustained through everyday performances that are shaped by an individual's status in society, the resources they can access, and the wider social order. To be accepted within society, to be a certain type of person, requires our performances to be aligned with our place in the social hierarchy and our compliance with the moral order of society. In this way, each person is engaged in what Goffman (1955) terms "face-work" to preserve the ritual order of social life. To this end, we constantly and skilfully manipulate other's perceptions and engage in impression management to get ahead in the game of life.

The importance of the concept of the self, thus, lies not in who we believe we are, but how others see us (Goffman, 1963, 1974). To sustain a respectable self-image, then, one needs to have the resources, traits, and attributes that are desirable in the dominant social culture. Those who cannot adhere to these social norms are marked as deviant and consequently stigmatized. In his seminal book, Goffman (1963: 3) describes stigma as an attribute of a person "that is deeply discrediting." It is a sign of difference that makes one less desirable within society. Whether a characteristic is considered stigmatizing thus depends on situational factors and an individual's social position.

Goffman (1963:13) identifies three types of stigma:

"First there are the abominations of the body—the various physical deformities. Next there are blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example,

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mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behaviour. Finally, there are the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion.”

Here, stigma is an inherent characteristic of a person and thus cannot be separated from the self. As a consequence of their condition, thus, stigmatized individuals are not treated as ‘normal’ human beings; they are deviant and to be avoided. Goffman (1963) classified individuals into ‘the stigmatized,’ ‘the normals,’ and ‘the wise,’ the latter of which are ‘normals’ who understand the stigmatized condition.

Since its publication, Goffman’s understanding of stigma has been used widely, with studies adopting his understanding of stigma as a ‘mark,’ (Jones et al., 1984) akin to Goffman’s ‘blemish,’ and an inherent ‘attribute’ of a person (Tsai, 2011; Yang et al., 2007). Scholars further concur that stigma is context dependent; it is directly related to what a given society defines as ‘normal’ and any infraction of this moral order results in their evaluation as deviant (ibid; Crocker et al., 1998).

2.3. Beyond Goffman

Over the years, however, Goffman’s definition has been criticized as too deterministic and focused on the individual, leading to a shift towards a more multi-faceted, social process understanding of the term (e.g. Crocker et al., 1998; Dovidio et al., 2000). In 2001, Link and Phelan reviewed the existing understanding of the term in academic literature and found that it was used in a variety of ways across disciplines and thus lacked clarity. Most studies prior to the turn of the millennium focused excessively on ‘deviant attributes’ and ‘stereotyping’. Stigma was regarded as central to a person’s sense of self, something that could not be changed, which, in turn, presented stigmatized individuals as passive victims needing help and support.

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Research, thus, lacked an understanding of their lived experience and the structural factors leading to stigmatization in the first place (ibid).

Seeking to change the way stigma was used in academic literature, Link and Phelan (2001) devised a new conceptualization, focusing on stigma as a social process in a social setting that has a negative effect on a person. Their definition of stigma comprises labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination, as well as later power situations (Link et al., 2013); and emotional responses (Yang et al., 2007).

Labelling:

For stigma to be possible, there needs to be a label that provides the focus for stigmatization. Humans are social creatures who create distinct categories for differences between individuals, which will be salient within specific social environments. Following Scheff's (1971) labelling theory, labels are socially created rather than inherent characteristics and learned through socialisation into a specific culture. They can be informal or official, and are reinforced through their use in everyday conversations. Thus, the way we communicate has a direct effect on the way stigmata are created and spread through society (Smith, 2007). Goffman (1963: 45) also alluded to this through his concept of 'moral careers,' which describes the process through which individuals learn about societal beliefs.

Stereotyping:

Following criticisms that Scheff's theory designates labels as causing "deviant careers" instead of the reverse, Link et al. (1989) provided a modified labelling theory that highlighted the harmful consequences of labelling by connecting it to

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stereotyping. Existing labels are connected to negative stereotypes through deeply held societal beliefs. Psychologically, this process is preconscious, which is why, once stereotypical beliefs are held, they are seldom questioned (Link et al., 1987). Which attributes are stereotyped depends on context. Whereas some cultures, for example, stigmatise obesity, others do not, and those who value conformity, as well as more conservative, rural areas, have been found to be more likely to stereotype and stigmatize (Shin, Dovidio, and Napier, 2013).

Separation:

Individuals labelled as deviant are categorized as distinct from others, thus creating an ‘us vs them’ mentality that enables a view of them as dangerous and fuels adverse social reactions such as racism and phobias (Devine et al., 1999). This creates a double-bind as ‘normals’ are likely to stay away from those perceived to be deviant, whereas those who are stigmatized learn to fear social interaction, leading to social isolation (Link and Phelan, 2001). Others choose to create their own neighbourhoods in which they can live freely, thereby creating a self-contained minority sub-culture. This is the case for ethnic neighbourhoods, as well as for *gaybourhoods*, gay neighbourhoods that emerged after World War II (Marchia, 2015).

Emotional Responses:

Stigma often leads to strong emotional reactions such as fear (phobia), anger, pity, and anxiety that influence how ‘normals’ will behave towards the stigmatised. Stigmatised individuals, on the other hand, are likely to experience feelings of embarrassment, shame, fear, or anger (Link et al., 2004). These emotional responses incur negative psychological consequences, such as lower self-esteem and self-worth

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(Austin and Goodman, 2017; Crocker, 1999), depression (Crocker and Major, 1989; Levitt et al., 2012), and anxiety (Link et al., 1997; Markowitz, 1998). Stigmatized individuals are likely to internalise the view of themselves as inferior and to accept negative stereotypes as truth, which has been termed *internalized stigma* (Herek et al., 2009; Livingston and Boyd, 2010) or *stereotype embodiment* (Levy, 2009).

Status Loss and Discrimination:

In addition to separation from the ‘normals,’ stigma causes individuals to lose status in society, subjecting them to discrimination (Link and Phelan, 2001). Discrimination also occurs at a structural level, whereby existing institutional structures create disadvantages that are not necessarily apparent. Stigma can, for example, lead to loss of employment due to missing legal protection and prejudice based upon negative stereotypes (Puhl and Heuer, 2009). Employers’ and colleagues’ negative beliefs create barriers for employment, hostile work environments, and work place inequities. Unemployment rates of stigmatized groups are estimated at three to five times higher than average (Stuart, 2006). Similar discrimination can be found in other institutional fields, such as health care and education (e.g. Hiestand et al., 2008).

Power:

Link and Phelan (2004; 2001) illustrate the importance of social, cultural, economic, and political power in stigma relations as follows: While mental patients might label, insult, and stereotype the staff in mental institutions, these practices do not constitute stigmatization, because the patients do not have the power to actually discriminate against the staff. For stigma to be meaningful, it needs to involve a relation of power.

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All groups within society can create labels or stereotypes, but what matters is “whose cognitions prevail - whose cognitions carry sufficient clout in social, cultural, economic, and political spheres to lead to important consequences for the group that has been labelled as different” (Link and Phelan, 2001: 378). In addition to requiring power, stigma also gives it to stigmatisers. Link et al. (2013) describe ‘stigma power’ in terms of Bourdieu’s ‘symbolic power’ as it enables stigmatisers to reinforce structural discrimination. Thus, even when one mechanism of discrimination has been overcome, another can easily take its place.

2.4. Coping and Managing Stigma

Link and Phelan’s definition takes us away from viewing stigmatised individuals as passive victims and back to an important aspect of Goffman’s study - people actively manage and resist their stigma. Goffman (1963) describes several stigma management techniques: Some engage in ‘*information control*,’ carefully deciding whom they disclose their stigma to (p.57), or conceal it in an attempt to ‘*pass*’ as normal (p.58). Some attempt to ‘*normify*’ their behaviour by convincing others that the stigma does not apply to them (p.132), or to ‘*master*’ something that should be impossible due to their stigma. Others come to accept stigma as a ‘*blessing in disguise*’ (p.21), or opt for ‘*in-group alignment*’ (p.137) - connecting with others to jointly confront its effects. This latter technique is particularly disruptive as the social order requires stigmatized individuals to perform in ways that signal acceptance of their lesser status (ibid).

Unsurprisingly, many scholars have expanded on Goffman’s typology. Work investigating stigma ‘coping strategies’ conceptualizes the consequences of stigma as

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stressors, whereby “environmental or internal demands tax or exceed the adaptive resources of the individual” (Miller and Kaiser, 2001: 74). This definition focuses on an individual’s cognitive and adaptive resources that allow them to face such stressors.

Link and colleagues described practices of “secrecy” (information control), “education,” and “withdrawal” (1991), as well as “challenging” (in-group alignment) and “distancing” (passing or normifying) (Link et al., 2002). They did not, however, find any positive benefits of adopting these individual coping strategies, concluding that their ineffectiveness stems from their failure to address hegemonic ideologies and existing cultural preconceptions. Similarly, Thoits (2011) suggests that some individuals have greater ‘*stigma resistance*’ and are thus less susceptible to negative stigma effects on self-esteem. According to Thoits, individuals can either “deflect” stigma, limiting their association with the stigmatised attributes, or “challenge” them, performing in ways that disaffirm the stereotype: educating others, confronting stigmatisers, or through activism. The author argues that deflecting and challenging strategies can significantly diminish the effects of stigma on one’s self-regard.

Miller and Kaiser (2001) draw on a framework created by Compas and colleagues, who classify coping mechanisms as voluntary or involuntary responses, at engagement or disengagement levels. Involuntary responses relate to negative effects of stigma and can include, at the engagement level, physiological or emotional reactions, such as anger or blood pressure rises, as well as impulsive action. Only one involuntary response is described as potentially positive - avoiding stressors at the precognitive level, whereby an individual unconsciously avoids paying attention to

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labels and discriminatory statements (ibid: 86). On the disengagement level, coping entails active avoidance of social contact with non-stigmatised others, akin to Goffman's 'group alignment' strategy, or stigmatized others (passing, norming). Another disengagement strategy involves denying that discrimination has happened in the first place (ibid). Voluntary engagement mechanisms, on the other hand, aim to gain either primary or secondary control over a stressor. Primary control mechanisms aim to influence the stressful event itself to regain control, by actively regulating one's emotions or finding innovative ways of overcoming a stressor. Conversely, those employing secondary control mechanisms seek to adjust to the situation themselves, for example, by actively distracting oneself, cognitively restructuring an event to reduce its negative connotations, or accepting discriminatory practices as normal (ibid).

2.5. From Heterogeneity to Intersectionality

Link and Phelan's (2001) conceptualisation of stigma as a social process, also opens up the field to those who challenge the belief that every person within a stigmatized group experiences the same negative outcomes. Indeed, the authors suggest that there are different degrees of stigma (ibid). Individuals within the same stigmatized group do not necessarily suffer the same effects, and each may be associated with only certain aspects of a stigmatized identity. Furthermore, Jones et al. (1984) describe six dimensions that affect the extent a person will be stigmatised: the stigma's *origin* and *course* (reversibility), *its concealability* and *aesthetic qualities* (extent to which it elicits disgust), as well as its *disruptiveness* to the social order and *peril* (threat to others).

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In addition, prior studies have shown that the effects of stigma are moderated by factors such as support structures and psychological factors. Steele and Aronson (1995) talk about '*stereotype threat*' as a form of negative self-awareness due to concerns that one's behaviour might confirm a stereotype. Pinel (1999) coined the term '*stigma consciousness*,' describing the extent to which individuals are aware of their stigma and how their expectations about being stigmatized affect their lives. For individuals who experience physical attacks first-hand, negative psychological effects are intensified (D'Augelli and Grossman, 2001). Major and O'Brian (2005) employ the concept of '*stigma sensitivity*' in examining the extent to which stigma influences a person's identity. Lastly, Link et al. (2015) coined the term '*symbolic interaction stigma*,' to describe how imagined relations to others, such as anticipation of others' discriminatory reactions may adversely affect an individual.

The similarity between these concepts illustrates one of the main problems in the literature on stigma – most studies in this domain focus narrowly on their respective context. This context-dependency, coupled with a lack of interdisciplinary work, has led to inefficiencies such as duplication of findings and concepts. In addition, as asserted by Link and Phelan (2001), the disproportionate interest in stereotypes and discrimination has limited research into both structural causes of stigma and moderating influencers.

These considerations highlight the potential importance of the concept of intersectionality, which has, to date, remained conspicuously absent from the stigma literature (Gopaldas and DeRoy, 2015; Mirabito et al., 2016). Traditional, additive models of jeopardy suggest that, for an individual who is affected by several stigmata

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simultaneously, the negative effects of stigma reinforce each other to create a cumulative effect (Luft and Ward, 2009). As the foregoing considerations suggest, however, this is not necessarily the case. Despite the plethora of studies seeking to determine the ‘marks of oppression,’ the literature is ripe with contradictory findings about its effects and stigmatized individuals are often found to be as well-adjusted as their non-stigmatised counterparts (Miller and Kaiser, 2001). A lesbian woman with a disability is thus not necessarily more stigmatized than one without it.

Intersectionality, with its interest in how multiple categories of oppression influence an individual over the life-course, can help scholars move away from outdated models of multiple-jeopardy (Cronin and King, 2010; Luft and Ward, 2009). The term was introduced to feminist scholarship in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw as part of black feminists’ critique of the supremacy of white feminism and the lack of attention given to the interdependency of race and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1989). After being further developed by Patricia Hill Collins in the 1990s, embracing other locations of oppression in the metaphorical “matrix of domination” (Collins, 2002), it has become one of feminisms’ most significant contributions (McCall, 2005). It refers to “the intersection between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Davis, 2008: 68).

In contrast to traditional models of stigma, the concept of intersectionality is more flexible and focuses on how relevant classifications are established, experienced and rejected in daily life (McCall, 2005). It focuses not only on the burdens of oppression, but also on exposing privilege and power, while always locating an

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individual's standpoint within its socio-cultural context. It thus holds great promise for the study of stigma, as it is predicated on an interest in both individual standpoints and experience, as well as macro-social structures that shape oppression.

2.6. Stigma in Marketing and Consumption Studies

Stigma as a concept has not been widely adopted in the marketing and consumption literature, remaining a largely implicitly used terminology. Nonetheless, Goffman's definition and the notion of stigma management have broken into some areas of this literature. The following sections discuss and critique studies in this domain.

2.6.1. Stigma in the Marketplace

The literature has been particularly interested in the limitations stigmatized people face in the marketplace. These studies rarely examine discrimination itself, however, focusing instead on the coping strategies employed by consumers, as well as marketplace stigma in terms of "the labelling, stereotyping, and devaluation by and of commercial stakeholders ... and their offerings" (Mirabito et al., 2016: 171).

Several studies have focused, for example, on 'functionally illiterate' (Adkins and Ozanne, 2005; Jae and DelVecchio, 2004; Viswanathan et al., 2005) consumers lacking the basic language and numeracy capabilities needed to move confidently through the marketplace (ibid). Assuming that such consumers face stigmatization in the marketplace, these authors proceed to describe the strategies used to manage their spoiled identity, such as frequenting the same stores, buying visually familiar products, as well as restricting the amount of money they brought with them (ibid).

Tepper (1994) positions the usage of a senior citizen discount as an overt sign of a

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stigmatized status – old age. She claims that individuals use three strategies to manage this stigma: *resistance*, through denying the label and rejecting discounts, *secrecy* in terms of controlling information through rejection of discounts, or by *challenging* negative meanings of senior citizenship and thus considering discounts unproblematic (ibid). Subsequent studies, however, have suggested that a stigma is placed on the use of discounts and coupons in general, thereby questioning Tepper's findings (Argo and Main, 2008; Ashworth et al., 2005).

Another area is the study of how stigma is connected to products and brands. Drawing on Belk's (1988) extended self-theory, it has been suggested that brands and their users are connected to positive and negative stereotypes. Literature on consumer identity agrees that consumers use products and brands as extensions of the self (Belk, 1988; Belk et al., 1989) or signifiers of (social-) self-identity (Sirgy, 1982). 'Brand stigma' has been connected to brand nationality (Ruth and Simonin, 2003), low market-share brands (Muñiz and Schau, 2005) and brand 'personality' (Aaker, 1997). Product categories have also been linked to stigma, as in the case of health risks associated with genetically modified food (Ellen and Bone, 2008) or cigarettes (Hamilton and Hassan, 2010).

Individuals of different social classes have been found to attribute different stereotypes to the same brands (Munson and Spivey, 1981). Several studies have pointed to the way teenagers and children use brands and products as status symbols to establish a social hierarchy, stigmatizing those who do not own the appropriate clothing (Roper and Shah, 2007; Wooten, 2006). Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds thus wear branded clothing to create a 'façade of affluence'

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(Roper and Shah, 2007: 715), resonating with Goffman's 'passing.' This practice, however, can leave them more vulnerable if the brands themselves subsequently become a target of stigma (Hamilton, 2012). The process is, thus dialectical. Brand-users can be associated with a stereotype, but can also themselves imbue the brand with a stereotype, as in the association of Subaru cars with gay women (Freitas et al., 1996; Tsai, 2012). Hence, consumer identities have become a further site of interest for scholars of stigma.

2.6.2. Sub-Cultural Capital, Acculturation, and Taste

The fact that stigmata are socially constructed and thus usually imposed on an entire sub-group of people within society is commonly accepted in the consumption literature. The concept of sub-cultures as a theoretical lens was introduced in the 1970s through sociology and cultural studies of punk, youth-, and techno movements (Hebdige, 1979; Hall and Jefferson, 1973; Thornton, 1995). Subcultures involve meanings and practices that influence an individual's sense of (social-) self and often lead to a shared identity (Hebdige, 1995; Holt, 1997; Thornton, 1996). Impression management and authenticity are central aspects of this process. It should be noted here that authenticity can be conceptualised as a constantly changing social process that is subjectively assessed by each individual (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). Thus, audiences can convert even something arguably 'fake' into something phenomenologically real (Rose and Wood, 2005). Taking Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, Thornton (1996) created the term 'sub-cultural capital' to describe the sub-cultural knowledge and practices employed by members to gain status and to be acknowledged as 'authentic.' Sub-cultural behaviours and values are learned via socialisation into the group and authenticity is established in shared discourses and

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negotiations. As Thornton (1996) points out, subcultures are often associated with deviance.

The stigma placed on groups across different categories of difference has attracted research interest, particularly in the acculturation, media consumption, and Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) literature. Both Peñaloza (1994) and Üstuner and Holt (2007) have examined the acculturation of migrants, the former focusing on Mexican immigrants in America, and the latter on women migrants in a Turkish squat. Both find these immigrants generally regarded as deviant in the dominant culture and thus physically segregated, but only Peñaloza (1994) explicitly invokes stigma in her study. Nonetheless, Üstuner and Holt (2007) found that for these Turkish migrants, any efforts to integrate into the community or conceal their deviance by adopting dominant consumption practices, were stifled by their lack of cultural and economic capital, and thus quickly suspended.

Drawing from Thornton, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) coined the term ‘subcultures of consumption’ in their study of the new biker movement, defining it as groups within society that self-select based on a mutual dedication to a certain product, brand, or consumption activity. They differentiate themselves based on “an identifiable, hierarchical social structure; a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values; and unique jargons, rituals, and modes of symbolic expression” (ibid: 43). According to the literature, these groups often face stigmatization as ‘social misfits,’ a notion that can be found in a number of studies. Kozinets (2001), for example, explicitly invokes the notion of stigma in his study of Star Trek fans who are widely perceived as immature, obsessive nerds preoccupied with fantasy rather than reality

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and thus linked to mental deviance (p.73). A very similar ‘stigma’ is placed on Warhammer players in Cova et al.’s (2007) study. In Henry and Caldwell’s (2006: 1037) investigation, stigma is seen as a source of consumer disempowerment and the stereotype placed on Heavy Metal Music fans is described as one of “‘social misfits’ with violent tendencies.”

To manage these stereotypes, members across all three contexts engaged in a range of behaviours similar to those already described. Henry and Caldwell (2006: 1033) detail their own “taxonomy of consumer remedies to stigma.” Table 2.1 presents an overview over all previously mentioned studies on stigma management and coping in relation to their taxonomy, as well as providing sample studies in consumer research that report the same strategies. It thus highlights again the duplication of findings and terminology pervasive in the study of stigma.

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Table 2.1 Stigma Management and Coping Literature Overlaps

Stigma Management Strategy	Goffman (1963)	Link and Phelan (1991; 2002)	Thoits (2011)	Miller and Kaiser (2001)	Henry and Caldwell (2006)	Studies in Marketing and Consumption Literature
	Stigma in General	Mental Health	Mental Health	Mental Health	Heavy Metal Music Fandom	
Carefully deciding whom to disclose one's stigma to.	Information Control	Secrecy		Emotional Regulation; Emotional Expression	Concealment	Kozinets (2001); Adkins and Ozanne (1998, 2005); Viswanathan et al. (2005); Henry and Caldwell (2006)
Concealing one's stigma to appear 'normal'	Passing		Deflect	Voluntary Avoidance		Tepper (1994); Adkins and Ozanne (1998, 2005); Viswanathan et al. (2005); Wooten (2006); Henry and Caldwell (2006)
Changing one's behaviour to convince others that the stigma does not apply to oneself	Normifying	Distancing		Denial	Mainstream engagement	Kozinets (2001); Neves (2004); Henry and Caldwell (2006) Nguyen et al. 2014
Striving to accomplish something that should be impossible due to one's stigma.	Mastering			Distraction		Adkins and Ozanne (1998, 2005); Viswanathan et al. (2005); Henry and Caldwell (2006)
Connecting with others like oneself to jointly and militantly confront the effects of the stigma. Groups provide social support and self-esteem.	In-Group Alignment	Challenging	Challenging: Educating, Confronting, Activism	Problem Solving (collective action)	Enclave withdrawal	Campbell and Deacon 2006; Crocker (1999); Kates (2002); Kozinets (2001); Neves (2004); Scaraboto and Fischer (2009); Henry and Caldwell (2006)
Producing or creating own societal spaces and norms where the stigma in question is valued.				Problem Solving	Creative production	Henry and Caldwell (2006)
Directly confronting stigma through potentially violent or aggressive behaviour.	Hostile Bravado			Emotional Regulation; Emotional Expression	Confrontation	Ozanne et al. (1998); Sandicki and Ger (2010); Tepper (1994); Scaraboto and Fischer (2009); Henry and Caldwell (2006)
Escaping reality through leisure consumption, often within a group.	In-Group Alignment			Distraction	Hedonism	Kates (2002); Henry (2001); Henry and Caldwell (2006)
Accepting stigma as a 'blessing in disguise' (p.21) for the valuable lessons learned	Blessing in Disguise			Acceptance		Kozinets (2001); Henry and Caldwell (2006);
Accepting the stigma by transforming its meaning and implications into something positive.		Challenging	Challenging	Cognitive Restructuring		Tepper (1994); Scaraboto and Fischer (2009); Sandicki and Ger (2010);
Finding meaning in life through spirituality and religion that supersedes the stigmatisation experienced on this plane of reality.					Spiritualism	Henry and Caldwell (2006)
Resigning to stigma (potentially falling into a pattern of drug consumption)	Defensive Cowering	Withdrawal		Acceptance	Resignation	Henry (2001); Henry and Caldwell (2006)
Drawing hope by dreaming of a fantasy world of acceptance, or engaging with such fictional worlds through the media.					Escapism	Kozinets (2001); Henry and Caldwell (2006)
Dreaming of a past life where things were better. Possibly engaging in (consumption) behaviour geared to take one back to these times.				Wishful Thinking	Nostalgia	Henry and Caldwell (2006)

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In a recent study of tattoo culture, Larson, Patterson and Markham (2014) looked at tattoo art as a type of voluntary physical stigma. Their study again focused on stigma management. Notably, however, they examined the mainstreaming and commodification of this formerly deviant art form. They discussed the existence of what they term ‘commodity stigma,’ whereby “tattooed individuals attribute stigma to other tattooed individuals based on the commodified nature of their tattoos” (ibid:16). The authors thus emphasise that stigmatization can arise both from the in- and out-group and that stigma is not always based on deviance from societal norms, but also over adherence to fashion and market forces.

Similarly, Ho and O’Donohoe (2014) investigated the stereotypes surrounding volunteering as a symbolic consumption form, and how young volunteers and non-volunteers managed the related stigma. Their study illustrates how both groups – volunteers and non-volunteers – stigmatised each other through impression management practices. Stereotypes were often connected to the marketplace in terms of appearance standards, such as in the stereotype of “the older charity shop worker” (ibid). Their work highlights the importance of reference groups for young people’s sense of stigmatisation.

2.6.3. Gay Sub-Cultural Consumption

Few consumer researchers have investigated the consumption behaviour of gay consumers through the lens of sub-cultural consumption. First suggested by Peñaloza (1996), the concept was substantially extended by Kates (1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004; Kates and Belk, 2001), whose work has since formed the basis for studies of this group (Rinallo, 2007; Tsai, 2012; Visconti, 2008).

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In a range of ethnographic studies spanning a North American, urban gay community (2004), a gay ghetto in a Canadian city (Kates, 2002), Toronto Pride (Kates and Belk, 2001), and the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Grass in Sydney (Kates, 2003), Kates characterizes the gay sub-culture as a highly cohesive, stigmatized entity that has a substantial impact on gay individual's lives and behaviour. It is characterised by shared rituals and practices, such as coming-out and the use of sub-cultural capital to determine status within members. Within the groups he observed, consumption practices, individual appearance, and symbols such as the rainbow flag were deliberately used to show adherence to group norms and distinguish oneself from heterosexuals via 'othering'. Following socialisation theory, Kates' (2002) describes how gay consumers usually developed their tastes during childhood, and then experienced further secondary socialisation into the gay sub-culture.

Kates explored how appearance was used as a social instrument of identification, and other commentators have similarly emphasised the traditional 'gay look,' "an idealized image of thinness, muscle tone, and style typically devoid of fat that one could show off" (Freitas et al., 1996; Hutson, 2010: 228–9). According to Kates (2002), however, members constantly walked a fine line between 'authentic' adherence to the group's norms, and blind conformity, in order to not slip into an exaggerated stereotypical appearance exemplified by the overly camp 'Ghetto Queen'. At the same time, careful management of appearance was also necessary in heterosexual spaces to avoid homophobic abuse (Goffman, 1963). Thus, the meanings of gay consumption were always contested as members struggled to maintain a distinct and authentic identity, both as individuals and members of a social group, while still carefully managing their stigma. Members of this sub-culture

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used consumption to build safe spaces in which to express both their individual and social identities, while simultaneously preserving the symbolic borders differentiating gay culture from the mainstream (Kates, 2004; Keating and McLoughlin, 2005; Visconti, 2008).

The sub-culture as described in existing studies further shares an ethos based on Queer ideologies that are predicated on “pride in self, concern for other human beings, emotional support, and acceptance for others” (Kates and Belk, 2001: 411), but also deliberately challenge and subvert heteronormative ideologies of the family and gender binaries. This ideology will be discussed further in chapter three. Gay sub-cultural consumption is thus often described as a collective resistance that is expressed through flamboyancy, radical gender-bending behaviour, and “consistent use of exaggeration, overemphasis, and things being just too much” (ibid: 404), particularly during events such as Pride and Mardi Gras (see also Kates, 2003). While some informants in Kates and Belk's (2001: 402) study of Pride in Toronto expressed discomfort at such behaviour, this was not explored further since “most of those annoyed continue to participate in Pride Day and find it a unifying celebration of community and oneness.”

More critical voices have contested such a liberal view, arguing that the increasing commercialisation and marketization of gay sub-cultural meanings to make them acceptable to mainstream consumers undermine their subversive potential and sanitise same-sex desire (Kates, 1999; McNicholas Smith and Tyler, 2017; Rinaldo, 2007; Sender, 2004; Visconti, 2008). In this context, “appropriation works by democratizing the ironic sensibility of camp so that it loses much of its political

potency and capacity to identify and condemn social inequity” (Kates, 2003: 18).

2.6.4. Recent Developments

Few studies have moved away from mere stigma management to study the social processes through which stigma arises and how stigmatized practices might be transformed or even destigmatised. A landmark study in this regard is Sandikci and Ger’s (2010) study of women who veil, one of the first consumer research studies to draw on Link and Phelan’s (2001; 2004) work to note the importance of power in defining and understanding stigma and to define the marketplace as a “domain where power is both reproduced and contested” (Sandikci and Ger, 2010: 17). Despite its widespread adoption, veiling is seen by many societies as a threat against a secular social order and a signifier of Islamic terrorism and patriarchal dominance. It has thus become an important stigmatized political activity. Sandikci and Ger describe how women embraced veiling as an identity project, despite its stigma, as a way of gaining stability at a time of political and spiritual unrest and of working against their own sexualisation. In a world of too much freedom, these women thus set boundaries for themselves akin to Foucault’s self-restraining subjects “to provide a sense of pride, self-respect, and higher moral ground” (2010:24). Through personalization and aestheticisation, veiling slowly became an accepted, routinized practice. Now, according to Sandikci and Ger, women who choose to veil negotiate both their belonging to a group, as well as their individuality under a neoliberal ideology.

Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) similarly tried to move the literature away from investigations of mere management of stigma to active responses and challenges. They describe the ways that members of the ‘Fat Acceptance Movement’ got

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together to challenge and transform the stigma surrounding obesity. Through online activism they contest the legitimacy of existing stereotypes, as well as the information espoused by the weight-loss and health industries. These types of studies emphasise the ways that consumption can provide “conceptual spaces that consumers in contemporary society use to construct a sense of self and what matters in life” (Kozinets, 2001:85).

Recently, Mirabito et al. (2017) attempted to unify existing stigma literature in their *Stigma Turbine* framework. Individuals, society, and the marketplace are positioned as targets of stigmatisation, whereas the factors contributing to stigma are summarised as “historical, institutional, and commercial” winds or currents. Institutions such as the media and policy makers are positioned as “countervailing winds” that destigmatise. The authors further provide a stigma audit questionnaire, based on Link and Phelan’s (2001) definition, aimed to be a tool through which policy makers and commercial stakeholders can assess the potential (de)stigmatising effects of their actions. While this work provides a good summary from which future studies can draw in future, in particular with regards to the structural factors affecting stigma, it does not engage critically enough with the limitations in the existing literature nor levels of individual experience. While it identifies the “crucial need” of understanding the consequences of intersectionality and the dynamic nature of stigma, for example, it does not provide clear avenues for doing so. Its structural nature inhibits it from exploring the possible dynamic nature of some of the “winds” as both stigmatising and destigmatising forces. Moreover, the importance of power is mentioned briefly, but not explored in-depth. This study is thus a great step towards acknowledging the importance of context and marketplace stigma. Nevertheless,

more work needs to be done to explore these theoretical concepts empirically.

2.7. Critical Considerations

2.7.1. Dearth of Explicit Research

The main criticism to be brought against the use of stigma in the marketing literature is the lack of explicit attention to the concept, even within studies that focus on categories of difference such as race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. For example, Harrison, Thomas and Cross (2015) focus on multiracial identity development and point to many aspects of stigma (us vs them; stereotypes; discrimination; labelling), but never refer explicitly to the concept itself. Studies of acculturation such as Peñaloza (1993) and Ustuner and Holt's (2007) equally do not make connections to the wider study of stigma, potentially overlooking promising avenues of analysis.

2.7.2. Contextual Vacuum and Concept Confusion

Those studies that do explicitly point to stigma generally fail to connect their findings to existing work, especially in the field of consumption studies. Studies of poverty stigma are thus, for example, not linked to those on stigma surrounding obesity or low-literacy levels, for example, creating a contextual vacuum. Studies continue to create context-bound descriptions of stigma management strategies, failing to acknowledge existing frameworks and thus creating redundant terminologies and contributing to the confusion surrounding the concept. Most consumption studies identified in

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Table 2.1 either draw solely from Goffman or use their own stigma management terminology that closely resembles those already in existence.

Most stigma research in the marketing domain happily invokes Goffman's (1963) definition of stigma as a discrediting attribute, but fails to acknowledge more recent advances (see also Mirabito et al., 2017). It seems that the term stigma is being used rather liberally as a placeholder for any practice that is labelled and stereotyped, even if there are no discrimination or power dimensions involved. As Link and Phelan (2001; 2004) contend, mere labelling and stereotyping do not in themselves constitute stigmatizing practices. Tepper's (1994) study on the stigma on senior citizenship discounts is a prime example of both the contextual vacuum and the confusion surrounding the definition of stigma. Based on the data provided, as well as subsequent studies, one has to ask whether the discrimination experienced in this study occurs due to old age or due to service personnel believing that a discounted price warrants a 'discounted' service (Argo and Main, 2005). Thus, the real stigma involved in these examples might be the stigma of poverty. Lack of economic capital, to use Bourdieu's (1886) terminology creates the 'inferior consumer' who is not able to fully participate in the market.

2.7.3. Homogeneity vs Heterogeneity

The marketing literature has often used the concept of stigma to talk about a group of individuals in a highly homogenized fashion. Despite defining stigma as a social process and in a social context, this is rarely kept in mind as studies unfold. Stigma is instead seen as a 'master status' - as the single most important part of the identity of individuals under study, thus fostering a positivistic, reductionist understanding of

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stigmatised individuals and communities (e.g. Tsai, 2011; Visconti, 2008). Holt (1997) already postulated twenty years ago that the literature on sub-cultures of consumption may benefit from a new concept that would facilitate exploration of the heterogeneity of their members. Similarly, studies of stigma need to ensure that it is not used as the sole locus of identity for the group in question. The literature has recently started to focus on heterogeneity within subcultures (e.g. Thomas et al., 2013), multicultural identities (e.g. Brumbaugh and Grier, 2006; Kipnis et al., 2013), as well as intersectionality (Gopaldas and Roy, 2015), providing fertile ground for richer stigma studies. To date, however, these efforts seem like a drop in the sea of existing studies.

2.7.4. The Importance of Power

Looking at any of the aforementioned studies through the lens of ‘power’ emphasises stigma as a social process that is dependent on social context and thereby raises further questions: Are Star Trek, Warhammer and Heavy Metal fans truly stigmatised, or does society ‘merely’ place distressing stereotypes on them? Asking in which contexts Star Trek fans experience stigmatization that involves power situations seems a fruitful approach for addressing underlying structures of discrimination. Similarly, while the notion of the ‘stigma of the commodity’ in Larson et al. (2014) is compelling, a discussion of power in defining stigma would have provided a clearer explanation of the conditions to be met for the stigma of the commodity to exist. Similar to Link and Phelan’s (2002) example of patients in a mental hospital not being able to ‘stigmatize’ staff, one has to ask under which circumstances tattooed individuals have the power to stigmatize due to violations of sub-cultural norms.

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Research making liberal use of the term ‘stigma’ devalues its impact and effect with regards to individuals who really do suffer adverse effects due to their stigmatized identity. The marketing literature needs to ensure that stigma does not become a buzzword used every time a study participant feels as though they are being treated unfairly by the market. The notion of ‘brand stigma,’ for example, is widely applied to any controversial product or brand on the market, but inappropriate in most cases. A brand or product may become a signifier for a specific stigma, but cannot itself be the locus, the signified of stigma. A social process definition of stigma thus pushes researchers to investigate the underlying forces of stigmatisation, preventing dilution of the terminology by applying it to every instance of negative stereotyping and labelling.

The lack of a power orientation in existing stigma research in the marketing domain also means that studies fail to address the most important issues - how to combat the creation and diffusion of stigma in the first place, and how to actively contribute to the eradication of socio-political drivers of stigma on a macro-cultural level. How do stigmatized consumers actively work towards their legitimization within society (e.g. Sandikci and Ger, 2010)? Larson et al. (2014), for example, provide a discussion of the changing stigma on tattoo art and normalization thereof, but fail to weave this discussion into the analysis of their findings.

2.8. Summary

Despite considerable advances in the wider literature surrounding stigma, marketing and consumption studies remain constricted by an understanding of the concept as a static variable that can predict consumption behaviours. Disproportionate emphasis

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has been placed on how consumption is used to manage stigma, replicating and duplicating existing findings while neglecting other important considerations. This chapter has provided an overview over the current state of the stigma literature, highlighting key shortcomings in existing work. Building on these considerations, the following chapter will delve deeper into the question of how stigma may change as power dynamics shift within society. How is stigma affected at a time when identities are more fragmented than ever, marriage equality is legalised in a number of countries, mental health is slowly becoming an accepted conversation topic, companies are called out on body shaming through advertising, and the forces of globalisation and technology are creating an increasingly multicultural market place?

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3. FROM MODERNITY TO LIQUID MODERNITY

As suggested in the previous chapter, the lack of studies that look at the way stigma may transform as a consequence of socio-cultural changes might be due to “a scarcity of historical analyses” and “an emphasis on the individual effects of stigma rather than its sociocultural underpinnings.” (Sandikci and Ger, 2010: 16). To conduct a study that is grounded in socio-historic context, however, requires an understanding of wider changes within the historical period of interest. Many scholars have shown a keen interest in the move towards post-, late-, or liquid modernity. Despite their widespread influence, however, these paradigms seem to have been avoided almost entirely in the study of stigma. This chapter thus places the previous discussion into this context.

It first describes the progression of the stigma literature in terms of the move from modernity to post-modernity, before engaging more deeply with current socio-cultural changes. In doing so, I turn to some of the most important social

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commentators of our time, in particular Bauman's concept of 'liquid modernity,' to discuss how uncertainty, fragmentation, and ambivalence may have shaped contemporary stigma experiences. I then contextualise this discussion by providing an overview of how LGBTQ⁺ identities have emerged and changed over time, illustrating the effect of socio-cultural changes in the past decade based on the emerging generational gap and the difference between (post-)modern sexuality- and gender nonconforming identity formation.

3.1. Stigma: From Modernity to Post-Modernity

Goffman's understanding of stigma is intimately tied to 'modernity,' a period of time that started between the late 16th to early 17th century, during which the traditional social metanarratives, values, and belief-systems - religion, the family, the workplace - slowly lost importance (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). The prevalent ideas of this period were the never-ending development of knowledge and constant striving for (moral) progress (Brown, 1993). Advances in science led to not only material progress, but overall to the formation of a rational order and a rational and autonomous Cartesian subject (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995: 240). The rise of industrial capitalism resulted in the separation of the spheres of production and consumption and it has been argued that the consumer as a feasible identity was constructed by modern market forces (Marchand, 1986): free and rational economic men, pursuing their desires and satiating their needs through logical analysis of marketplace choices (Slater, 1997: 9).

In suggesting deviance as an attribute of a body that precedes socio-cultural influences, Goffman positions stigmatised individuals as failed Cartesian subjects

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and thus through a lens of stigma which shapes both their experiences and practices: once an individual is labelled as deviant they cannot but perceive their identity through society's eyes. Rational thought is employed solely to manage ones spoiled identity and those afflicted are thus unable to contribute to societal progress (Battershill, 1990). Foucault (1990) has argued that it was the emergence of the modern, Cartesian subject, with its focus on self-mastery, economic progress, and viability that paved the way for society's "great confinement" from those considered deviant. His investigations focused on a genealogy of language as a way of refuting the prevalent notion of 'natural' norms that determine deviancy in a way that transcends historical boundaries. Thus, as opposed to Goffman's mostly modernist account of stigma that places the onus of responsibility squarely on the individual, Foucault's critical account of modernity aligns with social process approaches and, importantly, postmodernity.

Postmodernism emerged in the late 1900s as a critique of modernism, as well as a distinct philosophical effort (Brown, 1993). It is often described as being "incredulous towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984: XXIV). This incredulity, or reflexive doubt (Thompson, 2005), is directed particularly towards the modernist narratives of rationality, realism, capitalism, and science. Instead, scholars became interested in the indeterminate nature of the world, its chaos and paradoxes. Postmodern scholars cast doubt on scientific objectivity, arguing instead that it is the discourses within scientific institutions that give rise to "regimes of truth" that oppress divergent voices (Foucault, 1980; Kuhn, 1970 [1962]). Meta-narratives are thus nothing more than ideological constructs arising out of language and practices within social institutions, and are thus inherently linked to systems of power (Firat

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and Venkatesh, 1995).

Since the 1990s, postmodernism has had a widespread influence on marketing and consumer behaviour literature (Cova et al., 2013; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1992; O'Donohoe, 2001; Thompson, 1993). Firat and Venkatesh (1995) describe a number of conditions of postmodern consumption. *Hyperreality* describes the state in which simulations or augmentations of lived experiences can become 'authentic' and part of our reality. Objective reality ceases to exist and, symbols and signs, such as brands, are in constant contestation (Firat and Dholakia, 1995; Scott, 1992). Furthermore, where traditionally identity projects were pre-determined, postmodernists believe that today there is a freedom to create our identity through 'bricolage' using diverse resources that ultimately give rise to a *fragmented* subject (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Firat and Shultz, 1997). Thus, postmodernism vehemently rejects the Cartesian unified subject (Firat, 1991; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Instead, scholars assert that we are a product of our socio-cultural environment and individual practices (ibid). As such, objects can have an effect on us as much as we have an effect on them, such as the products we use to build a coherent identity project (Belk, 1988; Hogg and Banister, 2001). In this worldview, multiple opposites can co-exist and no viewpoint is superior: "Anything is at once acceptable and suspect" (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995: 255). Postmodernism thus creates and embraces ambiguity, accepting the possibility that consumers may engage in multiple contradictory practices.

As the previous chapter illustrates, thus, apart from an interest in the social construction of stigma that can be seen as aligned with a postmodern viewpoint, on the micro-level of identity a decidedly modernist conceptualisation of stigma remains

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despite the cultural and philosophical advances made over the past decades. Considering the vast amount of studies that have discussed the modernist, postmodernist divide as well as the numerous articles that have investigated how societal changes such as globalisation and technological advances have affected social phenomena, it is surprising that not only consumer researchers, but the wider academic field has failed to theorise stigma through the same lens. Scholars have, with the few mentioned exceptions (Sandikci and Ger, 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer, 2010), failed to address how stigma evolves in response to rapid societal change. This is particularly problematic as globalisation and technological developments are creating an increasingly dynamic, multicultural marketplace. In an effort to illustrate the potential impact such social changes can have on stigma and the study thereof, I thus turn to some of the most important social commentators of our time, with a particular emphasis on Zygmunt Bauman's concept of 'liquid modernity.'

3.2. Liquid Lives, Stigma and Ambivalence

Zygmunt Bauman, Anthony Giddens, and Ulrich Beck eschew the view that postmodernism has ushered in an entirely new era, instead seeing the previously outlined conditions as an exaggeration of the impact technological advances have had on our life (Bauman, 1988). Thus, these scholars maintain, modernity has merely developed into 'late-' (Giddens, 1991) or 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000). While these scholars' theories may be distinct, many of their central tenants overlap (Atkinson, 2008). As will be shown, their writings reflect several postmodern conditions: the fragmentation of a decentred subject; hyperreality and juxtaposition of opposites; as well as the reversal of the spheres of production and consumption.

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Bauman describes 'liquid modernity' as a 'fluid world of globalization, deregulation and individualization' (Bauman, 2000: 19). He argues that we have moved away from a 'solid' modernity, structured around capital-heavy institutions, fixed socio-cultural laws and social order, into a world in which the 'solid structures' that traditionally provided individuals with a sense of security are dissolved in favour of a state of constant uncertainty and risk (ibid) - a world in which everything is constantly changing, making it increasingly difficult to know with absolute certainty. Thanks to globalisation, local cultures are shared worldwide, and a global culture is increasingly taking over, creating a market of cultural pluralism (Bauman, 1998; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991).

In modernity, identity was fixed and pre-determined, but in liquid modernity it is an open-ended work-in-progress. As each individual is put in charge of their own identity project, there is a constant reflexive process of asking 'Who am I?' (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991). In navigating different social situations, we adopt different roles that lead to a fragmentation of identities. The resulting precariousness goes against our need to construct a coherent, stable identity; reflexivity becomes essential to navigating this environment: "The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choices as filtered through abstract systems" (Giddens, 1991: 5). Mediated experiences become increasingly important as we interact with a 'collage' of events, stories and cultures from around the world that enter our consciousness and thereby 'invert' reality, as media representations seem more real than the actual place and event (p.26-7). In a world thus characterised by risk and uncertainty, mediated experiences also lead to individuals detaching from

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or cynically accepting risks that seem distant (p.130, see also Beck, 1992).

Under liquid modernity, individuals are subject to a 'silent' ideology best characterized as neoliberal: everyone is independently responsible for their own life choices and success. This process is intensified by new technologies through the inversion of the private and the public, whereby public interest is directed towards the "public display of private affairs and public confessions of private sentiments" (Baumann, 2000: 37). Therefore, individuals spend copious amounts of time and effort constructing their 'narrative of self' to escape a sense of 'personal meaninglessness' (Giddens, 1991: 9), thereby affirming or rejecting the social structure. There is a dialectical relationship between the reflexive project of self and social structures; social structures are both empowering and constraining within the frame of existing categories of difference. Constantly aware, we construct our identity through conscious bodily regimes, consumption, social relationships, and stories to and about ourselves: "The more self-identity becomes internally referential, the more shame comes to play a fundamental role in the adult personality. The individual no longer lives primarily by extrinsic moral precepts but by means of the reflexive organisation of the self." (ibid: 153).

Thus, late modernity also has an important impact on our relationship with others as well as our sense of morality. For Bauman (2000), liquid modernity entails the dissolution of a sense of community. Individualization makes relations more fragile, as consumers prefer more fleeting connections over deep, life-long partnerships and communities (Bauman, 1999; Beck, 1992). This chimes with Michel Foucault's (1984) 'aesthetic of existence' whereby our interactions with others are largely

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aesthetic. Thus, society becomes increasingly regulated by market forces, citizens become consumers, and freedom becomes relational and determined by the resources we possess (Bauman, 1999). In liquid modernity consumers are subject to both a coercive 'agenda of choice' - the alternatives provided by the marketplace - and an indoctrinating 'code of choosing' - which stipulates the socially accepted ways in which to choose (Bauman, 1999: 74). It is coercive, because, as Giddens (1991: 81) writes: "we all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so - we have no choice but to choose." Our freedom is defined through our ability to choose out of an ever-growing plethora of choices without realising that these options have been pre-determined for us. The code of choosing is indoctrinating, because we are taught about the proper ways of choosing, and thus of consuming, from a young age. Our ability to choose *correctly*, determines our status within society and is thus each person's individual responsibility (Bauman, 1999).

For Bauman, the freedom to choose and the ability to move globally are the new stratifying factors within society, doing away with class structures (Bauman, 1998). Those that dispose of the necessary resources have the freedom to make use of the vanishing boundaries globalization affords. They are the *tourists* who explore the world and its endless opportunities. Those who cannot afford to live a consumerist lifestyle, however, remain tied down by country borders, and institutional control. They are the vagabonds, 'flawed' consumers who are dependent on others to live. As individuals are responsible for themselves, morality and the sense of responsibility for the community are eroded (Bauman and Donskis, 2013).

Scholars have previously cautioned that Bauman's description of liquid modernity is

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overly pessimistic, ultimately leading to an anti-social society, in which each person is out for their own gain, and those who are dependent on others, unwilling or unable to consume are marginalized (Crone, 2008). Furthermore, throughout his writings, Bauman is also unclear about who exactly constitutes the minority in his model, instead lumping diverse heterogeneous actors into overarching categories (Atkinson, 2008; Jacobsen and Poder, 2008). Distinguishing solely between winners/tourists and losers/vagabonds has been described as highly simplistic and far from an accurate representation of reality (ibid). Many scholars reject Bauman's belief that class structures are a thing of the past - a belief also propagated by Giddens and Beck. Nevertheless, most critics concede that these conceptual criticisms do not necessarily invalidate Bauman's wider social commentary if it is seen through other conceptual lenses (Atkinson, 2008).

While many scholars within consumer research have made ample use of Giddens' notion of fragmented identities in their writings on the postmodern consumer subject, Bauman's formulation has received little attention to date, with Bardhi et al. (2012) a notable exception. Using the idea of liquid modernity as their starting point, these authors describe how global nomads - cosmopolitan executives who relocate for professional reasons - have different relationships with their possessions than previous accounts of consumers' robust, durable bonds that become embedded in their identity projects, especially among those who migrate (Belk, 1988; Schouten, 1991; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). In contrast, Bardhi et al. (2012) found that global nomads relate to their possessions in more flexible or 'liquid' ways. For them, the value of items was temporary, situational; use-value or functionality rather than symbolic value mattered most; and immateriality was emphasised, with virtual or

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light possessions favoured over heavy items that would weigh owners down.

Even research examining the changing nature of stigma, such as Sandici and Ger's excellent study of veiling, focuses on "the processes of stigmatization and destigmatization" (2010:15), in isolation from the conditions of post- or liquid-modernity. There is no space here for the fragmented, decentralised consumer subject, for the juxtaposition of opposites, no room for Bauman's 'fluid world of globalization, deregulation and individualization' (2000:19). Bauman saw ambivalence as a necessary point of departure for analysing the current cultural and social order. From a sociological perspective, ambivalence "comes to be built into the structure of social statuses and roles. It directs us to examine the processes in the social structure that affect the probability of ambivalence turning up in particular kinds of role-relations. And finally, it directs us to the social consequences of ambivalence for workings of social structures." (Merton, 1976: 5).

This is incredibly important, however, as ours is a time of increasing ambivalence as social norms are contested and rearranged: transgender celebrities appear on the cover of global magazines, while dozens of others are murdered every year (Human Rights Campaign (HRC), 2016); Neil Patrick Harris and Ellen DeGeneres appear on *Time's* 100 most influential people list alongside a president-elect who has made openly homophobic and racist statements (Time Inc., 2016). Recent reports show that most Americans, including LGBTQ⁺ allies, are ambivalent when asked about LGBTQ⁺ issues (GLAAD, 2016). We are living with ambivalence in that contradictory cultural values are held by members of the same society (Merton, 1976: 10), fuelled by conflicting media discussions and regulations around the world

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(Ghaziani et al., 2016). To gain a better understanding of the aforementioned changes as they relate to the context of this study, SGNI, the following section provides an overview of the history of LGBTQ⁺ identities as well as the effects of socio-cultural change in terms of an emerging generational gap.

3.3. A Brief History Of LGBTQ⁺ Identities

While same-sex practices have been documented throughout history, the terminology used today to define sexual identities (and deviancy) has been established relatively recently (Foucault, 1990; Plummer, 1995; Weeks et al., 2001, 2003). It was only in the late 19th century that the label of “homosexual” was created, paving the way for the “homosexual role” that was associated with deviancy and decreed as a pathology (Epstein, 1998; Weeks et al., 2003). As a consequence, the focus shifted from sexual behaviour to individual identities. As Michel Foucault stated “[t]he sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.” (1990: 22).

The concepts of homosexual and homophobia were thus socially constructed as a result of the label placed on certain individuals. It was through “reverse affirmation” (Foucault, 1990; Weeks, 1989), then, that homosexual individuals became visible and self-identified with this label. Alongside the stigma that was soon placed on this ‘condition’, self-identification also enabled the creation of a distinct group solidarity that fostered their minority identity, giving homosexuals a voice and driving them towards collective action for legitimacy (Epstein, 1998; Foucault, 1990; Weeks, 1989). The industrial revolution resulted in mass movements into cities, where gay men in particular converged in secret gay spaces and developed gay identities (D’Emilio, 1997; Ghaziani, 2014, 2015). With the communities came concealed

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marketplace offers (Keating and McLoughlin, 2005).

Post second world-war, these communities grew, both in size and visibility, developing into famous districts such as *Castro* in San Francisco, *Soho* in London, and *Greenwich Village* in New York, ultimately paving the way for a long process of decriminalisation (Ghaziani, 2014). As Plummer (2015) argues, “it is only under conditions of capitalist modernity that this ‘sovereign individual’, with its ‘reflexive self’, comes into being; and that ‘individualism’ becomes an organizing principle ... [A]s modern worlds bring individualised subjectivities, so they also bring modern individualized sexualities” (p.66). The Stonewall riots in 1969 increased awareness of the sizeable gay and lesbian population (Peñaloza, 1996), resulting in companies employing niche marketing strategies to tap into a ‘dream market’ of affluent early-adopters and trendsetters (Peñaloza, 1996). This ‘dream consumer’ image, however, was bestowed solely upon gay men, who were considered profitable due to a double disposable income and lack of children (DeLozier and Rodrigue, 1996).

Politically, whereas the 1950s and 1960s were defined by calls for assimilation and integration, the Stonewall riots in 1969 rang in a new era of what is now known as the *gay liberation movement* (D’Emilio, 1997; Epstein, 1998; Halperin, 1989). Its first iteration was based on radical social constructivism that called for the abolition of categories of both sexuality and gender. In the 1970s, however, these radical views were replaced with a more essentialist politics that espoused an ideology of same-sex attraction as natural or biological (ibid). It has been suggested that this was a deliberate political move allowing activists to compare sexuality to an “ethnic” identity, and thus demand universal civil rights for gays and lesbians (Altman, 1982,

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cited in Epstein, 1998).

It was only in 1967 and 1980 that homosexuality was decriminalised in England and Scotland respectively, around the similar decade as in most other European countries. With the rise of Thatcherism and the surge of AIDS in the 80s, the previous advances of the movement were halted as the public discourse focused again on the threat posed by sexual liberation. In the 1980s, activists reclaimed and appropriated the pejorative term 'queer' to change its meaning (Epstein, 1998). In direct opposition to the gay rights movements, the queer movement undermined the ideology of heterosexuality as 'normal' and rejected all identity categories, thus opening the door for the inclusion of other sexual and gender minorities into its fold (Warner, 1993, 2000; Watney, 1994). These ideologies were driven by the rise of postmodern discourses and led to the emergence of *Queer theory* in academic studies in the 1990s. In contrast to traditional gay and lesbian studies that focused on homosexual behaviour and its social construction, Queer theory adopted the non-essentialist, poststructuralist standpoint of feminist theories (Beasley, 2005b). Stein and Plummer (1994) describe four main characteristics of Queer theory as follows: 1) it considers sexual power to be embedded and discursively enacted in all aspects of society through pervasive norms and binaries; 2) it follows a radical social constructivism and thus rejects any form of social identity categorisation; 3) it shuns assimilationist politics and instead adopts one of subversion and transgression through parody and 'gender trouble'; 4) it focuses not only on the domain of sexuality, applying its critical, Queer lens to everything, including heterosexual texts.

Based on advances in this domain, social science scholars today generally see

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sexuality and gender as socially constructed, recognizing that it is not appropriate to talk about a singular ‘gay community’ or a simple man/woman binary (Seidman, 2002). Within the humanities and social sciences, the literature thus shifted towards presenting identities as fluid, manifold, and contextually created. Nevertheless, Queer theory has been criticised for empirical blindness, as it disregards the socio-historical structures that evoke and reify sexual identities, as well as the collective nature of such social identities, in favour of a post-modern, under-socialised subjectivity (Green, 2002). Thus, it invents a “transcendental queer that exists outside of culture and social structure” (ibid: 523). The fact that a classification is socially constructed, however, does not diminish its saliency or importance in structuring individuals’ understanding of their selves and social practices. The previously outlined literature on stigma and labelling clearly attests to the power of social classification and their influence over the self.

Warner (2000) cautions that we are still living under a *hierarchy of respectability*, whereby some sexual- and gender identities are more accepted than others. Individuals who identify as transgender or bisexual, for example, face greater oppression both outside and within the Queer community (Devor, 2004; Germon, 2008; Levitt and Ippolito, 2014). Lisa Duggan has suggested that, as a result, accepted ways of performing homosexuality have become part of heteronormativity and thus normative in their own right, a phenomenon she has termed *homonormativity* (Duggan, 2002). She suggests that this assimilation and the resulting societal changes are based on liberal discourses and thus positions homonormativity as “the sexual politics of neoliberalism ... a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and

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sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (2002:179).

Even more recently, a conversation has arisen around the concept of ‘post-gay’ or ‘post-queer’ as a way of reorganising ‘queer’ in light of societal and academic developments (Boyle, 2012). Over the past three decades, western societies have seen radical changes in societal attitudes towards sexuality and gender and the establishment of anti-discrimination laws, culminating in legalisation of same-sex marriage in most developed countries (Lea et al., 2015; Savin-Williams, 2005). We are also experiencing a move away from binary conceptualisation of sexuality and gender towards a proliferation of identity categories. One only has to observe the continuous expansion of the LGBTQ⁺ acronym, with the addition of identities such as intersex, queer, questioning and asexual. Similarly, a myriad of gender identities exists, including butch, bear, femme, and leather-man. These have a significant impact on individual sense of self and are often more significant than sexual identity (Levitt and Hiestand, 2005).

To date, there is, however, no clear consensus on what ‘post-queer’ is, or how it should or could be employed (ibid). Many see it as a condition, a new paradigm predicated on the belief that we have moved beyond the stigma placed on sexual deviancy; one’s sexuality diminishes as an important marker of identity when “the regulatory discourses that instilled heteronormativity as a social norm and produced homophobia are evacuated, dead: they no longer shape the perceptions of same-sex desire, which is no longer socially stigmatized” (Boyle, 2012: 269). Other scholars

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question any notion of temporal sequence between queer and post-queer. Rather they advocate post-queer as a move away from Butler and Foucault and their interest in discourses and systems of signification, towards an interest in the body, its abilities and the Deleuzian notion of its constant ‘becoming’ and thus future potential (see e.g. Ruffolo, 2016). In any case, the societal changes fostering this paradigm shift have influenced how LGBTQ⁺ identities are formed over the life-course and across generations.

3.3.1. The Generational Gap: (Post-)Modern Identity Formation

In her book *In a Queer Time and Place*, Judith Halberstam (2005) powerfully argues that there is a queer time and place that differs from the heterosexual domain. She points to differences in queer life cycles (Queer Time) and the persistent existence of dedicated safe spaces, local communities and subcultural practices (Queer Space). Plummer (1995) describes the traditional narrative of a Queer life as a generic, modernist plot of “Suffering, Coming Out and Surviving.” This model is based on a positivistic understanding of linear and set change, where a person’s ‘coming-out’ is regarded as the fundamental turning point (Broido, 2000; Dunlap, 2014). In this model, gay and lesbians come out to themselves in isolation and join concealed gay communities, often after rejection from non-LGBTQ⁺ family and peers. For Plummer (1995), these communities become their ‘family of choice’, providing a distinctive interpretation of the world around them. As a result, “[a]n enemy is created and a contest ensues: parents, friends and ultimately the whole homophobic, heterosexist, patriarchal, racist, classist and unbearable ‘straight’ world” (ibid:55).

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Post-modern models of identity development aim to overcome such essentialist conceptualizations by accounting for individual processes and social context (Dunlap, 2014; Savin-Williams, 2005, 2008). Here, Queer socialisation can happen several times throughout the life-course. Socialisation is on-going and can progress through several stages as individuals transition between a myriad of sexual- or gender identities (Devor, 2004; Levitt and Hiestand, 2005). Appendix 1 gives a non-exclusive overview of such identities, illustrating the inherent intersectionality of gender and sexuality throughout the life-course. It has been suggested that post-modern models of identity formation are especially important for younger generations who particularly value individuality (Dunlap, 2014; Savin-Williams, 2005). In this context, contemporary research points to a sizable generational gap between queer cohorts and thus the influence of socio-historic events on individual experiences.

Russel and Bohan (2005) applied Mead's model of generational gaps, which looks at how different generations cope with social change and communication between generations, to the gay community (

Table 3.1). In this classification, older gay generations who are today 50 years and older, Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation, are described as post-figurative: their history of marginalisation determines their future, intra-generational influence is strong due to the cohesiveness of the community, and change is nearly inexistent. Those younger than 35, on the other hand, are a pre-figurative culture: change is fast and wide-ranging; the future is indeterminate and traditions and intergenerational influences dissolve.

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Table 3.1 A Model of Generational Gaps.

Culture Type	Nature of & Response to Change	Relationship of Past, Present, Future	Relations between Youth & Adults
Postfigurative	Change almost non-existent	Future shaped by past	Youth learn from elders
Cofigurative	Rapid change Culture developing means to incorporate it	Future shaped by the present	Youth learn from agents of present: peers, media, savvy adults
Prefigurative	Change pervasive & profound Cannot anticipate or incorporate change with existing social systems	Future shaped by future	Elders must listen to youth as bellwether for future Adults become consultants Cooperative learning & problem-solving

Adapted from Russell GM and Bohan JS (2005) *The Gay Generation gap: Communicating across the LGBT generational divide. Angles. 8(1): 1–8.*

Especially for pre-figurative cultures, it is likely that Queer individuals are socialised at the macro-level by their ‘minority consciousness,’ their “history of common interests and experiences, particularly their exclusion, mobilization, and struggle in response to how they have been treated by others” (Peñaloza, 1996: 22). Queer Baby Boomers (henceforth Boomers), who grew up prior to the decriminalization of homosexuality, are therefore expected to be less vocal about their sexuality and more prone to trying to ‘pass’ as heterosexual (Rosenfeld et al., 2012).

The Millennial Queer generation (henceforth Millennials), on the other hand, has been characterized as a ‘post-gay’ generation whose members “see little need to link their sexuality to their personal identity, attitudes, values, politics, religion, or life philosophy” (Savin-Williams, 2005). As opposed to the past, when ‘coming-out’ more often than not implied breaking ties with one’s family and peers, younger generations are thought to enjoy much more support and acceptance from these social systems (Dunlap, 2014; Weeks et al., 2001). In addition, the internet has made it easier to come out of the ‘digital closet’ and find potential partners outside local

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communities through social media (Alston, 2010; Dunlap, 2014). This poses important questions as to the extent to which queer time and place will be salient for younger generation’s identity formation over the life-course, and thus the degree to which sexuality influences their sense making in the face of other categories of difference. I summarise these main generational differences drawing from a range of literature in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 The LGBTQ+ Generational Gap

Macro-Level	Older Generations	Younger Generations
<i>Sexual Stigma</i>	Minority Consciousness	Demand Their In-Born Right
Micro-Level		
<i>Identity Formation</i>	Suffering, Coming Out, Surviving	Individual Process
<i>Cultural Socialisation</i>	Gay Culture	Several Identities
<i>Support Structures</i>	Families of Choice	Family and Peers
Identity Politics		
<i>Sexuality & Gender</i>	Essentialism	Fluid; Socially Constructed: Queer

These models can be expanded to incorporate considerations of the influence of class and race. Taylor (2008, 2009) explored the meaning of class for working-class lesbians. She found class to be omnipresent and ingrained in participant’s social and personal experiences and argued that both ‘lesbian spaces’ and the process of coming-out may be classed - the former due to prohibitive prices and the existence of an accepted type of appearance, the latter due to constraints in accessing support (Taylor, 2008). Patrick Johnson (2003) on the other hand, provides a detailed intersectional analysis of race, gender, class, and sexuality in his book *Appropriating Blackness*. He describes the struggle of black gay males to create ‘liveable lives’ in the face of the heteronormativity of an “authentic black masculinity” and its deeply entrenched homophobia. Class and race must thus be recognized as factors that

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constantly inform, constrain, or facilitate lived experiences, a fact that is often downplayed, as research in general remains biased towards white, middle-class subjects (Taylor, 2008).

Similarly, more recent studies into LGBTQ⁺ aging have moved away from a model of aging concerned with how oppression endured over the course of the life can create a variety of experiences in old age (King and Cronin, 2010). Such approaches point to older LGBTQ⁺ individuals' social isolation due to the lack of social support systems and peer support, as well as lower likelihood to have children (Weeks et al., 2001). Newer models instead focus on how individual agency and social structures interact in later life (King and Cronin, 2010). Through this lens, the different culture of aging among older queer individuals as compared to heterosexuals affords them certain strengths and skills that can be beneficial in later life. This includes emotional strength gained through the 'coming out' experience and the need to build a positive sexual identity, but also social support systems through affiliation with the Queer community (King and Cronin, 2010; Weeks et al., 2001).

3.4. Summary

This chapter has provided an understanding of wider philosophical and socio-economic changes that contextualise the study at hand. I have described the move from modernity, with its focus on essentialism, to postmodernity, and the rejection of macro-narratives and belief in the fragmentation of identity politics, as well as discussing those voices that believe we are currently in a state of late- (e.g. Giddens, 1991) or liquid modernity (Bauman, 2001). Drawing from the social commentary provided by these scholars, I have briefly outlined the possible effects of these

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societal changes on the experience of stigma in the western world. As both individuals and social-environments become more multi-cultural and attitudes towards previously stigmatised behaviours shift, the experience becomes marked by uncertainty and ambivalence. Finally, I applied the foregoing considerations to the context of the LGBTQ⁺ community, by providing a brief overview over the history of homosexuality and the shift from modernist, essentialist discourses to postmodern ideas about queer theory and thus identity. I then explained the changes to LGBTQ⁺ life-courses and identity formation, as well as delineating the generational gap that has ostensibly formed between older and younger generations as a result of these shifts. These considerations further illustrate the shortcomings of existing stigma and marketing literature that continues to entertain an essentialist understanding of sexual identity (Mikkonen, 2010; Tsai, 2012; Visconti, 2008) and a bias towards investigations of white, middle-aged, middle-class gay men (Oakenfull, 2012), effectively disregarding other axes of difference.

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4. MEDIA, MEANING, AND STIGMA

Whereas the foregoing chapters have given more general view of the stigma literature and its shortcomings, the following chapter will now delve into what has been described as a significant factor in the emergence and amelioration of stigma: the media.

The field of cultural studies has, for many years, been a fruitful ground for the investigation of social meaning creation. It is estimated that a third of our lives is spent engaging with the media - watching TV and movies, reading newspapers, magazines and books, surfing the internet, listening to music (Ofcom, 2016). The field of media studies has evolved over time as an interdisciplinary domain drawing from sociology, psychology, linguistics, communication, and cultural studies amongst others. How individuals consume 'media' and how this consumption affects them has been examined extensively. The answers, however, remain elusive, with some advocating a view of audiences as passive and easily manipulated, while others

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describe them as active, critical consumers. What is clear, however, is that the media have a fundamental influence on our sense of identity and (social-) self.

This is of particular importance when considering potentially stigmatised individuals. Previous research has shown that consumers use cultural texts to learn about socially accepted behaviours and how to manage stigmatised identities, and that these can play a substantial role in the formation, dispersion, and amelioration of stigma (Link and Phelan, 2001; Smith et al., 1996). At the same time, however, many scholars have voiced concern about the potentially harmful effects media representations can have on stigmatised consumers who internalize the espoused beliefs into their self-concept (Ciasullo, 2001; Peñaloza, 1996; Sender, 2004).

This chapter examines the role of media in the construction and maintenance of the culturally constituted world. It begins by interrogating theories that account for consumers' media readings, interpretations, and experiences, focusing in particular on stigmatised consumers and the importance of categories of difference. It then argues that, similar to the general field of stigma, the literature has favoured modes of inquiry that assign stigmatised consumers a passive subjectivity and failed to account for developments in cultural studies as well as the above mentioned wider societal changes.

4.1. Media Effects and Stigma Socialisation

Media studies emerged out of mass communication studies conducted in 1930s America (Boyd-Barrett and Newbold, 1995). The premise of these investigations was that consumers, particularly those in urban areas, were susceptible to manipulation. The 'hypodermic syringe model' assumed that, through the media, ideas are

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‘implanted’ into the minds of a passive audience, their effects instant and measurable (Strinati, 2004: 4). This was equally reflected in hierarchy-effects models within advertising theory (for a review and critique see Barry and Howard, 1990). Models such as AIDA and DAGMAR, which still enjoy widespread application today, define advertising as a linear process involving cognition, affect, and action, and consider the audience passive consumers to whom advertising “does things” (Shankar, 1999).

In the mid-1960s, Gerbner et al. (1986) introduced ‘cultivation theory’, arguing that the effects of television on individuals are not immediate but accumulate gradually. The media thus became recognised as an important socialisation agent. As Gerbner (1993: 207) describes, the media are “the most ubiquitous wholesalers of social roles in industrial societies” and have “a profound effect on the way we are socialized into our roles”. According to his theory, those who share a common background also share the same view of the world. Thus, television has the power to ‘equalise’ opinions across social strata. Stereotyping, and pervasive tropes influence the way we see the world and our role in it. This created a two-fold interest in (a) how certain issues are portrayed in the media and (b) what these images ‘do’ to consumers.’

Much socialisation research is based on cognitive development theories that consider development a result of cognitive stages that individuals pass through (Ward, 1974). While socialisation is an ongoing process throughout the life-course, research has found childhood and adolescence to be the most important stages for identity formation (ibid). Furthermore, social learning models assert that we learn through imitation and observation and that our learning is influenced by a range of socialisation agents, including family, peers, education, and cultural belief systems

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(Arnett, 1995; John, 1999). Through socialisation we develop a moral conscience and an understanding of socio-cultural meanings, roles, and performances. Such work has explored, for example, how the media may be theorised as socialising us into gender role identities (Brown et al., 1990; Evans et al., 1991), sexuality (Reichert et al., 1999; Wright, 2009), race (Adams-Bass et al., 2014; O'Connor et al., 2000), as well as occupational roles (Arnett, 1995; Bush et al., 1999). Much interest has also been placed on consumer socialisation, how individuals “acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace” (Ward, 1974:2). Bush et al. (1999), for example, show that socialisation agents have a clear impact on attitude toward advertising.

The notion of socialisation is particularly important for stigma in terms of the mass media's role in its construction and dispersal. As aforementioned, labelling theory asserts that labels are socially created and thus learned through socialisation (Link and Phelan, 2013). Stereotypes and ultimately stigmata are formed and dispersed through language and in particular through cultural texts such as those presented by the mass media or advertising. Rachel Smith (2007) describes stigma communication as those involving (a) marks that allow one to categorize individuals into a stigmatised group, (b) a description of said group as ‘other’, (c) as well as those that assign individuals responsibility for their stigma, and (d) points to the potential danger associated with its members. Such persistent and often homogenous messages teach negative beliefs about stigmatised individuals and thus “relate and facilitate the processes of social categorization, stereotyping, rejection of the stigmatized ... and discrimination” (ibid:477).

4.2. The Uses and Gratifications Paradigm

Early cultivation studies have been criticized on multiple fronts, however. Scholars have pointed out that the vast majority of such research does not take into account the socio-cultural environment in which the alleged effects take place, and positions individuals as passive ‘recipients’ of socialisation that is inflicted upon them (Strinati, 2004). Studies thus shifted their attention to more active models that are interested in “what people do with the media, instead of what the media do to people” (Rubin, 1994: 421). Such research has asserted that the media as socialisation agents differ from others such as parents and peers, because individuals can control their media choices and self-socialise in ways fitting their self-identity (Arnett, 1995; Rubin, 1994).

Drawing from theories in social psychology, Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch’s (1973) *uses and gratifications model* considered audiences to be active users of the media, used either to fulfil a need or to achieve gratification of some kind. In devising their theory, the authors’ revised work conducted by Laswell in 1948 to determine a set of four needs that are met by the media: (1) surveillance, allowing us to stay informed about socio-cultural affairs; (2) diversion, allowing us to escape from stresses and problems of our daily lives; (3) personal relationships, teaching us about interpersonal skills, offering companionship and providing conversation material; (4) personal identity, as the media plays an important role in its confirmation and creation, for example by supporting pre-existing values and beliefs.

The theory was adapted for an advertising context first by Crosier (1983), and then O’Donohoe (1994) in her study on young adult’s advertising experiences, which she

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divided into marketing and non-marketing uses across Katz’s need categories (Table 4.1). According to O’Donohoe (1994), advertising audiences are not passive recipients of advertising meanings but rather advertising literate bricoleurs.

Table 4.1 Advertising Uses and Gratifications.

Summary category	Comprising
<i>Marketing uses</i>	Information Choice, competition and convenience Quality assurance/reassurance Consumption stimulation Vicarious consumption Added value
<i>Structuring time</i>	Structuring time
<i>Enjoyment</i>	Entertainment Diversion Escapism Play
<i>Scanning the environment</i>	Surveillance Familiarity Checking out the opposite sex Education
<i>Social interaction</i>	Family relationships Peer relationships
<i>Self-affirmation/transformation</i>	Reinforcement of attitudes and values Ego enhancement Aspirations and role models

Source: O’Donohoe S (1994) Advertising Uses and Gratifications. *European Journal of Marketing* 28(8): 52–75.

Previous research has drawn from uses and gratifications theory in describing stigmatised individuals’ uses of mass media and advertising portrayals. Contrary to previous passive models of socialisation, such studies contend that consumers actively use the media to understand and form their identities (Kates, 2000; Kosenko et al., 2016), as well as to learn about socially accepted behaviours and how to manage stigmatised identities (Levy, 1981). Such studies show that gay consumers use the media to learn about non-conforming sexualities and gender identities, informing their self-fulfilment, coming-out, and lived identities. Thus, media are

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used to gain an understanding of what it means to be gay, to be part of the LGBTQ⁺ community, but also to be stigmatised (see e.g. Chasin, 2000; Sender, 2004). In particular for LGBTQ⁺ individuals lacking direct reference groups when they come out, the media can help to “reconstruct themselves as self-recognizing gay subjects” (Tsai, 2012:48). Gommillion and Guiliano (2011) found that LGBTQ⁺ media role models elicit feelings of pride, inspiration and comfort. Kosenko et al. (2016: 6) show that transgender individuals use the media to “explore and validate presentations of gender, to better understand the mechanics of transgender sex, to create community, and to research transition options.”

In addition to this identity formation, stigmata drive a need for social acceptance that can be gratified through inclusion and acknowledgment in the media (Kates, 2000; Tuten, 2006, Tsai, 2012). The media thus seems to have a clear socio-political use in individual’s negotiation of their stigmatised identity. Similar results have been obtained in studies examining consumers’ race (Green, 1999; Schwalbe et al., 2000). As a result, membership of a stigmatised group can positively influence consumer responses to ad imagery, as LGBTQ⁺ inclusion in advertising/media gratifies by suggesting social acceptance (Bhat et al., 1996; Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999). Studies thus suggest that due to the gratification elicited by such imagery, companies using it are rewarded with fervent brand loyalty (Kates, 1999; Tuten, 2005), even if portrayals are considered highly stereotypical (Tsai, 2011). Peñaloza (1996) discussed the importance of advertising as offering market integration for gay consumers’ assimilation of gay consumers, suggesting that: “[m]embers of social movements tend to have a heavily sensitized concern for the impact of marketing communications on group interest” (Peñaloza, 1996: 14).

4.3. Cultural Studies: Ideology and Hegemony

A key criticism of both previously described models is that they fail to take into consideration the social environment, thus failing to acknowledge possible macro structures that shape individual needs and beliefs (Boyd-Barrett and Newbold, 1995). This section thus focuses on models attempting to rectify this shortcoming by taking into account the social construction of meaning and the importance of ideologies and cultural hegemony.

4.3.1. The social construction of (polysemic) meanings

In 1959, Charles Wright Mills called for researchers across the humanities to engage in research showing how the micro-level of individual's subjective experiences, relate to socio-historic structures (Denzin, 2001). Mills believed that our perception of the material world is not exclusively established by our consciousness. Everything we know and see is always mediated through symbolic representations and our previous experiences. The media plays a decisive part in this process.

Following such a social constructionist understanding of knowledge, our experience of 'reality' is always an interpretation influenced by accepted societal structures and values: knowledge is "intrinsically the common property of a group or else nothing at all" (Kuhn, 1970: 201). Just like our understanding of gender, sexuality, and other categories of difference, our readings of texts are socially constructed. Neither linguistic- nor visual signs exist without first being "made to mean" (Hall, 1982: 57). Because meanings are socially constructed and context dependent, however, a range of different meanings can exist for the same sign. Texts, including media texts, can be interpreted in various ways; they are polysemic (Morely, 1980).

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This raises an important question - if meaning is never fixed, how can the media produce content that is read according to a preferred meaning? If texts are polysemic, meaning must result out of a “social struggle - a struggle for mastery in discourse - over which kind of social accenting is to prevail and to win credibility” (Hall, 1982: 144). There are some codes whose meaning is so widely accepted within certain cultures that the relation between signifier and signified seems natural. In these instances, thus, the process of coding is veiled by ideological processes that naturalize one specific, dominant meaning. To understand these processes, however, we first must understand the concept of ideology and its use in studies of popular culture.

4.3.2. Ideology and Hegemony

Etymologically, ‘ideology’ describes the study of ideas, their emergence and meaning. Today, however, it is often used to describe a specific idea in itself and the term’s definition and usage are contentious (Eagleton, 2007/1991). The sociological understanding of ideology focuses on how individuals or groups experience reality and the role ideas play therein (Eagleton, 2007). The epistemological one is connected to Marxist theories and focuses on one dominant, hegemonic ideology and the concept of false consciousness (ibid).

Several strands within the study of popular culture have been influenced by Marxist theories (Strinati, 2004). Marx and Engels maintained that the ruling class, which owns the means of material production, forces certain ideas on the subordinate classes, thereby reinforcing its dominant status (ibid). These ideas direct lower classes’ practices and lead to a false consciousness, a distortion of objective reality.

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Revolutionary potential exists only once the working class is able to produce its own ideas (ibid).

Marx's theories' impact on media studies are best reflected in the left-wing teachings of the *Frankfurt School* that laid the foundation for critical theory (Agger, 1991; Boyd-Barrett and Newbold, 1995). Horkheimer and Adorno ([1979] 2002) studied the power relations created by the cultural industry to undermine revolutionary potential. Following Marx, these theorists believed that the media was a vehicle that allowed the ruling classes to diffuse their ideas and beliefs, thereby maintaining existing systems of domination through mass-deception – a decidedly passive view of the audience.

The French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-90) also drew heavily on Marx to develop a structuralist theory of ideology. He describes a process akin to socialisation in which labour power is reproduced through ideological and economic forces (Althusser, 2006; Strinati, 2004). The state is divided into ideological state apparatuses, responsible for the dissemination of the dominant ideology and the maintenance of societal relations - education, family, religion, and mass media - and repressive state apparatuses, which ensure compliance through repression – e.g. police, military, and courts. Ideology has a material existence in the practices of institutions, state apparatuses, and individuals (Althusser, 2006). From our birth, we are placed in a system of ideologies that “interpellate” us - that shape us as subjects, (ibid:162). There is no way of avoiding this interpellation and most ideologies go unnoticed as they become natural practices (ibid). Popular culture, for example, shapes us into consumers that follow accepted consumption practices (Williamson,

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1981). Ideology is a distortion of reality, an imaginary relation individuals construct to their real circumstances (Althusser, 2006). Because we depend on language to construct reality, we are always within an ideology, each of which represents a different, imaginary form of reality (ibid).

In the early 1970s, many scholars further criticized Althusser's understanding of ideology as exclusively related to the domination of the subordinate class, thereby denying it any active part or agency in the process (Boyd-Barrett and Newbold, 1995). Despite the widespread influence of Althusser's ideas, his theory falls into the trap of functionalism as it confuses the consequence of ideology for its cause (Strinati, 2004). How did ideological state apparatuses emerge if not out of ideology? Focusing on these functional processes comes at the expense of discussing class and social conflicts (ibid).

Critics found a challenge to this view in the early 1970s in the works of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci (1971 [1933]) believed in a constant struggle for moral, cultural and thus political authority - which he terms *hegemony* - that opens up the possibility for revolution and change. Gramsci (1971) argued that through the espousal of hegemonic ideologies the media play a key role in the subjugation of lower classes. Opposed to the idea that ideology ultimately becomes working-class culture, however, Gramsci argued that any class can only become hegemonic if it can assimilate conflicting class cultures. This, to Gramsci, explained why the revolution predicted by Marx never emerged. Through the structures of the hegemonic ideology, opposing views are altered and ultimately integrated, preventing the expression of radical dissent because the consciousness of the subordinate classes is

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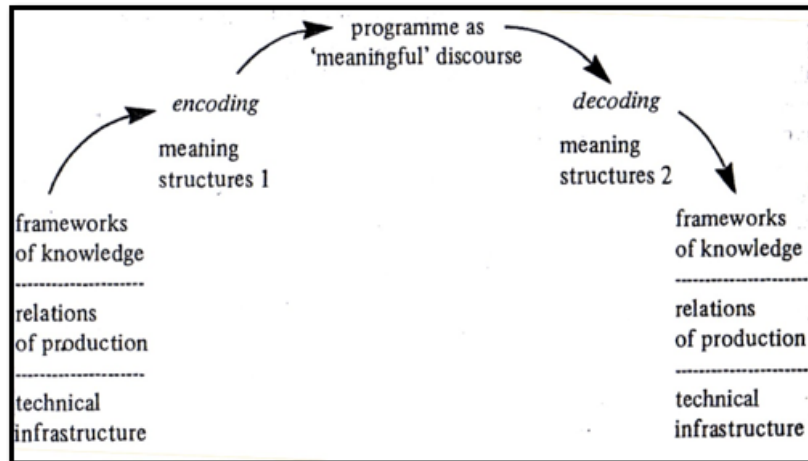
always already articulated through the hegemony's values and beliefs (Strinati, 2004). Similarly to Althusser, Gramsci distinguishes between 'coercive-' and 'consensual control,' voluntary consent engineered through establishment of hegemony (Daldal, 2014). It is institutions that belong to 'civil society' that create and negotiate hegemony - such as mass media - whereas the state uses coercion to uphold it. Where there exists a hegemony, however, there is always the possibility of a counter-hegemony (ibid). Gramsci believed that an overthrow would have to be engineered by those who produce and disperse ideas and knowledge in society.

Gramsci's theories have since been applied across a wide range of academic disciplines, including consumption studies, where they have informed studies of resistance in relation to race (Crockett and Wallendorf, 2004), sexuality (Kates, 2002, 2004), gender (Schroeder and Zwick, 2004), stigma (Sandikci and Ger, 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013), and mass media influences (Hirschman, 1993).

4.3.3. Ideology and Media Representation: Cultural Scripts

Drawing from these theories on ideology and hegemony, Hall (1980) suggested a model of communication that broke with the traditional, linear one of sender/message/receiver. His model, illustrated in Figure 4.1, focuses on institutional structures that construct a message and thus encode meanings within it. This process, however, is always framed by existing structures, such as skills, ideologies, and institutions, as well as extant infrastructure and professional relationships, in an existing socio-cultural environment.

Figure 4.1 Encoding/Decoding Model of Communication



Source: Hall S (1980) Encoding/decoding. In: Hall S, Hobson D, Love A, et al. (eds), Culture, media, language, London, UK: Hutchinson, pp. 128–38.

Following this notion, scholars suggested that cultural texts exert cultural leadership by creating ideological constructions or *cultural scripts* - of gender (McRobbie, 1997; Tuchman, 1979), class (Dodd and Dodd, 1992), race (Solomos and Back, 1996), and sexuality (Wright, 2009). These scripts are internalised by unthinking, easily manipulated consumers. Scholars have attempted to identify these ideological constructions through content analyses - systematic and often quantitative analyses of cultural texts to search for patterns, trends, relationships, and structures within the data set - as well as semiotic analysis, focusing on the semiological structure of signs within texts, as well as the ideological discourses espoused therein.

Feminist thought in particular has taken the media to task for its reification of traditional gender stereotypes. At the core of feminism lies the belief that gender is a socio-cultural construct and the media plays an integral part in its construction. Many feminist scholars have conducted content analyses of romantic novels, magazines, and advertisements (Dyer, 2008; Friedan, 1983; Radway, 1984). One of the best known semiotic works is McRobbie's (1978) study of how the ideologies in *Jackie*

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magazine shape working-class girls' identity. She describes how the magazine, through its sign system, espouses an ideology that indoctrinates women into their future gendered role. Nonetheless, she concedes that the effect on young girls is not immediate. Rather, their view of the world is changed slowly, and subtly, by destabilising values and beliefs and making the ideology it espouses seem natural. These studies have a clear connection to previously mentioned socialisation theories: because the media provides portrayals that adhere to the hegemonic ideologies, individuals are socialised to adhere to them (Zoonen, 1991). Through such 'gender scripts,' thus, the media constructs a picture of what it means to 'be a woman' and children are socialised to accept these roles as natural. As Williamson (1981: 42) argues, women are appalled by an ad, created, in particular, as consumers.

Gaye Tuchman (1979) termed the practice of excluding or trivialising women and other minorities in the mass media 'symbolic annihilation.' Based on the reflection hypothesis, the mass media, in an effort to attract audiences, reflects dominant socio-cultural values. Rather than simply reflecting reality, however, this is a 'symbolic representation' of an ideal society (ibid). Tuchman (1979) thus argues that not being included in this reflection, or being trivialised or condemned within it, constitutes symbolic annihilation. She finds that women are symbolically annihilated in mass media and advertisements, not only through their underrepresentation, and portrayal as incompetent, but also through continued expulsion into the domestic sphere. The concept has since been used extensively to describe the dearth of minority representations in media and advertising (Dyer, 2008).

Providing an in-depth review of the semiotic and content analyses conducted with

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regards to different categories of difference is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, Table 4.2 gives an overview of common themes, pervasive stereotypes and scripts found in previous studies. It should be noted that, despite their increasing importance, there is a dearth of studies into representation of categories of differences in online media, such a streaming services and video content providers (McNicholas Smith and Tyler, 2017).

Table 4.2 Gender, Class, Ethnicity, and Disability in the Media

Category of Difference	Stereotypes and Roles	Example Studies
<i>Gender (Women)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - symbolically annihilated - traditionally female occupation - sex object (young, beautiful, sensual) - lack in intelligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dyer (1982,2008) Eisend, Plagemann and Sollwedel (2014) Gill 2009) Goffman (1979) McRobbie (1978, 1997, 2004) Radway (1984) Schroder and Borgeson (1998) Williamson (1981) van Zoonen (1991) Zayer et al. (2012)
<i>Gender (Men)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - dominant, aggressive, authoritative - professional, efficient, rational - active and strong - traditionally male occupations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arnould, (2003) Connell (1995) Connell and Messerschmidt (2003) Eisend, Plagemann and Sollwedel (2014) Gauntlett (2008) Schroeder and Zwick (2004)
<i>Working Class</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lacking intelligence and competence - men: immature and irresponsible - women: more intelligent, rational, sensible, and mature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Butch (2003) Butch and Glennon (1983) Dines and Humez (2003) Thomas and Callahan (1982)
<i>Middle Class</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - smart, successful, responsible - super-parents 	
<i>Race</i>	<p>African-American Men:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack intelligence and civilisation - criminal vs sports star <p>African-American Women:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - subservient, overweight, domestic 'Mammys' - hostile and verbose 'Sapphires' - seductive, hyper-sexual, bad 'Jezebels' <p>Asian Individuals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - depicted as the „model minority“ - emphasis on work ethic at the expense of social/family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adams-Bass et al. (2014) Borgeson and Schroeder (2002) Dines and Humez (2003) Jackson (2006) Littlefield (2008) Mastro and Stern (2003) West (1995)
<i>Disability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sweet innocents (Tiny Tim) - obsessive avengers (Hunchback of Notre Dame) - from freak-show (1900s) to personal tragedy (2000s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Norden (1994)

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Content analyses have been critiqued as a quantitative methodology unable to properly account for qualitative, interpretive considerations, as well as completely ignoring socio-cultural and socio-economic context and power structures within which the text is located (Feuer and Dyer, 1982; Strinati, 2004). Ultimately, content analyses are highly deterministic, positioning audiences as passive receivers of messages that have a direct, negative effect on them (Currie, 1997; Hall, 1980). Semiological analyses, on the other hand, have been criticised for the arbitrariness of their conclusions that are always strongly influenced by subjective readings (Strinati, 2004). Because texts are polysemic, semiotic analysis can do little more than point to the variety of possible meanings within it. This is best illustrated by the fact that in a replication of McRobbie's study in 1989, Barker reached different conclusions (Strinati, 2004).

Lastly, both types of analysis have generally focused on one or two identity categories, despite the potential of intersectional analysis to provide more nuanced insights. Gopaldas and DeRoy (2015) recently introduced an intersectional analysis of media imagery, comparing it to approaches focusing on a single social dimension. They analysed a sample of *Gentleman's Quarterly* magazine covers to illustrate the superiority of an intersectional approach in exposing multiple points of marginalisation. They expand the notion of symbolic annihilation, arguing that

“only an intersectional approach can expose instances of intersectional invisibility, that is, the low to zero visibility granted to intersections of historically oppressed identities ... Only an intersectional approach can expose instances of intersectional travesty, that is, the ridicule, stereotyping, and generally inferior quality of representation granted to intersections of historically oppressed identities” (ibid: 25).

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While their work did not include sexuality due to a lack of sample instances, it is clear that the literature can greatly benefit from this approach to provide a more nuanced understanding of diversity in media representations as well as media experiences.

Despite these limitations, having an understanding of the portrayals that exist remains vital to understand individual media experiences. The following chapter will thus provide an overview of the limited representation of LGBTQ⁺ characters in the media and the narrow academic literature on this topic (Nölke, 2018).

4.3.4. LGBTQ⁺ Representations in The Media

Branchik (2007) created a conceptual historical framework of gay male portrayals in American advertisements and identified three phases: the ‘ridicule/scorn’ period before 1941, in which gay men were objects of stigmatisation; the ‘cutting-edge’ phase up to 1970, which saw their emergence as sophisticated trendsetters; and the ‘mainstream/respect’ phase from the 1970s to 2005, that showed them in a number of diverse roles. This last label, however, is misleading. The few companies that ventured into mainstream advertising during these years experienced backlash, boycotts, and violence: a 1994 IKEA ad featuring a gay male couple was pulled after the company received bomb threats (McMains, 2014). Subsequently, marketing budgets remained directed at gay publications, which thrived as a result (Peñaloza, 1996; Sender, 2003).

Consequently, studies to date have mostly focused on these gay publications (Draper, 2012; Gill, 2009; Marshall, 2011). In fear of alienating heterosexual consumers, marketers opted for an implicit, so-called ‘*gay-window*’ advertising approach

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(Sender, 2003; Tsai, 2012). Puntoni, Vanhamme, and Visscher (2011: 27) define this approach as “(1) the absence of explicit heterosexual cues, and (2) the presence of ambiguous cues that could be construed as depicting gay relationships or culture. It uses overt signifiers of gay culture, such as rainbows, as well as ‘purposefully polysemic’ imagery or text that may be read as gay only by gay consumers.”

In the past decade, however, the media and advertising landscape in western countries, particularly English-speaking ones, has seen an exponential increase in queer characters (McNicholas Smith and Tyler, 2017; Nölke, 2018). Since 2010, GLAAD (2017) has regularly announced new records in terms of media diversity. Nonetheless, this inclusivity in mainstream media has remained framed in heteronormative terms for a heterosexual gaze (Dow, 2001).

Already by the early 2000s, McRobbie (2004: 255) alleged that popular culture was marked by the juxtaposition of a return to “neo-conservative values” and a move towards liberal choice and diversity with regards to sexuality, gender, and family relations. Many feminist commentators have criticised how post-feminist thought has framed adherence to traditional gender scripts as a matter of personal choice, thereby undermining any possible critique of heteronormative relations and reifying existing power relations and dominant ideologies (Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006). McNicholas Smith and Tyler (2017: 318) describe this new type of queer representation as “‘post-queer popular culture,’ a social imaginary through which the socio-sexual freedoms of neo-liberal citizenship - such as the freedom to be an individual and to choose your sexual partner - are extended to (some) queer subjects, but largely within the circumscribed terms of existing hetero-patriarchal gender roles.”

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Both practice and consequently literature have focused on media portrayals of the acceptable gay male ‘dream consumer’ (Ginder and Byun, 2015). Gay people were typically Caucasian, “youthful, shirtless, hairless and muscular gay men” (Marshall, 2011: 4), from the upper-middle class (Kates, 1999; Peñaloza, 1996), depicted as handsome trendsetters, or in a hyper-sexualised, overly effeminate and ‘sissified’ way (Bergling, 2001; Tsai, 2004). In recent years, however, there has been movement towards depictions of gay men as ‘straight’ looking, stylish family men, in line with the accepted heteronormative ideal (Nölke, 2018).

To date, very few studies have explored lesbian portrayals in media (Capsuto, 2000; Ciasullo, 2001; Dove-Viebahn, 2007) or advertisements (Gill, 2009; Reichert et al., 1999). This is attributed to their position as economically less powerful and their frequent association with feminist anti-capitalism (Clark, 1993). Lesbian portrayals adhere to traditional scripts of femininity such as the white wedding, while framing ‘Femme’ lesbian women as glamorous, fashionable provocateurs pleasing to the heterosexual male gaze (Ciasullo, 2001; McNicholas Smith and Tyler, 2017). Similarly, ads depicting this group tend to formulaically ‘straighten’ lesbians to fit heteronormative forms of femininity (Gill, 2009; Nölke, 2018). These post-feminist, female characters are described by Gill (2009: 148) as the “active, desiring, sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their (implicitly liberated) interests to do so.” As a result, these portrayals are characterised by the objectification of hyper-sexualised ‘lipstick lesbians’, mirroring “those women engaged in lesbian sex in mainstream heterosexual pornography” (Reichert et al., 1999: 124). Furthermore, to this day, the correct ‘doing’ of femininity is reserved for white, middle- or upper-class women

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(Gill, 2009; Skeggs, 1997).

While gay and hyper-feminine lesbian media representations remain scarce, images of other parts of the LGBTQ⁺ spectrum, such as more masculine ‘butch’ lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals are virtually invisible (Ciasullo, 2001; Serano, 2007; Tsai, 2004). In my study of LGBTQ⁺ explicit advertising imagery between 2009 and 2015, I (2018) illustrate how, out of the 240 possible intersections between sexuality, gender, class, and ethnicity, 231 remain invisible (1% or less; Table 4.3). Similar to other minorities, thus, LGBTQ⁺ characters remain symbolically annihilated. This invisibility can either be absolute – i.e., no representations– or relative – i.e., no positive representations (Fryberg and Townsend, 2008).

Table 4.3 Intersectional Analysis of LGBTQ⁺ ads’ character diversity

	Upper				Middle Class				Working Class			
	Mature	Middle Aged	Young Adult	Teen	Mature	Middle Aged	Young Adult	Teen	Mature	Middle Aged	Young Adult	Teen
Gay												
Caucasian	1% [2]	3% [10]	1% [4]	0% [0]	1% [3]	28% [99]	18% [63]	0% [0]	0% [1]	1% [2]	1% [2]	0% [0]
Afro-American	0% [0]	1% [3]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [1]	1% [5]	2% [6]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Asian	0% [0]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [2]	3% [9]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Hispanic	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [2]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Lesbian												
Caucasian	0% [0]	5% [17]	1% [2]	0% [0]	1% [2]	11% [38]	7% [23]	1% [2]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Afro-American	0% [0]	1% [3]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [5]	2% [8]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Asian	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [3]	2% [7]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Hispanic	0% [0]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Bisexual												
Caucasian	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [2]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [5]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Afro-American	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Asian	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Hispanic	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Trans MTF												
Caucasian	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [3]	0% [0]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Afro-American	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [4]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Asian	0% [0]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [1]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Hispanic	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Trans FTM												
Caucasian	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [1]	1% [3]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Afro-American	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Asian	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Hispanic	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]

Notes: Intersections with 0% representation are shaded in grey. Intersections with N = 0 representation are shaded in dark grey.

Source: Nölke A-I (2018) Making Diversity Conform? An Intersectional, Longitudinal Analysis of LGBT-Specific Mainstream Media Advertisements. *Journal of Homosexuality* 65(2): 224–255.

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The inclusion of the Femme seems predicated on the denigration and erasure of the butch (ibid), who, as Jack Halberstam (2011:95) notes, signifies a model of queerness that is passé, as well as a “failure of femininity,” since it does not fit the heteronormative ideal of mainstream female sexuality. Examining the representations of transsexuals in advertising, for example, Serano (2007: 41) states that “popular media tends to assume that all transsexuals are male-to-female, and that all trans women want to achieve a stereotypical feminine appearance and gender role.” Male-to-Female (MTF) trans hyper-femininity is thus used to reaffirm the gender binary, symbolically annihilating trans identities as it trivialises trans femininity as unreal and artificial (Nölke, 2018). As a consequence, any subjectivity that cannot be easily adapted into a heteronormative lifestyle is excluded (Gill, 2009; McNicholas Smith and Tyler, 2017), including only “those whose sex is least threatening, along with those whose gender profiles are least queer” (Warner 2000: 66).

Moreover, the proliferation of streaming and video platforms has meant that much LGBTQ⁺ media content has moved online and can now be consumed on-demand (McNicholas Smith and Tyler, 2017). In my ad analysis paper (Nölke, 2018), I describe such a shift in the advertising landscape. Whereas prior to 2015 most explicit LGBTQ⁺ ads used a *diversity ad* format, showing a range of diverse characters in quick succession, advertisers today are increasingly employing *Human Interest (HI) ads*, two- to four-minute-long online videos that focus in-depth on one or more individual’s stories. Oftentimes a diversity ad is used as a trailer that invites interested individuals to watch additional content in the form of an HI ad online. To date, no studies have investigated the possibility that such practices may further reduce the visibility and thus the destigmatising effect of LGBTQ⁺ explicit content

due to the restriction of its audience to those who already hold favourable views towards SGNIs (Nölke, 2018).

4.4. 'Decoding' Hegemonic Meanings

Whereas the previous chapter provided an understanding of how ideology and hegemony may influence an audience by providing cultural scripts of minority consumers, this chapter now turns to more active audience models to describe ways in which hegemonic ideologies may be interpreted, both on an individual level based on lived experiences, as well as on a social level, through interpretive communities.

As Hall (1980: 130) declares, before a message can “have an ‘effect’ (however defined), satisfy a ‘need’ or be put to a ‘use’, it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded.” Drawing from Gramsci, and assuming that any television programme has always already been encoded with dominant, hegemonic codes - the ‘cultural code’ - Hall (1980) distinguished three ways that an audience may decode television discourses. Audiences might take a *dominant-hegemonic* position, uncritically accepting the meaning and thus “operating inside the dominant code” (ibid:136). Audiences may also operate through *negotiated* codes, accepting hegemonic meanings at a more abstract, general level, but remaining oppositional at a situational level. Lastly, audiences might employ an entirely *oppositional* reading, rejecting the originally intended meaning entirely, therefore engaging in the “struggle for meaning” (ibid:138). Instead of passive ‘consumption’, Hall (1980) thus prefers to characterise media consumption as an active, socially situated process of production.

4.4.1. Idiosyncratic Media Interpretations: Lived experiences

Hall's framework has later been adopted by a number of seminal studies, such as Morley's (1980) study of how individuals read *Nationwide*, the British current affairs programme, in which he allocates different groups to Hall's three audience positions based on their occupation, education levels, and ethnicity, and Katz and Liebes' (1990) study of how married couples from different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds read the 1980s soap opera *Dallas*. In both studies, the ability to decode the dominant meanings within the television set was dependent on the ideologies that individuals inherited via institutions such as schools, churches, and the workplace.

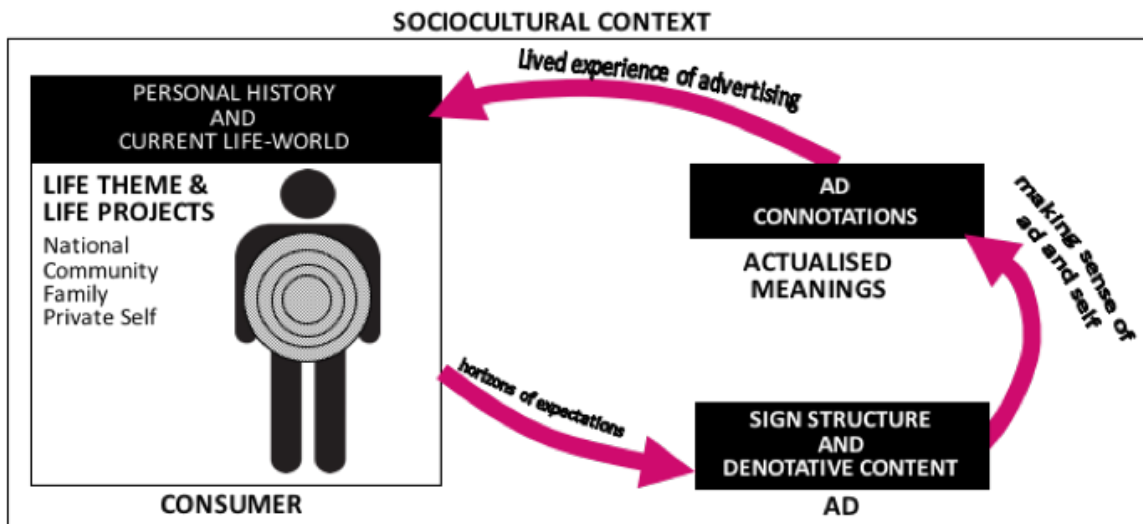
Thus, every "effect" can only ever be understood through the socio-cultural relations framing them. When the meaning structures driving encoding and decoding processes, are not the same, difference in meaning – polysemy - arises (Morely, 1980). How we make sense of cultural texts is thus strongly influenced by our own values, attitudes, and beliefs over our life-course. It is the audience who, in the end, accepts or resist the meaning 'transferred' through the media and it is possible for portrayals to be interpreted in different ways over time or indeed at the same time (Puntoni et al., 2010). Using *Jackie*, the magazine featured in McRobbie's (1981) study, for example, Frazer (1987) found that young girls were highly critical of *Jackie's* content and able to distance themselves from portrayals through reflexive deliberation of the messages.

One of the basic tenants of *reader-response theory* is thus that audience readings of texts are shaped by social structures and conventions (Mick and Buhl, 1992; Ritson and Elliott, 1999; Scott, 1994). Following this tradition, Mick and Buhl (1992)

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developed a meaning-based model of advertising experience (Figure 4.2), drawing on life history and advertising interviews with each of three brothers. The life history interviews identified particular life themes - relatively enduring and deep-seated existential worries for each brother - as well as a range of life projects - social, national, community, family or private - which followed on from life themes, but evolved over the life-course. Analysing the advertising interviews in light of the brothers' life themes and -projects, Mick and Buhl conclude that “consumers actualize many connotative ad meanings based on their salient life projects as conjoined by life themes.” (1992: 320). This study demonstrated that ad experiences are subjective and constrained by an ad's denotative context, sign structure, and the reader's socio-cultural background, thus endorsing the use of life story interviews for phenomenological research.

Figure 4.2 Meaning-Based Model of Ad Experience



Adapted from Mick DG and Buhl C (1992) A Meaning-Based Model of Advertising Experiences. *Journal of Consumer Research* 19(December): 317–338.

This shift reflects the ongoing juxtaposition of structure and agency that runs through much of social scientific thought. To “break down” this “sociological dichotomy,”

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Currie (1997: 454) draws from the writings of Dorothy Smith to treat women's magazine advertisements as social texts whose discursive practices work in tandem to readers' subjectivities. In analysing social texts, thus one must take into account its 'documentary reality' (Atkinson and Coffey, 2004) - the production process, pre-text and social context of its creation, and its intertextuality - its links to other texts (Fairclough, 1992; Rose, 2001), as well as the reader's lived experience and standpoint in society.

Currie (1997) found that girls in her study were agentic in selecting some images and rejecting others that were inconsistent with their lived experience. They assigned these ideologies an 'ontological status', accepting dominant images of femininity and gender roles as truth even if they were stereotypical. They criticised the magazine rather than wider societal discourses and still derived pleasure from these images. Currie thus acknowledges the power of cultural texts to mediate individual subjectivities. Nevertheless, she argues her participants are not 'cultural dupes,' as they were capable of critical interpretations and selective readings (ibid:474). Nonetheless, she casts doubt on their ability to truly undermine patriarchal and capitalistic ideologies through resistant readings. Ideology, she argues, does not create a false version of reality; it is constitutive of it (Currie, 1997).

In the same year, Hirschman and Thompson (1997) proposed that advertising as a cultural text does not differ from entertainment media. Approaches that focus on advertising in isolation, they declare, "fail to address the significant role of the mass media in shaping the frame of reference by which consumers interpret advertisements" (p.44). In semi-structured interviews, they asked respondents how

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they feel the media influences them, identifying three consumer-media relationships and associated interpretation strategies that are summarised in Table 4.4: inspiring and aspiring, deconstructing and rejecting, and identifying and individualising.

Hence, consumers interpret media texts as an affirmation of their lived experiences, as representations of an ideal self to strive towards, or in a critical way that questions its intentions. Comparable to O’Donohoe (1997), Hirschman and Thompson (1997) ultimately regard consumers as cultural bricoleurs, who blend and contrast cultural meanings and media images and thereby fashion an entirely new meaning that nonetheless reproduces the hegemonic cultural code.

Table 4.4 Consumer Media Relations and Interpretation Strategies

Relationship Mode	Interpretation Type	Description
Inspiring and aspiring	<i>Motivational</i>	Media text as a representation of an ideal self that can actively be aspired towards. As texts are considered 'truth', critical beliefs and views are suspended. This mode is closest to what Hall would describe as reading within the dominant code.
Deconstructing and rejecting	<i>Critical</i>	Media texts are considered unrealistic and idealise. Economic motivation are overtly questioned. Most male participants maintained their 'immunity' to such attempts (see also Pollay, 1986), whereas women tended to believe that one cannot easily evade harmful media effects.
Identifying and individualising	<i>Personalising</i>	Media images as interpreted as reflecting consumers' lived experience and self-identity which enables an emotional connection with characters. The meaning espoused in the text must be desirable, thereby enabling a wishful identification with it. It is a "visual department store of symbolic possibilities that can be tried on, adopted, altered, or discarded in keeping with their desired self" (p.57).

Hirschman EC and Thompson C (1997) Why media matter: toward a richer understanding of consumers' relationships with advertising and mass media. *Journal of Advertising* 26(1): 43–60.

Despite the proliferation of such studies since the late 1980s, few have focused on stigmatised individuals or minorities (Lee et al., 2014; Tsai, 2012). Furthermore,

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little research into the media experiences of stigmatised groups takes into account the macro-social structures that shape media portrayals to point to their underlying ideologies and cultural connections (Hall, 1977). Those considering the ideological work performed by the media usually examine categories of difference in isolation, most notably in terms of gender and race. Structural effects are often presupposed without interrogating the particular ideological discourses responsible for them in the first place.

In terms of advertising, studies are generally more interested in the effect of implicit and explicit minority imagery on the majority (Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999; Pounders and Mabry-Flynn, 2016). In addition, the vast majority of studies are quantitative, investigating how variables such as subcultural cues, character's race, and strength of group identification moderate consumer responses (Adams-Bass et al., 2014; Green, 1999; Oakenfull, 2005).

4.4.2. Social Uses of the Media: Interpretive Communities

One of the concepts used extensively in discussions of stigmatised consumers with relation to social contexts is the notion of the “interpretive community” (Fish, 1980). Drawing from literary criticism, Fish suggested that communities who share a socio-cultural context share ‘interpretive strategies,’ similar ways of and reasons for reading and understanding texts (Scott, 1994). Members are part of the same ideological structures and hence bound to certain ‘authoritative’ readings (Fish, 1980) in accordance with their socio-cultural identification (see e.g. Ritson and Elliott, 1999). For Fish (1980:14), “it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence

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of formal features.” Such groups are distinct and uniform, made up of “certified members” (Fish, 1980: 357) dictating the meanings of texts. To account for the possibility that a person may belong to different groups within the interpretive community, Fish later pointed to sub-communities that adopt the basic ‘rules’ but add ones of their own (ibid: 343).

Fish’s theory was quickly adopted by audience researchers and since its conception has been used extensively across the social sciences to describe how conditioning affects group interpretations of texts (see e.g. Lindlof, 1988). In marketing and media research, differences in interpretive strategies have been described based on brand communities (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001); social class and gender (Mick and Politi, 1989; Yannopoulou and Elliott, 2008); race (Littlefield, 2008; Mitra, 2010); homosexuality (Puntoni et al., 2010; Tsai, 2012); religion and spirituality (Lindlof, 2002; O’Guinn and Belk, 1989), and stigmatised groups more generally (Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999; Lopes, 2006). It is their collective ‘rules of the game’ that allow members of these alleged interpretive communities to read and interpret purposefully polysemic media content according to or against its producer’s preferred meaning (Puntoni et al., 2012).

Closely linked to interpretive communities, existing research suggests that members of a marginalized group will always prefer media content that portrays someone of their respective group. This claim is backed by *social identity theory* according to which humans create social categories and distinguish between their ‘in-group’ and ‘out-groups’ (Abrams and Hogg, 1988). We tend to search for and associate ourselves with those similar to ourselves - the principle of *homophily* (Lazarsfeld and

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Merton, 1954; Rogers and Bhowmik, 1970). Homophily has been the focus of many social network studies (McPherson et al., 2001) and provided the basis for *identification studies* that examine the motives and processes of consumer identification with media characters.

Identification theories have been used to describe *in-group bias*, individuals' preference for in-group over out-group stereotypes when presented with media imagery (Cohen, 2001; Green, 1999). Consumers are said to have more favourable attitudes to portrayals of their ethnicity (Adams-Bass and Stevenson, Jr., 2012; Bush et al., 1999) and sexuality (Oakenfull and Greenlee, 2004). Furthermore, gay male participants were found to be indifferent about the gender of a portrayed character, while lesbians preferred portrayals of gay women over males. In addition, gay respondents' attitude did not change for implicit or explicit portrayals, whereas heterosexual ones had a clear preference for implicit over explicit gay ads (Oakenfull et al., 2008).

As aforementioned, studies that have employed a uses and gratifications method have claimed that gay consumers – as an interpretive community - use the media to achieve the gratification of social acceptance provided by gay media portrayals. Indeed, a content analysis by Tuten and Neidermeyer (2003) illustrated how members of a gay online community engaged in proactive searches of gay ads and subsequent discussions of brands' gay-friendliness, to satiate that need. Gay individual's readings of media texts are thus described as “socially contextualized, negotiated in personal and social settings, and politically informed” (Tsai, 2004). Due to their “marginalised interpretive subjectivity” they “constantly ponder the gay

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perspective” (Tsai, 2012: 51–52). Such studies have further asserted that the craving for this gratification is such that gay consumers will like ads that show an explicit gay character even if that character is depicted in a highly stereotypical fashion (Borgerson et al., 2006).

Clearly, these existing studies do not take into the societal changes and generational gap outlined in chapter three, which poses several important questions: Do the above findings apply to individuals who grow up in more accepting environments? How does an individuals’ standpoint at the intersection of several minority groups affect their media experience? Considering the boycott of McDonald’s by LGBTQ⁺ consumer groups mentioned in the introduction to this thesis suggests a more complex media experience than existing research would have us believe.

4.5. Summary

Three key themes emerge from this chapter’s analysis of existing studies in relation to media, media consumption and stigma. Firstly, it is clear that the media plays a decisive role in the creation and spread of stigma, but also in its amelioration. Secondly, most minority groups are symbolically annihilated in the media or represented in a highly stereotypical fashion, furthering the reification of the dominant hegemony. Lastly, stigmatised groups are characterised as forming an interpretive community that shapes the meanings its members derive from media content: they ‘use’ the media to achieve the gratification of social acceptance and prefer in-group portrayals, even if these are stereotypical. Existing studies on stigmatised consumers in the media and advertising consumption domain are thus subject to the same limitations as the wider field. Research considers stigmatised

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consumers to be homogenous group of people whose minority consciousness is the main factor shaping their media experience. Such assumptions are one reason for the dearth of interpretive research on the media experience of stigmatized communities (Tsai, 2011).

As early as 1994, Schroeder reviewed literature on the interpretive community, succinctly concluding that simply introducing the possibility of ‘sub-communities’ as suggested by Stanley Fish (1994: 338–9)

“does not, however, solve the problem of different interpretations arising in the non-institutional contexts of everyday life. Here, an individual’s readings of a text may be different from that of another individual not because they belong to separate sub-communities within the same primary interpretive community ...but because they inhabit in different proportions a whole range of interpretive communities. In everyday life people hold multiple ‘membership’ of a number of primary interpretive communities, institutional and non-institutional, whose signifying potentials intersect in different ways in the individual consciousness.”

To date, studies of media experiences have not solved the problem of “different interpretations arising in the non-institutional context of everyday life.” They do not address how media interpretations may change throughout an individual’s life-course as one moves through different situations, or the effects of ones’ position at the intersection of multiple identity categories. Furthermore, looking at our current understanding of LGBTQ⁺ media experience further highlights the need for research that takes into account both macro-social changes and micro-social heterogeneity.

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5. ADDRESSING THE STRUCTURE V AGENCY DIVIDE: BOURDIEU

As the previous sections illustrate, much deliberation in the (media) consumption literature grapples with the issue of (media) consumers as “irrational slave[s] to trivial, materialistic desires who can be manipulated into childish mass conformity by calculating mass producers” (Slater, 1997: 33–4), or agentic beings, able to use the market to emancipate themselves (Holt and Thompson, 2004; Moisio et al., 2013).

The following section introduces Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice as a way to address the divide between those viewing human action as directed by social structures and those who believe in an inherent agency. Various consumer researchers have introduced Bourdieu’s work to the consumer culture domain (Hogg and Banister, 2001; Holt, 1997; Thompson and Üstüner, 2015). Askegaard and

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Linnert (2011) explicitly point to Bourdieu's work as a way of incorporating both individual experience and social constraints into our understanding of consumption as practice. To date, however, his conceptual toolbox has not been widely used in (media) consumption studies. It is only in recent years that a number of scholars has started to point out that his sociological approach can help generate a more nuanced understanding of the symbolic power of the media (Couldry, 2004a, 2004b; Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Myles, 2010).

Many of his concepts are not new; they are based on pre-existing theories which he combined into one coherent theory of praxis. As a consequence, it draws together many of the concepts outlined in this literature review, creating a comprehensive toolbox and offering an invaluable 'enabling theory' (Figueiredo et al., 2017) for studying the interplay between individual agency and social structures in LGBTQ+ consumers' stigma and media experiences. This use of Bourdieu is not to suggest that other theories are not valid. Considering the challenges posed by other theorists allows us to maintain a certain critical reflexivity regarding our own assumptions.

The following sections first provide an overview of Bourdieu's sociological theory, introducing the concepts central to this theory - habitus, field, and different forms of capital. I then discuss the difference between Marxist theories of ideology and Bourdieu's conception of doxa, symbolic power, and -violence, focusing on the application of the latter for the study of gender and sexuality. Lastly, I outline how Bourdieu's field theory has been used in media studies, before describing how the study of media experience can benefit from his writings.

5.1. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

The literature has struggled to categorise Bourdieu and he has been claimed by structuralists, poststructuralists, and postmodernists alike (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). He developed his 'theory of practice' in an attempt to overcome the shortcomings of the two opposing traditions - structuralism, which focused on the social structures that regulate individual behaviour, and essentialism, which focused on individual freedom through choice. He believed that a theory was needed to account for both, bridging the sociological problem of structure versus agency and incorporating both individual practices and choice within a structured social space (Grenfell, 2014).

Ontologically, Bourdieu describes social 'reality' as a construct, created through social structures that are both structured and structuring, generating our thoughts and behaviour. He thus creates "a science of dialectical relations between objective structures ... and the subjective dispositions within which these structures are actualized and which tend to reproduce them." (Bourdieu, 1977: 3). In a nutshell, thus, an individual's preferences (tastes) are structured over a lifetime and socially rather than individually constructed. Practices, then, arise from the relationship between actors' durable dispositions (*habitus*), an array of accrued resources (*capital*), and their current location in the social environment (*field*).

Bourdieu himself defines habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures." (Bourdieu, 1990: 53). Habitus is *structured* by one's life circumstances and the social environments one moves in, such as family environment and education (Bourdieu,

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1990: 54). At the same time, it is *structuring*, as it influences the actor's future practices, consciousness, and tastes (Bourdieu, 1990).

Actors can move in several social environments, *fields*, at any one time and in this way fields constantly influence and co-construct each other. Bourdieu makes extensive use of the game metaphor, describing how each field is regulated according to a certain 'logic of practice,' specific regularities and truths or *doxa*, that become 'second nature' to players in the field as they develop a "feel for the game" (ibid: 62). Any one field can be comprised of other sub-fields with their own (potentially conflicting) logics of practice and doxa (Bourdieu, 1977). Habitus is thus distinct from 'socialisation' as one is not merely socialized into a reductionist class consciousness. Rather, one acquires what Bourdieu calls a practical sense of how to behave in different situations and across fields that is largely subconscious (Bourdieu, 1998: 24–5).

As actors move within a field, they are constantly vying for power and status by exchanging different forms of capital: *economic capital* (money and assets), *symbolic capital*, which includes *cultural capital* such as field specific knowledge, tastes, and cultural preferences, and *social capital*, formed through social networks (Bourdieu, 1984). Symbolic capital is connected to all previous forms of capital. It emerges out of an (arbitrary) recognition of "an ordinary property (physical strength, wealth, warlike valour, etc.)" (Bourdieu, 1998: 102) as significant and valuable. To illustrate what Bourdieu means by symbolic capital as 'arbitrary,' consider how ethnic identity confers on an individual positive or negative symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1998). The distinction based on skin colour is ultimately arbitrary – one

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could have equally distinguished humans on the basis of eye colour, to follow Butler's (1990) argument. Nonetheless, white skin has developed into symbolic capital that can be used to gain advantages.

Due to field homologies or similarities, some capital that is accrued can be exchanged in several fields. As described earlier, CCT has paid particular attention to cultural capital, especially with regards to the notion of sub-cultural capital (Kates, 2002; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital exists in three distinct forms. In its *embodied* state, it takes the form of tastes, mannerisms, and long-lasting dispositions that are build up over time and cannot simply be acquired and transferred immediately. In its *objectified* state, it takes a material form as a cultural good, such as books, paintings, and machines that can be exchanged for economic capital or other goods. Lastly, *institutionalised* cultural capital takes the physical form of certificates and qualifications that bestow official recognition and allows for a comparison and exchange between holders.

Bourdieu believed that cultural capital is particularly important to the hierarchical order of social life (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998). Within society, some forms of cultural capital are linked to higher social status - e.g. certain accents and body language, forms of eating, knowledge about the arts - whereas others are markers of lower socio-economic strata, thereby creating *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984). To illustrate this, Bourdieu uses the example of a working-class person entering a fine dining restaurant and not understanding the range of cutlery or the 'proper' way to use them. The lack of cultural capital marks this person as distinct from others in the restaurant.

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Similarly, throughout our lives we are constantly confronted with situations where we decide whether certain things are aesthetically pleasing or not. Bourdieu believed that our *tastes* are not conscious choices (Bourdieu, 1984: 49). They are the result of our habitus and reflect the symbolic hierarchy into which we are born (Arsel and Bean, 2013; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013). Social categories of difference, especially social class, are thus fundamental to the evolution of our tastes. Some have described tastes as consumer preferences, reducing anything an individual does to consumption (see e.g. Graeber, 2011). It is more accurate to state that consumers' adherence to *taste regimes* is a way of maintaining distinction from other classes; thus taste becomes a "social weapon", defining and marking off the high from the low, the sacred from the profane and the "legitimate" from the "illegitimate" (Allen and Anderson, 1994: 1). Holt (1998), for example, showed how consumption practices differ even when using the same products, with low-cultural capital consumers more practically oriented and high cultural capital consumers more culturally diverse and omnivorous.

While a person's life-course may be unique, the habitus is structured by shared meanings with others. Spatial proximity is likely to generate individuals with a similar habitus, sharing a sense of taste and appreciation for certain forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Such a "class" habitus provides us with an understanding of our intended space within the social world, of the spaces that are best suited to our dispositions and capital (ibid). It is this class habitus that may prevent those in the working-class from entering the fine-dining restaurant in the first place or going to university. Bourdieu calls this sense for the opportunities we believe we have "subjective expectations of objective probabilities" (1990: 59). It is a "class

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unconsciousness” that reproduces existing structures and social inequalities (Grenfell, 2012, citing Bourdieu, 1985).

Situations might arise when a field undergoes rapid change, such that the habitus of those within it cannot adapt quickly enough to the new conditions, creating a “hysteresis effect” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 78–9). Such change often affects numerous fields at once and how quickly actors can acknowledge them and adapt accordingly to counter the hysteresis effect depends on their habitus. Generally, Bourdieu asserts, “it is the people who are richest in economic capital, cultural capital and social capital who are the first to head for new positions.” (Bourdieu, 1996b: 262). Thus, the hysteresis effect contributes to the continued success of the dominant groups.

Some commentators have since sought to extend and refine the concept of the habitus. Illouz (2007) talks about the *emotional habitus* to describe cultural capital in its most embodied, unconscious form - the “socially constituted, prevailing ways of feeling and emoting, as well as the embodied, axiomatic understandings and norms about feelings and their expression” (Gould, 2007: 10, cited in Illouz, 2009). This views emotions as based on embodied dispositions, habituated by the social environment and field movements (see also Illouz, 2009; Scheer, 2012). Others explore the notion of a *moral habitus* (Ignatow, 2009a, 2009b) to account for “the importance of ethical, moral, and normative dimensions of social life” (Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013). Moral identity can shape embodied practices and dispositions; it can evolve over time and is directed by strong emotions (Ignatow, 2009a; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013).

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The habitus alone, thus, does not determine an actor's practices. Rather, they stem from "an obscure and double relation" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 126) between an actor's dispositions (habitus), their resources (capital), and their resulting location in a particular social environment (field). His theory of practice is thus distinctly relational.

5.2. Symbolic Power, Gender and Sexuality

It is important to stress that Bourdieu describes tastes and dispositions as not necessarily intentional - more often than not our practices are unconscious, conducted "without needing to ask explicitly what is to be done" (Bourdieu, 1998: 97-8). Bourdieu's term *doxa* creates a deliberate distinction to ideology (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1992). He insists that the Marxist notion of ideology follows a "Cartesian philosophy" that affords agency only to learned scholars, whereas the rest of the world is easily manipulated into a false consciousness. Bourdieu believed that ideologies are not created by any conscious agents striving for hegemonic dominance; rather people replicate them unconsciously through deeply engrained and embodied "corporeal dispositions" (1998: 54-5) - the habitus. He states: "The social world doesn't work in terms of consciousness; it works in terms of practices, mechanisms and so forth. By using doxa we accept many things without knowing them, and that is what is called ideology." (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1992: 113)

Through the habitus behaving and believing in certain ways becomes second nature, reproducing objective realities and class relations. The prevalent doxa within fields, and the capital valued there, are fundamentally arbitrary. Through the naturalisation of doxa, however, this arbitrariness is misrecognised, with adverse effects for the less

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powerful. Bourdieu refers to this type of discrimination as symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984). Symbolic violence is a more dangerous form of oppression than other forms of violence, because it rests on complicity through the misrecognition of doxa as legitimate. It is predicated on an acceptance of certain types of distinction as natural, because our habitus has been structured in a way that induces us to accept the doxa unquestioningly, and to fight against heterodoxic discourses that do not adhere to it.

Perhaps the best example of this can be found in Bourdieu's writing about gender, articulated mainly in his essay *Masculine Domination* (2001a). It differs from some feminist writers in that Bourdieu does not believe that gender is imposed on our identity. To him the notion of a 'normative gender identity' (Butler, 1990) implies that it is the subjects themselves who must break free from the restraints placed upon them. This view fails to take into account pre-conscious adherence to the symbolic order of gender (Bourdieu, 1977; Kraus, 2006).

Bourdieu saw gender as one of the most powerful contemporary societal classifications. The symbolic gender hierarchy is embodied in our habitus, which is always already gendered (Bourdieu, 2001a). It is thus not a field in itself and ideas about gender may differ across fields (Kraus, 2006). It is here that the importance of the body emerges most clearly in Bourdieu's work. The habitus is 'the social made body' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 127), defining our gendered mannerisms, body language, expressions, our ideas about what constitutes a (gendered) body. That so many still consider gender to be 'natural' and not as the arbitrary social construct that it is, highlights the naturalisation of doxa at work. This is what makes it so

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difficult to overcome and why masculine domination is potentially the most obvious form of symbolic violence.

Bourdieu's position here is similar to that of Foucault and Butler in terms of the naturalisation and de-historisation of dispositions, the "transformation of history into nature, of cultural arbitrariness into the natural" (Bourdieu, 2001a: 2). Foucault's genealogical method largely concerns a similar naturalisation of power structures throughout history, unveiling its arbitrariness in the process. Foucault (1980: 39) writes about "the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives." While Foucault's approach is focused on technologies of the self and self-regulatory practices, for Bourdieu "power is a function of relations between subjects and so power must be seen to function through a multiplicity of relations" (Everett, 2002: 57).

Bourdieu's notion of the naturalisation of bodily practices through constant repetition throughout history can also be found in Butler's view of gender as performative. She describes gender as "the repeated stylisation of the body, [and] a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, the appearance of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1990: 33). Gender is thus the embodiment of socially accepted practices and "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' [i.e. nouns, adjectives] that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1999: 33-4).

In Bourdieusian terms, thus, the gendered habitus presupposes a gender binary and heterosexist social hierarchy, leading to the misrecognition of arbitrary "sexual

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structures” and the “historical mechanisms responsible for their relative dehistoricization and eternalization” (Bourdieu, 2001a: viii). While Bourdieu himself does not engage further with homosexuality, a number of researchers have used the notion of symbolic power to describe the social order that then values “certain sexual identities and gender expression over others” (Burtch and Haskell, 2010: 94). Homo- and transphobic behaviour, particularly in early life, thus teaches individuals which practices are acceptable and which are not (ibid: 91), creating pre-conscious durable dispositions - heteronormativity - and strong negative affective emotions - homophobia.

5.3. Addressing Criticisms of Bourdieu

A number of scholars have criticised the notion of the habitus as enduring and transposable dispositions as too deterministic, totalitarian, and averse to change (Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; Üstuner and Holt, 2007). Feminist writers in particular have criticised the felt determinism in his work, admonishing his limited attention to gender and the lack of room allowed for social change (Butler, 1990; Calhoun, 1994; Skeggs, 2004). Many commentators have challenged his “rather pessimistic account which heavily overemphasizes permanence over change” (Mottier, 2002: 353). It has been suggested that the concept of habitus pre-empts agency, as it is based on a socially structured practical sense rather than reflexive thought (Decoteau, 2016; Elder-Vass, 2007; Moi, 1991). To many scholars, his account focuses too much on structure, leaving no room for agency or, indeed, any form of subjectivity. Furthermore, Bourdieu’s belief that every form of capital is ultimately economic has led many to accuse him of the economic determinism he

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himself denounced in Marxist works.

The criticism that Bourdieu does not provide possible avenues of overcoming the permanence of the habitus seems valid. As opposed to writers who actively discuss ways of subverting existing power relations, readers will not find such clear directions in his work. This does not mean, however, that he does not allow for social change at all. Rather, Bourdieu is preoccupied with describing just how difficult it is to change naturalised, durable dispositions. This contrasts with theories that “overestimate the extent to which individuals living in post-traditional order are able to reshape identity” (McNay, 1999:113). Bourdieu adds two concepts to his theorisation of doxa that do elucidate the potential for social change (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1992). The first, *orthodoxa*, describes a state in which individuals become aware of the arbitrariness of the doxa, but still accept the resulting norms and actively work towards re-naturalising it. Conversely, discourses that actively seek to challenge the orthodoxy are described as *heterodoxa*, such as the gay liberation movement or feminism (Moi, 1991). One might be tempted to link orthodoxic discourses to work that has asserted that consumers often act *as if* they did not know about the detrimental effects of their (consumption) practices. Cluley and Dunne's (2012) concept of commodity narcissism, for example, is based on this belief. Cluley and Dunne's (2012) consumer knowingly engages in consumption practices despite their detrimental effects. Their theory intimately engages with Marx's theory of commodity fetishism and Freud's works on sexual fetishism to suggest that narcissism is a better concept to describe such *as if* moments. Ultimately, thus, such a consumer is described as “a tyrant who needs others to suffer so that they can continue to reign” (ibid:262). The concept of *orthodoxa* differs from

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this, because those who defend orthodox views intimately believe in them. That is to say, they do not act *as if* they did not know about heterodox discourses, they act *as if* these discourses are inherently wrong, precisely because they believe them to be, and thus fight against them. This social struggle between orthodoxy and heterodoxy produces ambivalence and uncertainty and can ultimately lead to social change. Thus, for Kraus (2006: 130), “[r]eflexivity is not a question, then, of the subject’s potentials, but of the social conditions under which the individual will renounce his or her doxic attitude toward the world.”

In addition to the tensions between orthodoxa and heterodoxa, Bourdieu believed that, while our habitus is mainly structured by primary socialisation, secondary socialisation, as well as hysteresis effects, can lead to fundamental changes (Bourdieu, 1990; see also Coskuner-Balli and Thompson, 2013; Holt, 1997). Bourdieu (2007) himself describes his own habitus as split, a *habitus clivé*, due to the conflict between his working-class upbringing and secondary education in elite academic institutions. Being thus “caught between two worlds, and their irreconcilable values,” (ibid:99) he asserts “helped to institute, in a lasting way, an ambivalent, contradictory relationship to the academic institution” (ibid: 100) that has forever changed his practices.

The mere possibility of different experiences across fields and the concept of heterodoxa illustrate Bourdieu’s belief that individuals can be made aware of the doxa, creating the possibility for political activism and social change. He is sceptical, however, of commentators who believe that consciousness-raising or individual political action alone is sufficient to subvert any form of domination - a view that has

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been adopted by a number of prominent feminist writers (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004; Butler, 1990). Instead, social change comes “not from a revolt of the great individual, but from the political action of many individuals: from social movements” (Krais, 2006: 131). Individual action, “regulated liberties” in Bourdieusian terms, thus, are insufficient and should be complemented with “political mobilisation” (Bourdieu, 2001: viii). Fitting to this study’s context, Bourdieu suggests that the success of the symbolic struggle of the gay and lesbian movement lies in the large numbers of relatively privileged people in terms of economic and cultural capital, which they could use to “invent and impose forms of collective organization and action and effective weapons, especially symbolic ones, capable of shaking the political and legal institutions which play a part in perpetuating their subordination” (2001:121). Thus, Bourdieu saw social change as arising from collective resistance that emerges from within the system and is able to subvert existing distinctions.

Still, it is true that in his work social movement across fields and, in fact, his own experience of a *habitus clivé*, was the exception, not the rule. He relied heavily on the empirical data generated in Kabylia (Algeria), and often failed to adapt his writing to less traditionally doxic environments (Krais, 2006; Moi, 1991; Skeggs, 2004). As previously described, social mobility and thus the ambivalence resulting from hysteresis effects and a *habitus clivé* may be considered the norm rather than the exception. Furthermore, it is hard to find an example of a modern society in which doxa are entirely naturalised. Rather than silent compliance, we see open debate between orthodox and heterodox discourses (Moi, 1991). Modern society is messier than Bourdieu suggests; it is “a social world with complex structures and divergent life-worlds, employing heterogeneous criteria of social differentiation and

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undergoing simultaneous processes of stagnation and of social change” (Krais, 2006:123).

As a consequence, it is hard to argue against the criticism that Bourdieu’s wider body of work under-theorises gender and, in fact, most categories of difference with the exception of social class, which he, however, describes in such general terms as to apply to any form of social difference (Moi, 1991). In fact, an extension of this criticism must be that he fails to specifically engage with the intersectionality of identity categories and the prevalence of social mobility today (Skeggs, 2004). His work on gender in particular focuses on binary distinctions, positioning masculinity, femininity, homosexuality, and heterosexuality as homogenous identities, failing to account both for the existing plethora of possible gendered and sexual identities as well as important changes to gendered scripts over time. Most surprisingly, perhaps, his view is at times marred by stereotypical understanding, best visible in his statement that gay male couples “often reproduce, as do lesbians, a division of male and female roles” (Bourdieu, 2001: 119). A further criticism is that Bourdieu fails to distinguish between sex and gender (Mottier, 2002). Others, however, have pointed out that the act of not acknowledging this difference in itself can follow a radical feminist agenda by arguing that “sexual differences are themselves imbued with, are in some sense the result of, gender power” (Chambers, 2005: 329). Following this logic, Bourdieu's and others' denial of a distinction between sex and gender is based on a radical criticism of the belief that distinction based on sex is anything other than arbitrary. In other words, stating that biologically, different types of genitals exist is correct but distinct from a naturalised belief in social differences that stem from this difference (ibid; see also McNay, 1999).

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The fact that Bourdieu himself did not sufficiently engage with questions of intersectionality in his own empirical work, however, does not detract from the potential contributions that this toolbox offers other scholars. Various researchers have addressed the foregoing criticisms (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004; Chambers, 2005; Kraus, 2006; McCall, 1992; McNay, 1999; Mottier, 2002) and found in his work a “powerfully elaborate conceptual framework for understanding the role of gender in the social relations of modern capitalist society” (McCall, 1992: 837). The beauty of Bourdieu’s theory lies in its relational character that allows us to consider that the importance of any social category will vary throughout an individual’s lifetime as one encounters diverse power situations. His can be described as a “*microtheory* of social power” (Moi, 1991: 1019, emphasis in original) that allows us to investigate the mundane details of everyday life.

Furthermore, addressing criticisms of structural determinism, Decoteau (2016) suggests that Bourdieu’s theory provides the cornerstones for a theory of a reflexive habitus. As “actors are always positioned at the intersection of multiple, overlapping fields” they can use the logics of one field to look at others, thus achieving the “reflexive distance and conscious understanding of themselves that can lead to well-articulated plans for transformation” (ibid: 318). Thus, it is due to our field movements that we are able to step back and reflect on our own actions across different fields. Through the distinction between field and habitus, then, a Bourdieusian approach should be inherently intersectional. Furthermore, Decoteau’s observation highlights the subversive power of reflexivity emerging from social mobility. The different conceptual elements of Bourdieu’s theory are tools for investigating the role of different fields in contributing to such reflexivity (see also

McNay, 1999).

5.4. Bourdieu and the Media

To date, media studies have largely overlooked Bourdieu's theory (Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Myles, 2010). Bourdieu himself did not write extensively on the topic, choosing to focus on the field of cultural production, (Couldry, 2004a; Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Venzo and Hess, 2013). More and more media scholars have turned to his theories in the past decade but have focused on Bourdieu's field theory, failing to apply other promising parts of his writings to the study of media experiences.

Throughout his work, Bourdieu focused on the fields of education and academia, a number of cultural fields, such as literature and arts, and those of politics and economics, as well as a combination of the latter two termed the 'field of power' (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). Whereas the field of power has relatively high levels of economic capital and low levels of cultural capital, that of cultural production is characterised by the opposite. To Bourdieu (1996a, 2001b), furthermore, the field is divided into sub-fields: that of small-scale production, best described as alternative or indie production, which, due to its disdain of capitalism, is high in cultural- but low in economic capital, as well as that of large-scale production, including mass production that achieves high economic-, but low cultural capital.

One main distinction between the two is that the sub-field of small-scale production has higher levels of autonomy than that of large scale production which is always influenced by outside forces, in particular the field of power. Audience ratings, for example, so Bourdieu argues, impose a market logic on the field of large-scale

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production that mean it is ultimately driven by economic capital and interests (ibid). Bourdieu saw a field's autonomy as the only starting point for a possible resistance against symbolic power (Hesmondhalgh, 2006).

One of the main criticisms levelled against Bourdieu is that he never talked about mass cultural production (Couldry, 2004a; Myles, 2010). He also never engaged with the plethora of sub-fields that have emerged, nor how some small-scale production now happens on a mass-scale (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). Due to the timing of most of his writings, he could also never comment on the difference the internet has made in fragmenting media narratives, allowing minority groups to broadcast outside of mainstream doxa.

The majority of work in the area has followed his lead and focused on studying the 'field' of journalism, the actors and capital structures within it. Only a few scholars have used his practice theory and writings about language and symbolic power to investigate how the media may be seen to "construct reality" (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991: 166) or even to inflict symbolic violence (Couldry, 2004a; Myles, 2010). Bourdieu himself argued, if only briefly, the importance of television in ensuring the misrecognition of doxa, in furthering individuals' silent complicity with existing inequalities (1998: 17). Television discourse, to Bourdieu, has the power to affect and form our habitus and other social fields. He described symbolic annihilation as a form of symbolic violence, a way of "invisibilisation" (Bourdieu, 2001a: 119) through which the legitimacy of an individual's identity is rejected. The absence of media representations reinforces beliefs about the illegitimacy of such identities and thereby fosters the misrecognition of such an arbitrary distinction as

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natural. Goffman (1981, cited in Myles, 2010:48-9), for example, draws from Bourdieu's work in describing how the media can amplify the stigma placed on specific accents and dialects.

Nonetheless, Bourdieu continued to reject the notion that the media are used to generate false consciousness. Couldry (2004a, 2004b) argues that existing ideological models fall short in explaining a causal link between ideological content generated by dominant classes and its dissemination through the media, nor does it account for the status the media has in our society, its historical emergence, or how it is maintained. Postmodernist theories, on the other hand, fall short in providing empirically grounded explanations for the media's power on society (ibid). While Couldry acknowledges that Bourdieu's own musings on the media are underdeveloped in the study of mass-media production, he believes that studying the media in terms of practices and symbolic power is a more fruitful endeavour (ibid).

Couldry (2004a) draws from Bourdieu's own remarks on the state as wielding a form of meta-capital that can influence all other fields to suggest that the same is true for the media. Media capital (*capital médiatique*) (Champagne, 1990:237 quoted in Couldry, 2004a) is seen as form of symbolic power that influences other fields in two ways, "by influencing what counts as capital in each field" and through its legitimation of representations and social categories that "because of their generality, are available to be taken up in the specific conflicts in any particular field." (2004a: 668)

The media is a key influence on our habitus (Couldry, 2004b). Hence, the concept of media capital is consistent with a number of existing theories, such as those

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concerning the role of the media in the ‘social construction of reality’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1991), their function as a socialisation agent, the potential importance of interpretive communities sharing a doxic world view, the use of the media to gain status across fields, and how knowledge of media representations can be employed as cultural capital amongst sub-cultures. How different social groups and strata are represented in the media is saturated in symbolic power. Using this conceptualisation, the media becomes an “open set of practices relating to, or oriented around, media” (Couldry, 2004b: 117). Thinking of the media in this way allows for the complex, paradoxical nature of media uses and interpretations.

5.5. Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of Bourdieu’s theory of practice, describing the dynamic relationship between embodied dispositions (habitus), social environment (fields), and individual resources (forms of capital) in the formation of our practices and beliefs. It further outlined the importance of symbolic power in the study of oppression and social inequality, focusing particularly on his stance on gender. The discussion illustrates how Bourdieu’s conceptual toolbox can help scholars overcome a strict structure-agency divide, as it requires a discussion of the interplay between individual experiences, social context, and power relations. I have further addressed the most prevalent criticisms levied against his work, namely an overly deterministic and structuralist focus, as well as allegations that he does not leave any avenues for social change and under-theorises categories of difference such as gender. While I agree that Bourdieu himself has not outlined agentic practices with regards to social change and intersectionality, I appreciate that this was not his

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aim; rather, he sought to illustrate the difficulties in overcoming doxa and practices that have become naturalised in the habitus. His failure to provide actionable suggestions for social change does not diminish the value of his theoretical toolbox in exploring potential practices. Furthermore, while he himself does not sufficiently engage with questions of intersectionality, his conceptual model predicates a discussion of such questions on the level of micro experience and macro social structures. Thus, his theory of practice seems an appropriate lens for studying media experiences in conjunction with questions of stigma, as it reflects existing theories of socialisation and group identification, with questions of symbolic power and changes over the life-course and across field movements.

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6. METHODOLOGY

Having provided an overview over the various theoretical foundations that underpin this study, the following chapter now turns towards its research methodology. This chapter first summarises the three main research questions that emerged out of the theory. Then, it delves into the philosophical and theoretical foundations that guided my research approach, including the methodological challenge of intersectionality, my ontological and epistemological position, as well as considerations in line with a feminist perspective. Subsequently, I elaborate on data generation and sampling procedures, as well as the data analysis process, before finally detailing a number of limitations of and personal reflections on the study. This methodology was the subject of a paper I presented at the 13th ACR conference on Gender Marketing and Consumer Behaviour which is provided in Appendix 9.

6.1. Research Questions

The first part of this study has brought together a range of literature, exploring the relationships between stigma, the media, and the dynamic interplay between

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structural macro-dynamics and micro-level experiences particularly at times of rapid societal change. Three research questions have emerged as a consequence:

- 1) How and to what extent has the experience of stigma changed for two generations of LGBTQ⁺ consumers over individual life-courses and across intersectional divides?
- 2) How do these lived experiences of stigma relate to individual media experiences?
- 3) How do marginalised consumers navigate their lives and experiences of stigma and particularly the fragmentation of identity politics through consumption, including media consumption?

These questions reflect the various themes explored in the literature review. The first question is interested in the shifting life stories of SGNIs, with a clear emphasis on exploring the alleged generational gap, the nature of stigma, as well as the intersectionality of identities. The second moves us into the realm of media experiences and their dialogic relationship with our life-course, a theme that is further investigated through the last question, which ties these individual micro-experiences back to macro-social structures. As will be discussed in the next section, the methodology employed to answer these questions is based on a critical theory paradigm and historic-realist ontology. Its epistemology is an intersectional, and therefore contextual, phenomenology guided by feminist concerns.

6.2. Philosophical and Theoretical Foundation

Every researcher is guided by a paradigm, a set of basic beliefs about the world (Kuhn, 1970). The range of paradigms in the social sciences indicate that it is not possible to arrive, with absolute certainty at one ‘truth’ or overarching belief system. Each individual adopts the paradigm that fits into their worldview, and it is

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imperative for our understanding of our and others' work that we understand the underlying assumptions.

Three major philosophical questions shape the paradigms underpinning the social sciences (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln et al., 2011): the 'ontological question' raises questions about the nature of reality, while the 'epistemological question' concerns the nature of knowledge and "what can be known." One's epistemology is thus intrinsically dependent on one's ontology. Lastly, the 'methodological question' is interested in the methods used to further our knowledge. While a vast range of paradigms exist, Guba and Lincoln (2011) identify five main ones. Table 6.1 provides an overview of the philosophical assumptions of each. It should be noted, however, that the proliferation of paradigms has meant that "virtually no study can go unchallenged by proponents of contending paradigms"; indeed "various paradigms are beginning to 'interbreed'" (Guba and Lincoln, 2011:97).

In the marketing literature, positivism and interpretivism (constructivism) are often considered the two central paradigms, leading to much dispute between scholars (see e.g. Kavanagh, 1994). Positivism, long considered the dominant paradigm in the domain (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Saren et al., 2007), holds that hypotheses can be verified and become facts or laws. The ultimate goal of positivism is to explain social phenomena to predict and control them (Blaikie, 2009; Lincoln et al., 2011). This position has been challenged in the last decade (Brennen, 2017; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Table 6.1 Basic Beliefs of Alternative Inquiry Paradigms

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Positivism</i>	<i>Postpositivism</i>	<i>Critical Theory et al.</i>	<i>Constructivism</i>	<i>Participatory^a</i>
Ontology	Naïve realism— “real” reality but apprehensible	Critical realism—“real” reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehensible	Historical realism— virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallized over time	Relativism— local and specific co-constructed realities	Participative reality— subjective-objective reality, co-created by mind and given cosmos
Epistemology	Dualist/objectivist; findings true	Modified dualist/ objectivist; critical tradition/community; findings probably true	Transactional/ subjectivist; value- mediated findings	Transactional/ subjectivist; co-created findings	Critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with cosmos; extended epistemology of experiential, propositional, and practical knowing; co-created findings
Methodology	Experimental/ manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods	Modified experimental/ manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods	Dialogic/dialectical	Hermeneutical/ dialectical	Political participation in collaborative action inquiry; primacy of the practical; use of language grounded in shared experiential context

a. Entries in this column are based on Heron and Reason (1997).

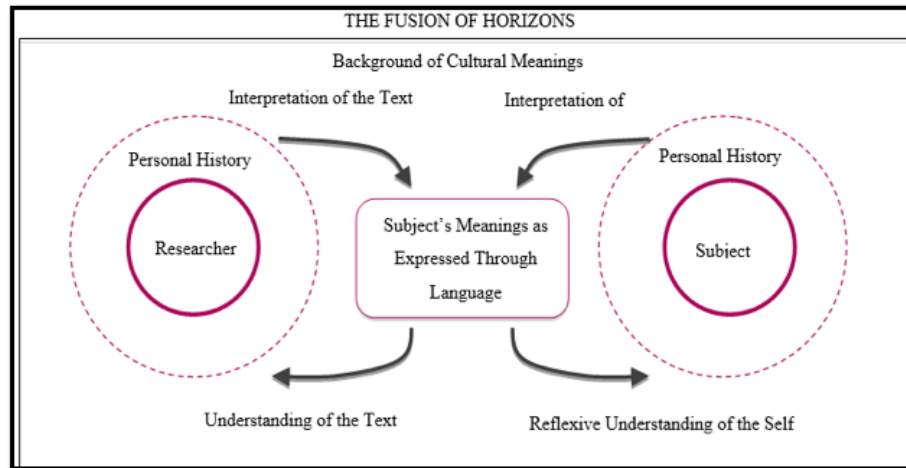
Guba EG and Lincoln YS (1994) Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In: Denzin NK and Lincoln YS (eds), Handbook of qualitative research, Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage, pp. 105–117.

While other social sciences such as sociology had already experienced a ‘narrative turn’ in the 1920s (Atkinson, 2007), it was not until 1959 that this shift was applied to consumer research, focusing on its symbolic nature instead of information processing. Following the debates generated by this call, the 1980s saw the ‘interpretive turn’ (Sherry, 1991; Spiggle, 1994). Scholars rallied around the belief that reality is not objective, but based on meanings interpreted differently by each individual (Holbrook and O’Shaughnessy, 1988). As a result, Thompson et al. (1990) advocated an ‘existential phenomenology’ that would take into account consumer’s individual experiences. According to existential phenomenology, knowledge can only be accessed through individuals’ own accounts and language. To understand an

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experience, the people who experience it must be asked about it. At the same time, such an interaction always entails an interpretation by the researcher (Thompson et al., 1994), a standpoint known as hermeneutics (Heidegger, 1996), as illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 Hermeneutic Phenomenology



Thompson CJ, Pollio HR and Locander WB (1994) The spoken and the unspoken: a hermeneutic approach to understanding the cultural viewpoints that underlie consumers' expressed meanings. *Journal of Consumer Research* 21(1): 432–452.

It is not the goal of such an exploratory, interpretive endeavour to deduce testable hypotheses from previous theories (Blaikie, 2009). Rather it seeks to explain the subjective experience of consumers. The goal of such research, thus, has to be the creation of a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of subjects' experiences, from which we can induce moderate generalisations (Payne and Williams, 2005) that conceptualize existing theories in relationship to research findings. Hermeneutic phenomenology has become a common methodology employed by researchers in the consumer culture tradition. The following sections elaborate on how I position my study and research approach in relation to these paradigms.

6.2.1. The Methodological Challenge of Intersectionality

To understand the philosophical framework guiding this study, it is important to remember that it focuses on the media experiences of a (potentially) stigmatised group and is driven by a feminist appreciation of intersectionality, and a critical interest in the interplay between individual experience and socio-cultural changes.

As described earlier, intersectionality concerns the intersection of categories of difference to understand the power relations that structure them and result in oppression and stigmatisation. To date, intersectional analysis is largely non-existent in the marketing literature (Gopaldas and Fischer, 2012). The methodological problem of intersectionality lies in the fact that “research practice mirrors the complexity of social life” (McCall, 2005: 1772). Its application is difficult, because the sheer number of possible axes of difference increases the complexity of analysis exponentially. Furthermore, the choice of which categories to take into consideration is reflexive and can easily be accused of the reification of differences. Focusing on sexuality, gender, race, class, and disability as the most widely discussed categories is tempting (Gopaldas and Roy, 2015), but many potentially oppressive distinctions exist in the world.

One has to distinguish two divergent approaches to intersectionality: the positivist or systemic approach favoured in the United States, and the constructivist one employed by scholars in the United Kingdom (Prins, 2006). The systemic approach conceives categories of difference as “systems of domination, oppression and marginalization that determine or structure identities” (ibid: 279). This is a decidedly positivist approach, viewing individuals as passive carriers of the meaning of these

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categories, the cumulative nature of which serves as an estimate of the oppression they endure. Categories are reduced to variables that allow generalisations to the wider population. It employs a systemic way of ‘asking the other question’ (Matsuda, 1991, cited in Prins, 2006): asking about sexuality in the face of racism, about heterosexism when confronted with sexism. The main goal of the systemic approach is to reveal the harmful effects of the binary oppositions of dominance and subordination.

Prins (2006) argues that such a systemic approach falls short if the goal of inquiry is to describe how an intersectional identity is formed. Hence, it is vulnerable to the problem of reification, as its additive nature and neglect of their social construction might reinforce individual categories of distinction (Davis, 2008; Luft and Ward, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2006). The practice of eliciting metaphors, such as an intersection or matrix of difference where categories of oppression cross at a fixed position, has been problematized for this very reason, as it reinscribes and commodifies the experiences, needs and preferences of individual groups (Davis, 2008). Given these concerns, Prins (2006) makes a convincing case for the constructivist approach to intersectionality as the superior model.

In terms of this study, such determinism is wholly and directly opposed to the values and beliefs espoused herein. My research question builds on the belief that neither sexuality nor stigma can be treated as reliable and stable variables. Thus, I question external validity and measurement validity of existing, positivistic studies. Moreover, considering the intersectionality of diverse categories of difference, the internal validity of such studies is also questionable, as findings cannot be traced back

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unequivocally to a person's sexuality. In addition, these types of studies are not suitable if one looks to understand meanings and social processes (Blaikie, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2011). My thesis thus operates from a standpoint that is radically different to positivism.

The constructivist approach is based on queer theory, especially Butler's (1990) concept of 'performativity' which sees identity categories as performative: they are produced through narrative practices that create what they name. Hence, identities are managed through discourse and agency, deviance, and opposition are established through performative acts. In this model, individuals are not merely subjected to a supreme power and static categorisation of dominance and suppression, but become subjects themselves - the actors and authors of their own life-story (Prins, 2006). This approach recognises that, while categories of difference are constitutive, they are never fixed nor stable. Their effect can only be studied if we listen to the multifaceted stories that provide a view of how they were constructed and how they interact on an individual level (King and Cronin, 2010; Prins, 2006). Many feminist writers thus assert that intersectional research must always be qualitative (Beckman, 2014; Harding, 1986; Wilkinson, 1998).

The classification of methodologies for intersectional practice provided by McCall (2005) is helpful in managing the inherent complexity of the concept and has been used extensively in the literature. Her tripartite classification of complexity distinguishes between anticategorical-, intracategorical-, and intercategorical-complexity (see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 McCall’s Tripartite Classification of Intersectional Approaches

Intersectional Approach	Description
Anticategorical Approach	Identity labels are seen as fictitious, social constructs of language that mutate across socio-historic margins and thus lack any fundamental essence. Refuses any form of categorisation or research that uses it, as labels inevitably reify differences and endorse inequality.
(Inter-)categorical Approach	Focuses on multi-group subjects and systematically compares individual effects of categories of differences and their ‘interaction effects.’ Looks at structural relationships and thus needs categories as a starting point for comparison.
Intracategorical Approach	Instead of analysing all possible intersections, complexity is managed by looking at a specific location and the intersections at this point. Uses categories strategically to critically expose their inner workings.

McCall L (2005) The Complexity of Intersectionality. *Signs* (3): 1771.

The *anticategorical approach* falls on the extreme postmodernist spectrum, as it calls for a complete deconstruction of identity categories. As Butler states, identity categories “simultaneously work to limit and constrain in advance the very cultural possibilities that feminism is supposed to open up” (1990: 147). This stance, however, has received much critique. A complete refusal of labels is said to foster the negation of oppressed groups (Beasley, 2005a), or to induce a proliferation of homogenized identities (Seidman, 2002). Furthermore, due to its preoccupation with the deconstruction of categories, it fails to provide a method of analysis that advances an understanding of intersectional differences.

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(Inter-)categorical complexity lies on the opposite side of the spectrum. Instead of focusing on a particular group, this approach is interested in the complex relationships between categories, and how they change over time and location. It uses a quantitative approach to look at single relationships between groups one-by-one, in a process that joins all parts of the analysis together in a holistic picture (McCall, 2000). Thus, “different contexts reveal different configurations of inequality” (McCall, 2005: 1791).

Lastly, the *intracategorical approach* recognizes the stability that categories afford in specific socio-cultural contexts (McCall, 2005). This chimes with the ‘strategic essentialism’ endorsed by feminist writers such as Gayatri Spivak (Beasley, 2005): categories are used to “define the subjects of analysis and to articulate the broader structural dynamics that are present in their lives” (McCall, 2005: 1783). This approach starts with the analysis of the lived experience of one core category, from which it spreads out to reveal the interrelations with others. To this end, the most useful method is a case study of a single group and the interpretative, qualitative analysis of personal narratives to gain a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1994) of lived experiences (McCall, 2005).

My research seeks to explore an allegedly stigmatized group and fans out from this case to understand the intersections with other categories of oppression and wider socio-cultural structures, both in terms of advertising representations as well as lived experiences. It thus follows an *intracategorical* approach to manage complexity. In the following sections, I will further explain the ontology (historic realism) and epistemology (intersectional phenomenological) that follows from this approach and

is thus adopted in this study.

6.2.2. Ontology: Critical Theory and Historic-Realism

“Critical theorists often criticise and imagine from the safety of the sidelines; it is time to rush the field and become players.” (Murray and Ozanne, 2009: 836)

As I embarked on this study, it was clear that my ultimate aim was not only academic in nature. In light of the socio-cultural changes of the past decade, I was determined to ensure the impact of my findings on a more practical level. I was also aware of the fact that intersectionality, as a feminist concept, is always already critical in nature. My research thus evolved from a purely phenomenological study to one adopting a decidedly critical perspective. Critical theory emerged as an evolution of Marxism and is linked to the 1950s, to the Frankfurt School (Agger, 1991; Saren et al., 2007). It is “a political and moral social science, designed to change society for the better” (Murray and Ozanne, 2009: 130). As an interdisciplinary approach with a clear emancipatory aim, it seeks to systematically criticize existing ideological and socio-historic structures that oppress individuals (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009; Saren et al., 2007). At its core lies the belief that the social problems and oppression we face today arise from the social structures and systems we continuously build and sustain.

As described in Table 6.1, its ontology can be described as historic-realism. It is the belief that reality is created in social interactions in a “constant interplay between subject (meaning) and object (social structures)” (Murray and Ozanne, 1991: 132). As social structures mature, they become more rigid and resistant to change. Human beings can have an impact on them, but this effect is moderated by existing socio-historic conditions. Individuals are thus neither entirely passive as in positivism, nor

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entirely active. Hence, instead of seeking knowledge based on subjectivism (social constructivism) or objectivism (positivism), critical theory maintains that only a fusion of both allows us to envision changes to the existing system. Jay (1973) coined the term ‘dialectical imagination’ to describe the capability to see the potential for change within historical structures. Researchers must foster an understanding of both the socio-historic environment of a phenomenon, as well as the shared consciousness of the groups affected by it. Critical research is thus distinct from phenomenology and even interpretivism, due to its interest in oppression through power structures and relations (Saren et al., 2007).

Critical theory links to a variety of critical paradigms, including Queer Theory, feminism, and postmodernism (Catterall et al., 2000; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). In fact, in many ways, critical theory overlaps with other traditions, (see e.g. Agger, 1991). As discussed in Chapter 4.3.2, critical theory has been particularly important in media studies, due to its focus on highlighting taken-for-granted assumptions and ideologies that oppress and dominate individuals (Denzin, 2001; Saren et al., 2007). In terms of consumer research, while various studies address such issues, few follow a critical theory paradigm, even though a number of scholars have argued that critical theory must always be at the centre of critical investigations of consumption (Murray and Ozanne, 1991, 2009). As Bradshaw and Firat (2007: 40) assert, “critical theory can provide marketing with a lens to uncover domination, reification, alienation and fetishisation,” identifying the ‘dark side’ believed to be at the centre “of the commodification process.” Crucially, like other critical paradigms, critical theory is a reflexive theory (Ozanne and Murray, 1995). This notion of reflexivity will be further expanded on in the next section.

6.2.3. Epistemology: Intersectional Phenomenology

“Recognizing that identity politics takes place at the site where categories intersect... seems more fruitful than challenging the possibility of talking about categories at all.” (Crenshaw, 1991: 377)

My epistemological position is best described as *intersectional phenomenology*. As aforementioned, hermeneutic phenomenology has become a standard methodology employed by researchers in the consumer culture tradition, used to explore consumer meanings (Arnould and Price, 2000; Gadamer, 2008), as well as advertising experiences (Mick and Buhl, 1992). Heidegger (1996) described phenomenology as the science of experience and Lavery (2008: 22) as “the study of lived experience of the life world.” This thesis seeks to explore exactly that. In the first instance, it operates from the viewpoint that social reality is subjective and knowledge does not exist outside a certain context (Thompson et al., 1994). To understand how a person is influenced by different categories of oppression, we first need to understand their standpoint and how they experience their life and oppression.

This type of pure phenomenological work has often been described as celebratory of consumer agency and choice, in line with liberatory ideologies and a mythology of self-actualisation (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011). In recent years, scholars have thus called for research adopting an epistemological position that transcends the lived experience (Valtonen and Hirsto, 2009). Askegaard and Linnet (2011) argued that CCT has placed much emphasis on consumer agency and micro-social processes, overlooking the importance of the systemic and structuring power of market and social systems. Other critics pointed out that existing phenomenological work failed to pay attention to “the socio-culturally normalised and institutionalised ways of

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thinking, talking and representing knowledge about the consumption agent, object, or activity” (Moisander et al., 2009: 20). Even when research is located within a critical paradigm, a critical perspective often gets lost when the focus lies solely on lived experiences, leading to a fragmentation of experiences into stand-alone analytical parts (ibid). Such an individualistic perspective also neglects individuals as social creatures, influenced in their practices by social concerns and thus socio-cultural structures. Furthermore, phenomenological work has been criticized for not exploring new concepts, but rather judging phenomena based on their adherence to pre-existing ones (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Moisander et al., 2009).

In an attempt to overcome these shortcomings, Askegaard and Linnet (2011: 382) suggest an epistemology that combines the phenomenological lifeworld of consumers with the wider socio-cultural and historic context, “bridging the analytical terrain between the anthropological search for thick description ... and the sociological inclination towards broad social theories and movements.” Indeed, when Thompson et al. (1990) proposed an existential phenomenology, they asserted that “personal understandings are always situated within a network of culturally shared knowledge, beliefs, ideals, and taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of social life” (Thompson et al., 1994: 433).

Askegaard and Linnet (2011) invoke Douglas’s theory of institutional agency, emphasising that social structures are both constraining and enabling. They further point to practice theory and Bourdieu’s (1984, 1990) conceptual toolbox as enabling researchers to study the embodied and thus often misrecognised social structures that shape and are shaped by individual practices. A Bourdieusian approach to consumer

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research, it is proposed, allows for the creation of analytical distance from consumers' phenomenological accounts and makes us realize that individual actions are always already socially embedded. It raises the question of why consumers engage in their specific identity projects in the first place and what socio-cultural and -historic processes drive individuals' desire and motivation to act in certain ways. Instead of focusing on the boundaries of an individual's mind and the restricted empirical context provided by the data, Askegaard and Linnet (2011) thus call for an examination of the 'context of context', the wider socio-political and cultural phenomena that act upon individual practices. There is a contextually sensitive epistemology.

A study of individual experiences of the media thus has to be a phenomenological endeavour (Lavery, 2008), based on the belief that the lived experience of individuals is inseparable from the broader socio-historic meanings - our habitus is structured by the fields we move in and vice versa (Bourdieu, 1990). Our historicity affords us ways of making sense of the world (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Research into the experiences of LGBTQ⁺ consumers thus always needs to consider their individual background, the fields they move in, including queer fields and the doxa that structure them, as well as the intersectionality of categories of difference throughout their life-course. Because pure existential phenomenology does not consider how individual experiences are shaped by socio-historic meanings and categories of oppression, such phenomenological accounts must always also be contextualised – an intersectional phenomenology.

6.2.4. A Feminist Perspective

Intersectionality is a specific feminist concept that allows researchers to account for the complex and dynamic nature of power relations. In the words of Alcoff and Potter (1993: 3–4), feminist research must not be understood “as involving a commitment to gender as the primary axis of oppression, in any sense of ‘primary,’ or positing that gender is a theoretical variable separable from other axes of oppression and susceptible to a unique analysis.” Intersectional research is thus inherently feminist in nature, which is why my research methodology must be informed by feminist concerns (McCall, 2005). Feminist research is inherently concerned with giving voice to marginalized individuals, understanding them based on their socio-historic background, and creating a power balance between the researcher and the researched (Beckman, 2014; White et al., 2001). It is thus also inherently critical (Harvey, 1990).

One important aspect of feminist epistemology is the question of how one’s social standpoints may influence one’s knowledge. Feminist researchers maintain that, if one believes that one can easily exchange participants, then intersectional differences are epistemically immaterial from the get go. That is, each individual has their own distinct standpoint in the world that cannot simply be generalised. Differences between knowers are structured by social systems and thus need to be studied and understood within their socio-historic context (Wilkinson, 1998). A contextual phenomenology is thus perfectly suited for feminist enquiry.

Some scholars have proposed that feminist research is best described based on how it is ‘done’ (Grasswick, 2011). It is about adding feminist concerns into the research

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process. As such, feminist researchers do not espouse one single method. While it is often believed that feminist research is only interested in women's lives and identity (Acker et al., 1983), important developments in gender studies have broadened the focus as more scholars adopt feminist concerns as inherent part of any methodology, in particular with regards to reflexivity and power relations (McCall, 2005).

One of the main concerns of feminist research is the possibility of inadvertently causing harm to participants (DeVault, 1996). To mitigate potential adverse effects, feminist scholars call for greater awareness of the researcher's position as 'expert' and the resulting power imbalance between them and their participants (Grasswick, 2011). Scholars must not pretend to be objective in the name of scientific inquiry - they must acknowledge and reflect about their social position, its effect on participants, as well as its effect on data interpretation (Harvey, 1990; Stanley and Wise, 1990, 2002). Power relations are thus relevant not solely within the phenomenon under study, but also between the researchers and the respondents (England, 1994). Researchers should be aware of their position and strive towards a relationship based on mutuality, trust, respect and sharing (ibid). It is for this reason, that interviews are widely used by feminist scholars as a sensitive and non-condescending method (Beckman, 2014; Morrison, 1998).

Consistent with my previously outlined ontological position, feminist research thus espouses the belief that qualitative research is always guided by the subjective stance of the researcher who, similar to their participants, is subject to oppressive social systems (Gummesson, 2001; Harvey, 1990). My status as a LGBTQ⁺ peer thus also creates a need for on-going critical reflexion of my own preconceptions and

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interpretations (Blaikie, 2009). A feminist perspective therefore meant that I had to critically and reflexively examine the power relations present throughout the entire research process. This is especially important considering my participants' potential background of stigmatization. As a queer woman myself, my background and experience of stigmatization gives me a better starting point from which to build a research environment that is sensitive to participants' needs. My historicity might also convey a higher level of trustworthiness and relatability, encouraging participants to be more honest and comfortable in disclosing information, mitigating respondent bias (Levitt and Hiestand, 2005).

Using peers for interviews and focus groups is a growing trend towards a more collaborative research approach and in feminist research (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Deem, 2002). As a relatively novice researcher, however, I had some reservations about my ability to conduct interviews, especially considering the potential vulnerability of participants if they recount potentially distressing life experiences. Regardless of their sexuality, any form of research that involves human beings talking about their lives has the potential to touch on potentially distressing events. To mitigate these concerns, both in general and in relation to my sample, in the first year of my PhD I volunteered for the LGBTQ⁺ Age programme of Edinburgh's LGBTQ⁺ Centre for Health and Well-Being (CHW), 'befriending' an older, socially isolated LGBTQ⁺ person and spending time with them once a week. For this role, I was required to conduct sensitivity training tailored to work with older LGBTQ⁺ people (Appendix 2) and to pass the background checks for the government's PVG (Protection of Vulnerable Groups) Scheme. Aside from the heightened awareness for issues that might arise during my research, this position also provided me with a

support system in the form of trained LGBTQ⁺ CHW staff that I could have turned to if the need arose during my fieldwork. In addition, my research design incorporated pilot interviews that allowed me to practice the art of interviewing and test the appropriateness of my design (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

6.3. A Meaning-Based Model of Media Experience

6.3.1. Data Generation: Purposive Sampling

The following section describes how I generated the data for this study. It first outlines the research design and methods used for data generation, focusing in particular on the logic behind the categories used for purposive sampling, before detailing the sampling method and interview process.

Murray and Ozanne (1991) describe five steps to data collection and usage in critical theory (Table 6.3). These steps merge the interpretivist interest in subjective meanings (Step 1), with the importance of the historic-empirical context (Step 2), combining both to describe existing constraints and power relations (Step 3). Critical research then goes further in its attempt to raise awareness about these constraints (Step 4), which can then lead to practical action on the ground aimed at changing social conditions (Step 5). Murray and Ozanne (2009) extend this methodology in a second paper outlining the researcher's role as a 'critical participant' whose ultimate goal should be not only to critique and investigate existing social structures and envisage alternatives, but also to advocate for change. This resonates with the feminist goal of 'consciousness raising' (Stanley and Wise, 2002).

Table 6.3 Methodological Approach to Critical Theory

Research process	Critical Theory
<i>Initial Stage</i>	Identification of a concrete practical problem Identification of all groups involved with this problem
<i>Data collection stage:</i> <i>General structure</i>	<i>The interpretive step:</i> construction of an intersubjective understanding of each group <i>The historical-empirical step:</i> examination of the historical development of any relevant social structures or processes <i>The dialectical step:</i> search for contradictions between the intersubjective understanding and the objective social conditions <i>The awareness step:</i> discuss alternative ways of seeing their situation with the repressed group(s) <i>The praxis step:</i> participate in a theoretically grounded program of action to change social conditions
<i>Standard data-gathering techniques</i>	In-depth interviews Historical Analysis
<i>Sample evaluative criteria</i>	Improvement of quality of life

Adapted from: Murray J and Ozanne J (1991) The critical imagination: emancipatory interests in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research* 18(2): 136.

As described, I did not follow a critical theory approach when I first embarked on this research project. Nonetheless, my final research design fits this basic structure. To gain insight into subjective meanings within media experiences, I employ a meaning-based model of media experience that combines (Step 3) phenomenological life history interviews (Step 1) with knowledge of the socio-historic context (Step 2), gained through the previously provided in-depth literature review on socio-historic changes with regards to the stigma on sexuality- and gender non-conformity, as well as the evolution of LGBTQ⁺ media representation. As aforementioned, in a study that was intended to be part of this thesis I investigated the types of advertising portrayals queer individuals have been exposed to over time through an intersectional imagery analysis (Nölke, 2018). While this work was left out of this thesis, it still

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furthered my understanding of the contextual factors that may shape informants' media experiences.

As will be described in chapter 12.4, I am also actively engaged in steps four and five, raising awareness and working towards practical changes in the real world. The literature indicates that identifying LGBTQ⁺ participants for quantitative studies can be challenging due to the inaccuracy of official statistics and the degree to which potential subjects are comfortable in revealing their sexuality (Walters and Moore, 2002). Studies are also prone to omit the experiences of those who are struggling with their sexuality (ibid). Furthermore, it has been suggested that SGNIs are highly sceptical towards inquiries into their lives (DeLozier and Rodrigue, 1996). As previously outlined, I addressed these issues with a feminist approach (Beckman, 2014; Harding, 1989). By revealing my own sexual- and gender identity during the sampling process I hoped to assuage any scepticism and encourage a deeper connection with participants, a number of whom later admitted to feeling more comfortable discussing their sexuality with someone who shared their experience.

Purposive sampling was necessary to enable an intersectional focus in the data analysis. One of the gaps this research seeks to address is the lack of regard for the heterogeneity amongst LGBTQ⁺ identified people. While I acknowledge the existence of a myriad of sexual- and gender- identities, the marketing literature to date still considers the LGBTQ⁺ community as a sub-culture united by their non-conforming sexuality. My sampling frame operated from the higher-level category of individuals who identify as SGNI, from which the intersectional analysis then expands. In the first instance, I disregarded individual sexual identities to better

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manage complexity (McCall, 2005). This is a form of strategic essentialism, whereby one category is adopted and later deconstructed to illustrate its boundaries (Beasley, 2005). Consistent with an intracategorical approach, my sample is thus based on sexuality and age as distinct categories of difference and thus the core categories under study (Cronin and King, 2010; Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005).

The sampling strategy employed in this research was purposive, in that it specified the sample as “LGBTQ⁺ people of the Millennial- and Baby Boomer generation.” There is no clear consensus as to the exact years that comprise a generation (Dolliver, 2010; Noble and Schewe, 2003; Strauss and Howe, 1991) The most established time span, however, used in numerous studies, considers Baby Boomers as those born between 1946 and 1964, and Millennials between 1981 until 1997 (Howe and Strauss, 2009; Strauss and Howe, 1991). No further sub-sampling into different sexual identities nor class was conducted. The study thus relied on participant’s self-selection based on the posted advertisements.

Purposive sampling allowed me to identify those individuals who would be of interest to the study as they are personally affected and most likely able to reflect on the phenomena at hand (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). During the sampling process, I noticed that men were more responsive than women, in particular amongst the Boomer generation, which might reflect gay men’s traditionally greater openness about their sexuality and gay women’s tendency to be more private (Walters and Moore, 2002). I thus added gender as a further dimension to ensure that a male bias was avoided, recognizing, however, that gender is performative and participants did not necessarily position themselves in relation to the gender binary (Butler, 1990).

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Despite concerted efforts to recruit more women through more targeted advertising, my sample in the end consisted of slightly fewer Boomers than Millennials, which might be considered a limitation if it weren't for the phenomenological nature of the study - I was not looking to generalise across categories, but for individual experiences, which was possible with the three female-identified Boomers that had already come forward.

The need for a generational comparison arises from recent work attesting to the substantial Queer generation gap as a result of radical social changes. Fitting a critical theory paradigm, life-course theory sees aging as an on-going process. A person's life is shaped not only by categories of difference, but also by dominant institutions, social roles and norms in specific socio-historic contexts (Elder, 1998, 1999; Gee et al., 2007). Three key systems interact to shape human life-courses: first, the social timing of roles or how social roles, such as marriage and profession, can disrupt or fortify the anticipated passage through life; second, agency, or the possibility to make deliberate choices within established boundaries; and third, interdependence, or the way in which the events in one person's life can shape the life-course of others. (Elder, 1999).

One of life-course theory's primary interests thus lies in the life stage principle, or the belief that socio-historic events, especially incidents that elicit social change, have a collective effect in later stages of our life (Elder, 1999). Thus macro-social occurrences have a profound effect on a personal level and create cohort effects - "collective memories" (Halbwachs, 1992) that shape values, attitudes, and beliefs that are shared by members of the same generation (Schuman and Scott, 1989;

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Strauss and Howe, 1991). This is also known as generational cohort theory (GCT) (Noble and Schewe, 2003; Parment, 2013). In studying only one generation, one would thus only receive insights into the socio-historic events that structured this specific generation. There is reason to expect, however, that experiences might differ across generations due to the radical changes of the past few decades.

Previous studies suggest that a comparison of adjacent generations can be problematic as definitions of generational cohorts remain contested (Parment, 2013). While a comparison of Millennials or Baby Boomers with Generation X was thus not advisable, the difference between the former two appears substantial (Carpenter, Moore, Doherty, & Alexander, 2012). Bergling (2004: 12) asserts that “the younger and older within the gay community are frequently living almost wholly separate lives.” Boomers have grown up at a time when homosexuality was still criminalised and severely stigmatised. They experienced the AIDS crisis, but also changes such as the Civil Rights- and Women’s Movement first hand. Millennials, on the other hand, grew up in times of stigma amelioration and experienced the proliferation of possible identities (Lea et al., 2015; Ruffolo, 2016). Considering each of these generations as a case in its own right not only offers a promising comparison, but also helps to manage the complexity within the heterogeneity amongst SGNIs. At this point, I must, however, stress that despite this literature I did not presume such generational differences.

My final sample thus consists of 18 participants from both the Millennial and Baby Boomer generation. I recruited participants from both cohorts via a number of means. Two of the participants, Jo and Lea, are members of my queer football team.

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When I explained the purpose of my PhD in broad terms a number of teammates offered their help, but, to avoid over-reliance on one source, I only accepted two into the study. These were the only participants with whom I had a previous friendly connection. I met Emma while undergoing my training on how to work with vulnerable adults, as she was another participant in this class. I mentioned my PhD as a reason why I was attending this training and she subsequently e-mailed me offering to participate. Jamie and Max in the Millennial group were recruited via referral through friends of participants. I quickly noticed, however, especially in the Boomer group and amongst trans people, some scepticism and wariness as to the reason for the study. Referrals did not work well, even from good friends and colleagues.

All other participants were found via flyers (Appendix 3) and a website (<https://lgbtmediaresearch.wordpress.com>) that explained the purpose of the study and asked for participants in the respective age groups. These were distributed in local venues, both LGBTQ⁺ and others across Edinburgh and Glasgow, as well as in student union buildings. Apart from physical flyers, ads were further posted to relevant Facebook pages, such as LGBTQ⁺ student societies, LGBTQ⁺ sports clubs and interest sites, as well as 'Meet-Up' groups. Meet-Up is a webpage that allows users to create interest groups, which other users can then join to take part in events relevant to the common interest. Before posting on any site, I obtained consent from the page or group administrators. In some instances, the administrators preferred to post the message themselves, and some opted to include the ad in their E-Mail newsletter sent out to all members. This process took over a year. One reason for choosing the UK as the research location was ease of access due to my involvement in the local LGBTQ⁺ community and thus existing foundation for building trust and

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rapport. Moreover, the great majority of related marketing research is limited to the US. Thus, a European setting provided a different viewpoint from existing findings.

As the emphasis lay on depth of understanding, the sample includes 18 participants - ten Millennials and eight Boomers. While the sample may seem small, it is indeed larger than other phenomenological studies' whose sample size ranges from three (Mick and Buhl, 1992) to nine (Cherrier, 2005). Indeed, the *Journal of Consumer Research* has previously recommended between three and 20 as the optimal number of informants for interpretive research (Fournier, 1998; Murray, 2002). While today larger sample sizes are preferred, it is entirely dependent on the type of qualitative research that is being conducted (Boddy, 2016). As McCracken (1986: 17) explains, "the purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many, and what kinds of people, share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one construes the world." While there was scope to expand my sample if the need for additional cases to explain emerging themes arises (Corbin and Strauss, 2014), this proved unnecessary Table 6.4 provides an overview of participants along with their age, nationality and occupation. It should be noted that the information provided in this table on sexual and gender identity, social background, ideological positions, and life theme are based on participants' use of membership categorisation labels throughout their interviews. This led to a diverse set of participants who all identified as LGBTQ⁺, but not necessarily with the traditional gender binary nor the gay-lesbian divide. Letting participants define their own identity poses a clear advantage to existing studies that do not account for such heterogeneity and are therefore wholly inadequate for a study of LGBTQ⁺ experiences.

Table 6.4 Overview of Participants

Alias	Sexuality	Gender	Age	Class	Ethnicity	Nationality	Occupation	Health	Religion	Life Theme
Jo	Gay	Questioning	32	Working-	Caucasian	English	Postgrad	Remission	No	Striving for More
Lea	Lesbian	Woman	26	Middle-	Caucasian	American	Postgrad		Yes	Change/Harmony
Olivia	Queer/Bisexual	Woman	26	Middle-	Caucasian	Northern-Irish	Doctoral Researcher		No	Finding (a) Home
Elena	Lesbian	Woman	33	Middle-	Hispanic	Spanish	Freelance Translator		No	Prevailing/Self-Love
Corinne-Chris	Gay Woman	Gender Queer	20	Upper-Middle-	Caucasian	Canadian	Philosophy Student		Spiritual	Living Deliberately
Jamie	Pansexual	Man (FTM Trans*)	23	Middle-	Caucasian	Scottish	Mathematics Student		Yes	Acceptance
Bill	Gay	Cis-Male	23	Middle-	Caucasian	Northern-Irish	Assistant Tax Advisor	Anxiety	No	Self-Actualisation
Jason	Gay	Cis-Male	29	Middle-	Caucasian	German	Doctoral Researcher		No	Living agentically
Titus	Pansexual	Man/Gender Queer	23	Middle-	Caucasian	Scottish	Charity Worker		Spiritual	Blinding Choice
Max	Gay	Man	27	Middle-	Caucasian	English	Doctoral Researcher	OCD	No	Being Apologetic
Emma	Lesbian	Woman	56	Working-	Caucasian	English	Insolvency Officer		No	Stability
Alice	Women	Woman (MTF Trans*)	50	Middle-	Caucasian	English	Banker		Spiritual	Put things right
Joy	Gay Woman	Woman	66	Working-	Caucasian	Scottish	Chef/Business Owner	Remission	No	Giving
Sage	Gay	Genderfluid	53	Working-	Caucasian	Scottish	Freelance Writer		No	Not Stagnating
Peter	Gay	Man	56	Middle-	Caucasian	Welsh	Data Manager (NHS)		No	Do the best you can
Padruig	Gay	Man	52	Middle-	Caucasian	Scottish	Freelance Journalist		No	Observing
George	Gay	Man	63	Middle-	Caucasian	English	Drugs Education		No	Missed opportunities
Adam	Bisexual	Man	50	Working-	Caucasian	Scottish	Carer	Dyslexia	No	Be Yourself

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Table 6.4 is provided also as a ‘pop-out’ at the back of this thesis, to enable readers to refer back to it while reading the following chapters.

The Millennial group is made up of three cis-men and -women each, one trans* man, two participants who consider themselves genderqueer and one questioning. Out of these last three, two mostly perform as women, especially for their families, while one performs mostly as a man, but has a female Drag alter ego. Among Boomers, three identify as female, one of whom is currently in transition and still presents as male in a number of social fields, five identify as male, and one as gender queer.

While I consciously committed to including participants from different ethnic groups in my sample, I was aware that, according to the Scottish Government (2017), only 3.7% of adults in Scotland are non-white. This, combined with the previously outlined difficulties in reaching LGBTQ⁺ individuals, ultimately meant that all participants apart from one are Caucasian, an unfortunate limitation of this study and its intersectional aims. Most Millennials have a middle-class background, with one working-class and one upper-middle class participant. Six participants were students, and four were in full-time employment at the time of being interviewed. For Boomers, the split between middle- and working-class was even and most participants were close to retirement or retired. Politically, all participants were decidedly left-wing in their ideological belief systems, two identified as Christian and three as otherwise spiritual.

6.3.2. An Intersectional Phenomenology of Media Experience

A key foundation of phenomenological research is the use of life story interviews that allow participants to be the main interpreters of their own life (see e.g. Atkinson,

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1998). According to McAdams (1993: 5), “identity is a life story.” The stories we tell of our lives influence our ways of being. These can point the researcher to the ideologies at the heart of a person’s identity, the assortment of ideas someone holds about the world (ibid, Erikson, 1993). As previously described, ideologies are built over the life-course and shaped by the myths we hear, especially in the malleable years of adolescence and transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2000; McAdams, 1993).

Life stories thus help us understand the discourses and beliefs we use to make sense of our surroundings (Goffman, 1974). While we will never be able to gain a complete understanding of another human being, let alone ourselves, life stories show us how individuals make sense of their own lives. Even if we remember events differently from how they actually happened, our memory shapes our identity in the long run (McAdams, 1993). Furthermore, an investigation of the life-course of consumers allows for an application of an intersectional lens, based on an individual’s affiliation with not only stigmatised sub-cultures but also other categories of difference. As mentioned above, intersectionality is not a static study of multiple jeopardy; it is a process that focuses on how relevant classifications are established, experienced, and rejected in daily life (Luft and Ward, 2009; McCall, 2005). It is a complex concept that calls for the use of narrative analysis to understand the life-long processes that form an individual’s view of a category (King and Cronin, 2010; McCall, 2005). For the purposes of this research this in-depth historicity makes life story methods preferable to other approaches, such as ethnographic observation.

Several consumer researchers have followed this phenomenological tradition of

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using life stories to gain in-depth insights (Cherrier, 2005; Levy, 1981; Mick and Buhl, 1992; Thompson, 1996; Thompson et al., 1990). Most pertinent to the current study is Mick and Buhl's (1992) research as it combined life stories and advertising interviews to develop a meaning-based model of advertising experience.

To offset the limitations of a purely phenomenological approach, I adapted Mick and Buhl's (1992) methodology by integrating intersectional considerations and the critical theory paradigm previously presented and exploring media experiences in general rather than simply advertising, thereby creating an intersectional meaning-based model of media experiences. My methodology thus engages with the cultural ambiguities shaping these consumers' identities, marketplace practices, and media interpretations. It paves the way for an intersectional approach to understanding SGNIs media meaning-making, challenging the assumption of a unitary identity prevalent in the literature. It also explores the ideologies underpinning media experiences and how they interrelate. Most importantly, it addresses how a changing socio-cultural landscape and multi-cultural identity add complexity to LGBTQ+ consumers' media experience.

6.3.3. Life Story Interview

As in Mick and Buhl's (1992) original paper, my approach is based on life story- and media interviews that follow the conventions of phenomenological interviews (Thompson et al., 1990). One of the main challenges of intersectionality concerns how researchers can avoid the deterministic assignation of static identity labels in qualitative intersectional practice. Reverting to the previously mentioned performativity of identities, Butler (1990) based this concept on the belief that

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categories are constituted through discourses that are used to manage identities and may be both empowering and restraining. If we wish to investigate the lived experience of an oppressed group, as in the intracategorical approach, then the imposition of categories on them can only be avoided if the focus is on how they are invoked and used by the subjects of analysis themselves. To enable such an approach, life story interviews need to be conducted in a manner that allows individuals to define their identity and standpoint themselves, avoiding the imposition of pre-existing analytical classifications. Thus, diverse sexual identities and affiliation with other categories of oppression may appear in the narratives, but will be described and classified by participants themselves.

I wanted to build an environment in which participants would be comfortable in sharing the personal information needed to develop emic insights (Walters & Moore, 2002). I thus gave all participants the option to conduct the interview at a place of their choosing, while always suggesting the possibility of meeting in their home, in an LGBTQ⁺ friendly location or a café offering a more secluded area that would shield us from both noise and prying ears. The majority of Millennials were indifferent about the location, but opted for the café due to ease of access. For the Boomers, one participant was interviewed at home, due to a disability that prevented her from meeting me in town. The rest opted for the LGBTQ⁺ friendly location. Everybody was offered a non-alcoholic drink and snack during each interview as the only exchange for their participation. All but one interviews were conducted in English. One participant informed me that she would be happy to talk in English, but that she would likely be more comfortable in Spanish.

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Acutely aware of the power balance and the informal atmosphere I wanted to establish, I did not provide a formal consent form (Wiles et al., 2005). Thus, I took a ‘situational relativist’ approach (Plummer, 2001) to my ethical process, tailored to this specific research question. I provided each participant with an information sheet, written in an informal way (Appendix 4). This ensured that all participants were aware of the confidentiality of the data and their own anonymity. To build further trust and increase the likelihood of honest first-person accounts, each participant was invited to choose their own pseudonym, reassuring them of the complete anonymity of the research (Corden and Sainsbury, 2004). Only five participants chose their own name. The information sheet further detailed the study purpose, the people with whom data would be shared, and how the data would be used. I also offered a copy of the transcript, to ensure full transparency. Further, they were reminded that they could leave the process at any time. I made it clear that I would not change any of the data on age and location, as I did not want to remove the study from its original context (Thomson and Bzdel, 2004). The sheets were lying on the table when participants entered, and they could eat and read the form, which provided a natural opportunity for me to start recording and ask for verbal consent subsequently.

I started the interview by introducing myself and my work, as well as asking about the participants’ week, slowly building rapport and making them feel comfortable to talk in my presence. Life story interviews took an average of three hours and were semi-structured based on an interview schedule devised by McAdams (1993) in his book *‘The stories we live by’*, (Appendix 5). McAdams’ approach was deemed more appropriate than following the widely used guidelines for life story interviews provided by Atkinson (1998), as the former focuses specifically on life stories.

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Furthermore, Atkinson suggests more than 200 questions out of which the appropriate ones can be chosen for each participant, whereas McAdams provides a clear progression for every interview. His interview schedule proved to be a natural sequence through seven thematic questions, moving from the more general story to more detailed accounts of key events, important people, and problems and ideologies within the life story. Many participants reported feeling emotionally spent after the interview, but also experienced a sense of gratification and achievement that made them re-evaluate their life in a positive light.

In the second interview, only two questions were pre-established, to allow participants to describe their own experiences. As I sought emic perspectives on the issues most relevant to participants, I wanted to avoid using leading questions and prompts and be relatively passive, allowing participants to direct the course of the interview (see e.g. Thompson, 1996). Additionally, my becoming too actively involved would risk distorting their views with my own assumptions derived from the literature as well as my own assessments as a queer person (Mason, 2002).

Participants were first asked to talk about their media habits and favourite media content: “Tell me about your media habits. Any favourite content for example.” This gave a good introduction to the topic, as well as providing background information on general media usage and tastes. Subsequently, they were asked whether they remembered seeing any media portrayals of LGBTQ⁺ individuals in the media and, if they had, what their experience was: “What about LGBTQ⁺ people in the media? What is your experience here?”

While I wanted to maintain the rest of the interview in the same unstructured manner,

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I anticipated one complication for which I wanted to be prepared: the possibility of limited awareness of queer-inclusive media representation. Despite the increase in gay imagery in the media it is still not the norm to see such portrayals. Thus, I brought along examples in the form of five recent ads. Visual materials are widely used by advertising researchers to gauge immediate responses (O'Donohoe, 2001). I chose ads over other types of media because the types of LGBTQ⁺ portrayals found in advertising is very similar to the general media. Furthermore, I expected participants to talk more extensively about TV series and movies without any prompts. Thus, showing recent ads was expected to give me further insights into both their immediate experience of characters and their advertising experience.

After the first interviews, my concerns were confirmed, as most participants showed only a limited prior knowledge of specific imagery. To ensure the comparability between interviews, I thus decided to show all five ads to each participant. Staying true to my semi-structured approach, I only prepared one question for each of these ads: "What do you think about this advert and how do you feel about the way the characters were portrayed?" On average, the media interviews were one and a half hours long.

Table 6.5 provides an overview and description of the five ads used. Interested readers can watch each ad by scanning the QR codes provided in Figure 6.2. In addition, stills of the LGBT characters in each ad are provided in Figures 6.3 to 6.7.

Table 6.5 Overview of Example Ads Used in Media Interviews

This is Wholesome	Honey Maid	2014	Packaged Foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gay couple with children - White - Middle-Aged - Middle-Class 	This commercial features a series of families, including a gay male couple feeding an infant, a tattooed and bearded rock drummer dad, a single dad, and a multiracial family. The narration: "No matter how things change, what makes us wholesome never will. Honey Maid, everyday wholesome snacks for every wholesome family. This is wholesome."
First Love	Aetna	2015	Financial Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gay- and Lesbian Couples - White - Middle-Aged - Middle-Class 	The ad features an interview of two people, a man and a woman, taking about their first love. At the end, it is revealed that they are not talking about each other, but about their same-sex partners of nine and 18 years respectively. Each couple is then shown celebrating with their friends and family. The campaign's tagline is "Be Strong. Be Well."
The Story of Jacob	Google Inc.	2015	Dot Com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trans Male - White - Young-Adult (YA) - Middle-Class 	The video tells the story of YouTube FTM Trans blogger Jacob Wanderling. It recounts his story of transitioning, his surgeries and how he is now building the body he always wanted at City Gym in Kansas City, Missouri. The Gym owner then says she uses Google Business to ensure people know that her gym is open to all and that she runs a dedicated class for transgender men.
Coffee Frenemies	Starbucks	2014	Retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drag queens - White and African-American - Middle-Aged - Middle-Class 	Drag star Adore Delano gets in line at Starbucks, but then decides to keep cutting forward. The friendly customers all say yes until she reaches Drag Star Bianca Del Rio who starts a catty discussion with her, until the barista then serves up two skinny lattes, one for each of them, with a smile. The text then reads "Saving friendships since 1971. Expect more than great coffee."
#hostwithpride	AirBnB	2015	Travel	<p>Diverse Couples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gay, Lesbian & Trans - White and African-American - YA, Middle-Aged & Mature - All Middle-Class 	This ad features a great variety of LGBT couples, including a young trans couple, a middle aged lesbian family with their son, a young, interracial lesbian couple, a bear couple (bearded, hirsute gay men), and an older, interracial gay couple. They all talk about the concerns LGBT people face when travelling and the ad ends with the tagline: "We look forward to a world were all love is welcome. #hostwithpride. AirBnB."

Figure 6.2 QR Codes linking to Visual Materials



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Figure 6.3 Still of Honey Maid “This is Wholesome” Ad



Honey Maid (2014). *This is Wholesome :30 TV Commercial | Official*. [video file]
Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xeanX6xnRU>

Figure 6.4 Stills of Aetna “First Love” Ad



Aetna. (2015). *Aetna first love* [video file]. Retrieved from
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKaX_AzMsFM

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Figure 6.5 Still of Google “The Story of Jacob” Ad



Google Small Business. (2015). The story of Jacob and City Gym. [video file]
Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIUK53sf-kc>

Figure 6.6 Still of Starbucks “Coffee Frenemies” Ad



Starbucks [OUTtv]. (2014). Coffee Frenemies | Starbucks and OUTtv [video file].
Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkyTQP27H6s&t=1s>

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Figure 6.7 Stills of AirBnB “Host with Pride” Ad



AirBnB. (2015). *Love is welcome here: Our #HostWithPride Film* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OL2P2u45SCA>

The ads were chosen out of the set of 181 ads included in the semiotic content analysis I conducted before these interviews (see Nölke, 2018). They were selected as amongst the most representative of the main portrayal types identified in said research. The first two ads are representative of the two most dominant types of characters in LGBT-explicit ads found in this analysis. The *Honey Maid* (HM) ad portrays a heteronormative, handsome, middle-aged, middle-class, white, gay couple. The Aetna ad further includes a glamorous, middle-class, middle-aged, white femme couple. The third and fourth ads were chosen to solicit reactions about trans* representations and are illustrative of the main character types for both FTM and

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MTF characters (ibid): the *Google* ad tells the story of a white, middle-class, young adult trans-man, whereas the *Starbucks* ad provides a humorous take on hyper-feminine drag queens. The last ad by *AirBnB* was chosen as the most diverse in the sample. On the white, middle-class, middle-aged side it portrays a gay male 'Bear' couple and a 'domestic femme' lesbian family. Furthermore, it includes a white, middle-class, young adult trans-male with his girlfriend, an interracial domestic femme lesbian couple, as well as a mature, middle-class, interracial gay male couple. Both interracial couples are Caucasian and Afro-American. The sequence in which the ads were shown relates to the frequency with which these types were represented over the past six years - sole gay men first, followed by femme lesbians and trans men, then drag queens as representative of the lack of trans* woman portrayals, ending in a highly diverse ad that includes interracial and older couples.

These ads are also indicative of the shift towards *Human Interest Ads* (Nölke, 2018). While the Honey Maid ad follows a more traditional *diversity ad* format, showing a range of different characters in quick succession, the others are closer to the HI ad category. This allows for an exploration of participants' attitudes towards these different formats as well as portrayal types.

6.3.4. Data Analysis

In the end, my data consisted of interview transcripts, field notes, the literature review regarding the socio-historic background, as well as a private journal and electronic notes recording my own views, feelings, and observations throughout the process. All interviews were recorded through a voice recorder on my iPhone, which sat unobtrusively on the table during the conversation. In two instances the recording

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failed and I had to revert to the notes taken during the interview to reconstruct what was told. In both cases, this problem was identified immediately after the interview, increasing the likelihood of a correct reconstruction of the topics and sentiments covered. In total, the interviews were transcribed into 884 pages (single-spaced; 11-point font) - an average of 33.5 pages for each life story and 15.5 pages per media interview. The Spanish interview was transcribed in Spanish, with only the quotes used in this thesis translated.

Data analysis was conducted using NVivoTM Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS), creating separate files for each case. Previous literature has shown that the use of QDAS can foster transparency and academic rigour, as it helps maintain clarity over analytical processes, codes, and themes across large data sets incorporating different source materials, as well as aiding the researcher in creating more complex and meticulous coding schemes (Catterall and Maclaran, 1998; Woods et al., 2016). Appropriately for phenomenological research, the analysis was based on a hermeneutic logic, involving “an iterative process of reading, documenting, and systematizing the interview transcripts” (Thompson, 1996: 393). Patterns between individual ad experiences and life-stories were explored for individual participants (idiographic analysis), and then across them (nomothetic analysis) (Bryman & Burgess, 2002; Mick & Buhl, 1992), this was undertaken first within each generation and then across them.

One important challenge throughout the analysis process was ensuring that intersectional patterns and issues were addressed: how were categories used in particular contexts to manage participants’ identities, and how did they relate to

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different facets of their self-concepts (King & Cronin, 2010)? One promising avenue in addressing this challenge is Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA), as described by King and Cronin (2010) in their analysis of the intersectionality of old age and sexuality. MCA focuses on “members’ methodical practices in describing the world, and displaying their understanding of the world and of the common-sense routine workings of society” (Fitzgerald, 2009, cited by Stokoe, 2012). MCA is used to show how individuals cluster their world into groups that are united by specific actions and characteristics - membership categorisation devices (MCDs) (Stokoe, 2012). MCA employs narrative analysis to understand how cultural meanings are constructed in narratives, how individuals label and categorise their reality (Baker, 2000), allowing researchers to understand how an individual came to identify with distinct categories (MCDs) and cultures, and what these mean to them.

Consumers who grow up with different socio-historic backgrounds are likely to use different types of MCDs and assign different meanings to the same signifiers. LGBTQ⁺ Millennials and Boomers, for example, may have different notions of what constitutes sub-cultural capital and what can be classed as inauthentic or stereotyped. Thus, MCA offers insights into how individuals classify themselves and others, and how they use these classifications to negotiate their experience of advertising portrayals. The MCA used in my data analysis involved teasing out categories and cultural affiliations from the narrative, paying special attention to how participants described and labelled their identities and those of others. It was thus useful not only in avoiding the reification of identity categories, but also in enabling an intracategorical analysis. This allowed me to understand the intersection of categories as narrated by each respondent, focusing solely on the dimensions that

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were important for each. It also allowed me to notice the absence of relevant categories in a narrative, giving rise to follow-up questions about the absence of certain categories – e.g. class or race.

For the ideographic analysis, I created separate NVivo™ files for each participant. For each file, I started by reading the life story interview as a whole, recording key themes and membership categorisation labels, while simultaneously compiling a long and a short narrative form life story for each participant. One page summaries of each participants' life-story can be found in Appendix 6. The life story and media interview transcripts were then read and reread iteratively to identify and explore emergent and recurrent themes and patterns of meaning (Mick and Buhl, 1992). Analysis of both interviews offers insights into how individuals used and resisted hegemonic ideologies, “producing complex representations of themselves and their life-course” (King & Cronin, 2010, p. 17) and how these related to their media experience.

Over time, the system of codes evolved into higher-order data categories and node systems for each individual participant that were written up in individual analyses. For each participant, I started to note common or opposing themes or patterns (Appendix 7). Throughout this iterative process I slowly developed a map of such relationships, grouping common codes into higher-order themes (see Appendix 8). The process always took into account my knowledge of the socio-historic environment throughout participant's life-course. The analysis thus moved constantly between interpretations of participants' individually expressed meanings and their socio-cultural background, in an effort to pinpoint a system of cultural meanings that

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builds the foundation for their interpretations (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Thompson et al., 1994).

In summary, I conducted an intersectional, intratextual analysis of each individual narrative and set of media experiences as well as an intersectional intertextual analysis across narratives, to establish common storylines and patterns in the meaning-making process at different intersections. This allowed me to compare the narratives not only at the level of sexuality, but also at the intersection of age and other categories if they arose.

6.4. Limitations and Reflection

Certain limitations and considerations need to be mentioned at this point. With regards to life story interviews, I understand the drawbacks of compiling a life story out of a single interview (Plummer, 2001). Life story narratives are open systems and thus constantly evolving and subject to a variety of different interpretations that may not be picked up in a single session (Linde, 1993). Nonetheless, previous research suggests that even mini life stories can be used to discern key life themes and projects that guide media and advertising experiences.

As for the media interview, its chief liability is its non-natural setting and the limited ability to pick up meaning that is not comfortably voiced. It can be assumed, however, that letting consumers speak spontaneously with minimum intervention by the researcher allows for a near-natural conversational flow (Bryman, 2003). In addition, my research involved two interviews. While each focused on a different aspect, it was apparent that the media featured heavily in participants' life stories. Therefore, elements of the life story appeared in the media interview and vice versa,

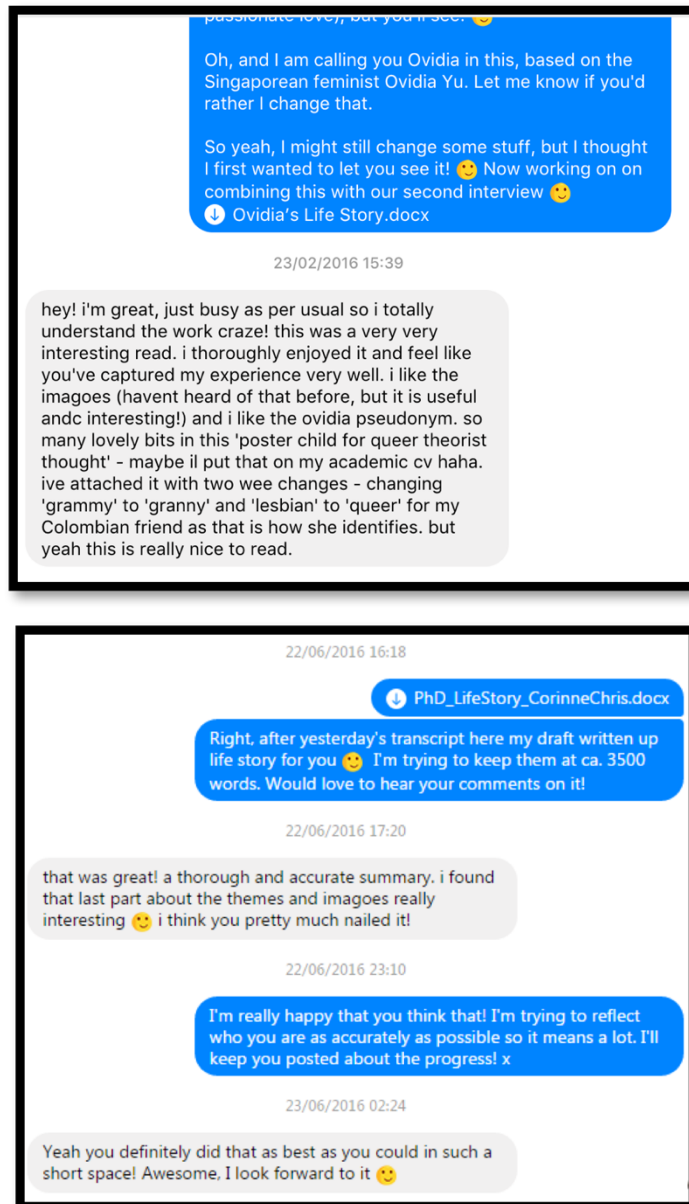
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complementing and sometimes elaborating on each other.

Several criteria have been proposed for judging interpretive research: (1) the type and scope of insights that explain how an individual gives meaning to a phenomenon, (2) the fit of researchers' interpretations with the research goal, (3) the verification of interpretations through examples of respondent's accounts, and (4) the level on which researchers understand participants better than they do themselves at the end of the study (Creswell and Poth, 2017; Denzin, 1983; Mick and Buhl, 1992). In this research, the detailed literature review, fieldwork diaries, and prolonged engagement of participants contributed to the credibility, confirmability, and dependability of the study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In addition, member checks were conducted by providing them with both the transcript of their interviews and their individual analyses, asking to comment, refute or endorse the interpretation I made.

Figure 6.8 shows examples of two such exchanges through Facebook. Ten participants replied with feedback. All were happy with their analysis and only suggested minor factual changes similar to Ovidia's. In using these member checks I wanted to ensure that my findings reflect the experience of informants as best as possible (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982; Maxwell, 2002).

Figure 6.8 Example of Member Feedback



Looking back at the research design after having conducted all interviews, one thing that struck me was that in many cases I seemed more aware of my surroundings than my participants. Even though I disagree with a sweeping generalisation of LGBTQ⁺ individuals as stigmatised and have no problems myself being in public with LGBTQ⁺ friends or my partner, during the interviews it seemed as though I was more aware of others who could overhear the interview than the participants

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themselves. Only three informants would lower their voices when talking about particular topics related to their sexuality. Nonetheless, I caught myself constantly wondering about just how comfortable the majority of participants seemed to discuss their sexuality, and in some cases even their sex lives, in public. Overall, I believe that the sampling approach I used was very helpful in that all my informants had contacted me out of their own volition and were thus willing to talk to me extensively. This may also be a limitation, however, as my sample may omit those who are more socially isolated and thus perhaps more vulnerable. Had it included such cases, there would therefore have been further ethical concerns. Through my work with LGBTQ⁺ CHW I was able to talk to highly vulnerable people during social occasions, where I was often asked about my work. While I could have easily recruited some as study participants, I did not feel comfortable using my status as a volunteer to do so. These conversations, however, had an obvious impact on my own experience and interpretations, a fact that I touch upon further in my discussion.

7. THE VISCOSITY OF STIGMA

My participants life stories and the sheer variety of stigma experiences chronicled within them, suggested to me that stigma simply cannot be understood as a master identity that determines individual behaviours. Each of my informants has different lived experiences of stigma. They each relate differently to their sexuality and gender identity and the way they engage with it has changed over their life-course. Some currently consider it an important part of their identity, some do not and for many its saliency ebbed and flowed as they explored their identities, moved through different environments, and made new acquaintances.

In writing these life stories and subsequently throughout the data analysis process, it quickly became apparent that a new theoretical framework was needed, able to account for the changes in stigmata across cultural contexts and the impact this has on informants' stigma habitus. This chapter thus presents a theory of stigma as viscous that serves as a theoretical framework and a metaphor which helps make

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sense of differences between informants' lived experiences, including their media experiences, as discussed in later chapters. This framework emerged out of my empirical data, but was shaped in constant dialog with the literature. It was presented at the 2017 Consumer Culture Theory Conference. The corresponding paper can be found in Appendix 10.

The chapter starts by reflecting on the metaphor of viscosity and its suitability for illustrating different degrees of viscosity across social fields and participants', both in terms of sexuality and gender, as well as other categories of difference. It then goes on to discuss changes in viscosity over an individual's life-course, changes stemming from both lived and mediated or vicarious experiences and the way they may shape participants' durable dispositions.

7.1. Degrees of Viscosity

Viscosity describes “the internal friction of a moving fluid. A fluid with large viscosity resists motion because its molecular makeup gives it a lot of internal friction. A fluid with low viscosity flows easily because its molecular makeup results in very little friction when it is in motion” (Girdhar and Moniz, 2014: 49). Apart from a fluid's inner molecular make-up, its viscosity is determined by two other factors: external forces and ambient conditions that act on it and, depending on their intensity and duration, might lead to ‘thinning’ or ‘thickening’ behaviours. These factors include temperature and pressure; increasing levels of either usually lead to an increase in viscosity or flow resistance (Viswanath et al., 2007).

Theorising stigma in terms of viscosity resonates with the ambivalence, uncertainty, and variations surrounding the concept. As previously shown, in the contemporary

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Western developed world, the doxa within and across fields can create different - even contradictory - attitudes towards certain human attributes, arising from many external factors such as politics, globalisation, and technological advancement. While in some fields stigma is as present as ever, constricting those 'marked' as deviant in their movements across and within them, in others it has softened or nearly vanished completely, affording individuals a freedom to express their identity and behave in ways that are not inhibited by considerations of discrimination, separation, or inferior status. It is this movement that is captured in the metaphor of viscosity. Consider a ball thrown into two different vessels, the first filled with a high viscosity substance, such as oil, the other with a low viscosity substance' such as water. When the same steel ball is thrown into the two containers, it will move easily through the water, but be slowed down by the oil. In the same manner, when a field is characterised by low stigma viscosity, individuals' movements through it are easy and natural, whereas under conditions of high viscosity, their practices, their ability to move around is constrained.

When researchers talk about a post-gay generation, they refer to a young generation of LGBTQ⁺ consumers who grew up in more accepting environments and thus frequent mixed social circles (Russell and Bohan, 2005; Savin-Williams, 2005). For them, coming-out is less transformative than for older generations as they continue their lives uninterrupted (Klein et al., 2015), able to choose from a plethora of identity labels (Savin-Williams, 2005). Due to changing societal conditions, the fields in which this generation grew up in are characterised by a low viscosity of stigma, affording them unprecedented freedom of movement. Many of my participants talked about their environment as a 'bubble' of acceptance within which

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they do not even have to think about stigma. This bubble of acceptance can thus be seen as those fields in which the attitudes to traditionally stigmatised characteristics or behaviours have ameliorated.

As fields and habitus are interdependent, through field movements one develops a stigma habitus that is structured by dynamic degrees of viscosity. Those who move in fields where orthodoxic stigma surrounding sexuality has been largely removed - where stigma viscosity is low - do not generally recognise their identity as stigmatised; indeed, their sexuality is an unremarkable part of their identity in line with post-gay theories (Reynolds, 2008). The stigma viscosity of their habitus is low.

The following excerpt out of Lea's interview illustrates this perfectly:

I think for the most part gay and lesbian, we're kind of past that struggle, in society. ... I've never had an actual negative experience with coming out or being gay with anyone. So, I feel like I am quite lucky in that respect. I think in some ways that has impacted how I view things and how comfortable I am with being out. Like, I never think about: 'Oh, is this going to make anyone nervous?'

Even though in America, as a vast national field, the orthodoxic stigma on sexuality has not fully liquefied, the restricted fields she has moved in since coming out have affected her habitus. Her sexuality is not central to her identity nor overly salient in her life (Quinn and Chaudoir, 2009). Already as a child she was set against the conservative views of her church, but her family and congregation, while opposed to homosexuality, followed a 'love the sinner' philosophy and never voiced any homophobic views towards her. Due to her financial privilege, she was also able to move away from her more conservative hometown to fields where stigma viscosity was very low. As a consequence, she has never faced outward homophobia. For her,

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thus, sexual stigma has a low viscosity as she is able to move through her world without its negative influences.

Consequently, Lea never felt the desire or need to undergo the “secondary socialisation into gay mores, history and subcultural meanings” (Kates, 2002) that many describe as a defining attribute of LGBTQ⁺ consumers’ identity. In fact, only a subset of participants across both cohorts experienced such secondary socialisation. For many, their engagement with the community was limited to a phase of “exploration”, a specific time-frame after the initial coming-out during which participants immersed themselves into local LGBTQ⁺ fields, usually for a few months or up to two years, as a way of learning about one’s own identity (see also Dunlap, 2014). Having acquired enough experiences to create ones’ identity in accordance with or distinction to the LGBTQ⁺ field, most opted to move back into more mainstream social fields, maintaining a connection only with a subset of peers or partners gained during their exploration phase.

In stark contrast to Lea’s experience, however, homophobia remains alive and well in other parts of society where the habitus of other actors is not disposed to adapting to new circumstances, leading them to battle against the new order (Lea et al., 2015; Marchia, 2015). As her life story makes clear, Jo, Lea’s partner, has a distinctly different outlook:

I do know that I have internalised homophobia, and I do think, because of when I initially came out, how badly it went, I feel like no one is just going to be fine about it. But then to some extent I do feel ... Maybe people don’t verbalise it, but I do feel, maybe there’s a difference in how people respond towards me.

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Jo's personal experiences across fields, such as within her family, education and work, have led to more pronounced levels of what previous research has called anticipatory stigma (Quinn and Chaudoir, 2009) or stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999). Her personal sense of stigma affects her disposition towards other people, something she is painfully aware of, as illustrated by her reference to the concept of '*internalised homophobia*.' For Jo, then, stigma takes a near solid form that restricts and controls her practices in day-to-day life greatly. As Lea recounts:

[Jo] sees everything and hears everything, or assumes. Sometimes I just think: oh, maybe I am just totally ignoring... I'm not even thinking about it, it doesn't matter to me, so I don't see any of that negative stuff or have any of those experiences.

The second facet of the viscosity of stigma is thus that each person's habitus is structured by different levels of stigma viscosity. Stigma viscosity is part of the habitus, and thus also "*a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination*" (Bourdieu, 1977: 2144, emphasis in original), which is acquired through experiences in fields – a predisposition to expect stigma, develop stigma management techniques, or not to do so. Apart from field conditions, however, other external forces, in particular economic and social capital, affect stigma viscosity. Lea comes from a wealthy, middle-class family and was able to leave the conservative area she grew up in, whereas Jo was forced to remain for some time in an unaccepting, working-class environment.

Looking at the remaining life stories, we can start distinguishing between participants based on stigma viscosities at the time of the interview. Despite assertions in existing research that younger generations are less affected by stigma,

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this was not necessarily the case here. Generational belonging did not determine the extent to which sexual stigma featured in informants' life stories or shaped their life themes or projects. Jo's whole life story, for example is structured around surviving constant experiences of stigma as well as her cancer diagnosis. Both her life projects are intimately tied to her stigma experiences. Similarly, George's pervasive life theme, 'missed opportunities' describes how his fear of being stigmatised has kept him from coming out and leading the life he wants. As a 63-year-old gay man, his whole life is structured around his sexuality. In direct opposition to this stands Peter, a 53-year-old gay man from a working-class background. Peter has the support he needs both from his lifelong partner of nearly 40 years as well as, after some initial difficulty, his family. He was never very involved in the LGBTQ⁺ community and, apart from some homophobic incidents in his early twenties (which he now shrugs off, commenting that "that's just what it was like during Thatcherism and the AIDS crisis"), he does not recall any experiences of stigma. To him his sexuality is by no means as important as his family or work identity and he considers himself to be challenging stereotypes about gay men by being down-to-earth, not flamboyant in any way, and happily married in a long-term, stable relationship.

Joy, a 66-year-old Scottish gay woman similarly grew up in a working-class family. As she did not consciously realise her attraction to women until her late 30s, it never solidified as a salient issue in her youth. While she was aware of societal views on homosexuality when she was younger, this was very much an awareness in passing that did not affect her life or sense of self. Rather, her identity was structured by constantly striving to work her way up the social ladder.

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I wasn't gay then. I didn't know anything about gay people, I just didn't come in contact with gay folk or anything like that. I lived in the outskirts of Glasgow, much like here where you had to go into the town, so we had no contact with any other people ... So, there was not an issue of sexuality then, in my mind. But one thing I will say though is there comes a point at that stage... I was at home, I was at college, I was doing everything I could. My father just didn't agree with anything. ... I wasn't bitter, I just thought: This is my lot, but some day I will get out of here. ... So, I worked hard until I was 21, and in my head that was my time for going.

The psychological resilience and economic independence she built in this process helped her shrug off subsequent stigmatisation, resulting in the low viscosity of her sexual stigma. Within her stigma habitus, class thus has higher viscosity and importance.

Amongst the participants who described their upbringing as working-class, there were mainly two types: those who had a close, loving relationship with their family (Peter, Pádraig), and those whose childhood was influenced by non-existent or problematic relationships with their parents (Joy, Emma, Adam). For both, viscosity was generally very low. The former due to having been able to move in mixed circles, supported both by their families, peer groups, or partners. The latter, such as Emma and Joy, developed independence due to having to fight for themselves and not feeling answerable to their parents, which afforded them a certain stigma resistance (Thoits, 2011). From a young age, they built their own chosen family who accepted them unconditionally. Joy's resilience was a result of her rebellion against her father and his oppression of her mother, as well as her pursuit of education. Thus, other troubles took precedence, whereas sexuality was generally not a topic in these participants homes, most starting to explore it only in early adulthood.

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Despite also growing up in a working-class environment, Jo's life differed from these five mainly due to the on-going experiences of stigma from a young age as a result of her early realisation of her non-conforming gender presentation. In addition, her relationship to her family was simultaneously loving and troubled, which kept her from asserting her independence from them and thus possibly from building a similar stigma resistance.

Taking the concept of intersectionality into account, then, the metaphor of viscosity allows us to account for intersections of stigma that each have varying degrees of viscosity. The stigma habitus of CC, a 22-year-old gender-neutral lesbian woman, and Jamie, a 23-year-old pansexual trans man, for example, seem to be structured more by the stigmata surrounding gender non-conformity than their sexuality.

JAMIE: I'd say like the trans issue is more of an issue for me because, also, I'm not in any relationship, and, also, I'm pan, so if I was in a gay relationship I'd probably be more relating to the gay couples, and if I was in a straight relationship I'd relate to that more, but since I'm in neither it's just like – I don't really relate.

For Ovidia, a 26-year-old Queer feminist woman from Northern Ireland who has experienced personal trauma, it is the stigma surrounding women's experiences that structures her habitus.

7.2. Changes in Viscosity Within the Habitus

7.2.1. Changes Following Lived Stigma Experiences

At this point, one might ask: Why use the metaphor of viscosity? Why not simply talk about stigmatised and non-stigmatised or more and less stigmatised individuals or groups? Based on the examples given above it may be tempting to describe some

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informants as experiencing stigma as liquid and others as solid. Throughout the interviews, however, it became clear that participants' sense of themselves as stigmatized morphed and flowed based on the fields they moved in, as well as their lived and mediated experiences - sometimes stigma appears barely perceptible, but particular situations could lead to a wave of sudden awareness, piercing their protective bubble and temporarily changing their practices in its path. While existing, duplicated terms, such as stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999, 2002), anticipatory stigma (Quinn and Chaudoir, 2009), or felt stigma (Scambler and Hopkins, 1986) capture different degrees of stigma across people, conceptualising stigma as viscous allows researchers to further account for changing levels and experiences of viscosity within both individuals and fields.

A change in the viscosity of stigma can happen as a person moves between fields whose *doxa* dictate different attitudes. A transgender person from California for whom stigma has a low viscosity as they generally move through fields with low stigma viscosity, may suddenly be faced with a thickening of stigma in the form of severe discrimination when moving to a different state, or even upon meeting someone whose habitus remains structured by the orthodoxy. Even those who are able to 'pass' (Goffman, 1963) - to appear to others as heteronormative - might be marginalized in certain social milieus or situations. Bill was faced with such a situation when first bringing his boyfriend home to his family in Northern Ireland:

I brought him home and my granddad didn't want to see him. This was kind of my first real... sort of insight into that. I never really experienced any outward homophobia as such, so that was completely jarring.

Having grown up in Northern Ireland, Bill was aware of the higher viscosity of

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sexual stigma within this national field. His habitus has been structured by it, which is visible in his rejection of the LGBTQ⁺ scene and overt displays of homosexuality. Nonetheless, it started to liquefy since he moved to Scotland and began his current relationship. Here Bill comes face-to-face with high stigma viscosity within the field of his family, an experience that subsequently coloured his disposition towards them and rendered his stigma more viscous. In a way, his habitus is split, influenced both by the highly viscous field he grew up in and the less viscous field in which he lives now. As aforementioned, Bourdieu (2003, cited in Kraiss, 2006) calls this phenomenon a *habitus clivé*, exemplified by his own life in the difference between his poor, rural upbringing and his education alongside the academic elite. *Habitus clivé* is thus responsible for “identity alternation” (Visconti, 2008: 116), whereby individuals alternate their practices based on the social situation they find themselves in. Other informants also exhibited such a split habitus: Lea, CC and Jamie, like Bill, due to their religious families, George due to not having come out to the majority of his social groups, and Elena due to not having come out to her father. Most were able to live and manage this split due to the geographical distance between them, their daily lives, and the higher viscosity fields they grew up in or those individuals who still adhere to the orthodoxic, stigmatising beliefs such as their families.

The ambivalence about stigma in the social world means that a constant uncertainty about whether someone will act negatively towards oneself remains - even for a person for whom stigma appears liquid. Many participants reported sudden increased awareness when walking hand-in-hand with their same-sex partner in certain situations, particularly at night or in “dodgy” neighbourhoods, irrespective of the field they move in. Scholars have previously suggested that stigmatised individuals

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in general, and SGNIs in particular, develop a superior self-reflexivity stemming from the process of coming-out and establishing a coherent identity (e.g. Foucault, 1978; Peñaloza, 1996). This constant self-reflexivity, the “ability to narrating (sic) the self, due to superior identity salience” (Visconti, 2008: 129) has been associated with other groups such as migrants and women and was described by all participants including Jason, a German gay man with no lived experiences of stigma:

Many homosexual people no matter what gender, are more reflective than the average heterosexual. Not because they are smarter, but simply because due to society, thinking about - Am I normal? How do I compare? - Many of them feel they have to look out more and think a bit about their position in society.

This reflexivity is heightened by mobility across fields. Someone living in a field that can be considered a ‘bubble’ of acceptance, for example, may suddenly be faced with uncertainty at the prospect of moving beyond it. As Bauman asserts, security is a precondition for freedom (Bauman, 1998). Even for individuals for whom stigma feels liquid on an everyday basis, mobility remains restricted due to different levels of viscosity across fields and may affect consumption choices:

BILL: Homosexual couples travelling internationally put a lot more thought into their travel. ... If I wasn't sure, I would always prefer anonymity over policy. I would always, for example, go for a big hotel, where the chance is that I vanish in the amount of people with my partner.

When it comes to international travel new *doxa* apply and one's practices need to adapt to the new field conditions. For Bill, who is distinctly aware of the different *doxa* operating across fields, cheaper hotels are less attractive because they are perceived as being less safe.

7.2.2. Changes due to Mediated and Vicarious Experiences

The viscosity of stigma is not only influenced by direct lived experiences, but also by mediated or vicarious experiences. When Lea began her relationship with Jo, she was, for the first time, confronted with personal stories of stigmatization:

I feel very comfortable just being myself and coming out to people. But Jo's experience is different. Like, travelling, she would think about: Oh, is this hotel good? Oh, they are known to be accepting we can stay there; we're not going to go to that country... I don't think about that. I mean, I wouldn't go to Russia [laughs]. But you know, little things, you don't think about. She is more cautious about that kind of stuff. And part of that is my experience of life being different from hers, and she's told me about what it's like living in the UK. It almost makes me nervous to live outside of [Scotland].

Lea's account shows not only the unstable viscosity of stigma: she can afford not to think about the little things because she does not live in Russia. Her stigma experience is shaped by vicarious accounts offering vicarious experience of oppression. Jo's stories about her lived experience of stigma have changed the way she sees the world – they have somewhat congealed her stigma viscosity, structured her habitus, and problematized her practices.

In this vein, most participants described the influence of the media in manifesting their fears of coming-out, by providing them with images of physical violence and discrimination that created *anticipatory stigma* (Quinn and Chaudoir, 2009). As a consequence, stigma habitus solidified, making them more prone to expect stigma irrespective of field conditions. They thus created their own (hyper) reality (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), due to which they experienced psychological detriments without ever having experienced stigma first-hand. If those negative media images did not resonate with their lived experiences, however, stigma could re-liquefy.

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As a result, for many participants stigma viscosity changed throughout the life-course. Many described their habitus before their first coming-out as structured by high viscosity due to stigma experienced largely through the media. Throughout their phase of exploration, then, stigma either manifested itself in lived experiences or not, thus further solidifying or liquefying their stigma habitus. Hence, for those who had only recently come-out, namely CC and Max, stigma retained a somewhat higher viscosity, although signs of its liquefaction were visible. As Max observed: “I find it funny how that effect has been diluted the more, I suppose, I have become comfortable with myself, the more I feel I need less support from external sources.” As Max has started to accept himself and come to realise that others accept him, he has felt less of a need to turn to the LGBTQ⁺ community. This phenomenon will be discussed further in the next chapter. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that those for whom stigma had the lowest viscosity had the least contact with a formal LGBTQ⁺ community, preferring to move in mixed or mostly heterosexual circles.

Stigma could, however, also liquefy for those participants who decided to fully immerse themselves within the LGBTQ⁺ community. Both Titus, a 23-year-old pansexual man and drag artist, and Sage, a gender fluid, gay 53-year-old, for example, have only very limited lived experiences of stigma precisely because they have moved in Queer and, for Sage, punk rock fields for the majority of their life, small bubbles of acceptance which they have never felt the need to leave. Their involvement in and cultural capital gained within these non-conforming sub-cultures provided them with a resilience and indifference to others’ opinions about their identity. Consequently, their stigma habitus is structured by very low viscosity in terms of sexuality and gender.

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For those without any lived experience, however, mediated stigma experiences can still prevent coming-out, even when the doxa in a field has changed to be more accepting. George, for example, only ever experienced mediated stigma, but remains convinced of others' ill-will. He has not even told his daughter about his sexuality:

The awful thing is that it hasn't changed. Same as way back in the 60's. Fear. Gay people live in fear, no matter where they go, be it the country, be it the city, be it in home countries or abroad. We live with an inherent fear of being not accepted in some way or another. I think that is absolutely awful.

Despite living in a city which many participants described as a bubble of acceptance, George's perception had not adjusted to the new reality, and the solid stigma hyper-reality he has created for himself drives his social isolation even from the LGBTQ⁺ community out of fear to be seen or associated with it. Indeed, I engaged with several individuals whose stigma habitus was so solid, their isolation so complete, that they lacked even basic sub-cultural capital, such as the meaning of the rainbow flag.

Such a person with a solid stigma habitus that does not change in response to the liquefaction of stigma in their fields of practice might be described in terms of the "*hysteresis effect*" (Bourdieu, 1990): the person's habitus does not match the new field conditions and they struggle to adapt accordingly. In this case, the high viscosity of George's stigma habitus stands at odds to the low viscosity of the fields he moves in, causing him to exhibit unnecessary stigma management behaviours. Thinking back to Bill's experience, this hysteresis effect also describes the solidification of a low viscosity stigma habitus when confronted with a solid stigma field or habitus. Bill first did not know the adequate way of responding to his grandfather and subsequently adopted new practices and stigma management

techniques in his interactions with him.

7.3. Summary

This chapter has provided a novel way of understanding stigma that takes into account individual differences, changes in macro social environments, as well as power situations. Stigma is considered to have different degrees of viscosity within a person's habitus as well as within field conditions, both of which structure and are structured by each other. Thus, it is determined by an individual's molecular make-up, the habitus, which is a result of and in constant interplay with external forces and ambient conditions. The viscosity is not fixed, but rather changes according to lived and mediated or vicarious experiences as individuals move through different fields and encounter different power situations. It is furthermore affected by individual resources such as social and economic capital and the intersection with other potentially stigmatised identities that may be more salient or which may have increased an individuals' resilience. In the following the viscosity framework is used to make sense of participants' media experiences.

8. MEDIA EXPERIENCES THROUGH THE LIFE- COURSE

The following chapter discusses the salience of the media over my informants' life-course, its symbolic importance in the formation of participants' habitus and conception of their self. The first section describes how informants' media experiences change over their respective life-courses, discussing differences across degrees of stigma viscosity and generational cohorts. Subsequently, I discuss how mediated stigma is experienced as well as the consequences for participants' stigma habitus, before describing changes in media experiences due to life-course progression and field movements. Lastly, the chapter discusses more in detail the gendered awareness participants displayed in their engagement with portrayals.

The number of individual cases in this study does not lend itself well to providing an understanding of the connection between life stories and media experiences for every single participant. Hence, while my nomothetic analysis is based on all cases, these

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findings chapters focus more extensively on some participants over others, emphasising those cases that more clearly demonstrate pervasive themes. This relates in particular to the difference between those for whom sexual stigma had the highest (George, Jo, Bill) and lowest (Lea, Jamie, Joy) viscosity, those who move mostly in heterosexual- (Lea, Bill) versus queer fields (Ovidia, Sage), as well as experiences expressed only by gender non-conforming informants (Jamie, Alice, CC, Jo). Any examples that are provided, however, are always related to other participants' accounts in which these themes equally applied.

8.1. Mediated Stigma Experiences

Participants' life stories provided an insight into the decisive role the media played in making them aware of the stigmatised nature of SGNIs and the stereotypes and discrimination associated with these. As Crockett (2017: 11) argues, for “members of the black middle class, the process of managing stigma begins when it is made salient”. The same appears true for SGNIs. For most informants, it seemed to be the media that made stigma salient in the first place (see e.g. Smith, 2007). Mediated stigma experiences clearly emerged as important in the establishment of the stigma habitus. For many of my participants, images of homophobia and reports of discrimination portrayed through the media contributed to its solidification at a young age.

As may be expected, those participants whose habitus was structured by high stigma viscosity recounted more of these experiences. Jo, for example, blames the media for her “internalised homophobia” and problematic gender identification and fears that others might be influenced in the same way. She draws on her own life story to

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explain:

When I first came out I was 19, so like 13 years ago. So, what the media was like then and previous to that in my upbringing and stuff, I think before I realised I was gay I was genuinely homophobic, because of my surroundings, and I think I just can't remove it from myself. It's awful, and that's what really upsets me. People don't realise that their TV programme or their, like, crap about you being a sinner for being gay or stuff, they don't realise how [it affects people]. ... And the whole gender thing is just down to the fucking media in the first place, it's insane. Well, not the whole gender thing, but like the extreme need to identify with one or another is down to like an obsession with the media and advertising.

Media Box 1. The Danish Girl

Here she describes how both lived and mediated experiences of stigma and discrimination structured her understanding of gayness as a 'sin' and gender as a binary,



The Internet Movie Database (iMDB) (2017). *The Danish Girl*. iMDB. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0810819/>

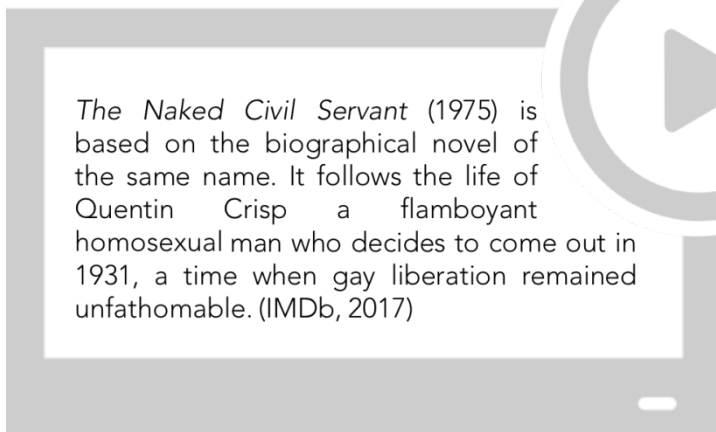
beliefs she still struggles with. For George, the media was similarly instrumental in creating his stigmatised subjectivity and thus prompting practices to conceal his gay alter-ego. In talking about the film '*The Danish Girl*' (Media Box 1), he creates a connection to '*The Naked Civil Servant*' (Media Box 2) a movie about Quentin Crisp, a cross-dressing gay man in his 40s:

It was showing a time in the 50's of the fear and the prejudice and the sheer hatred towards gay men and at the time anyway, it was exceedingly horrific what he had to endure. He was beaten up and everything but he would not

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give in. Although in the middle of being beaten up, he would not give in. He would say, 'You can hit me as much as you want, but I am who I am.' All bloody and everything. To sit and watch that and know... At the time, when I was watching that, I knew that I was gay and I went, 'Fucking hell, I ain't going to put myself through that.' So, again, I knew. It's horrible to have to try and subdue what is only natural for you, it is a really difficult thing to do. But I don't know, you kind of get used to it. Well, I'm so used to it now, I know that sometimes I can feel not gay at all. If the situation demands that I am one of the lads - because I'm quite a well-built chap, I'm not a fey little thing, you know what I mean? And I'm athletic, I go to the gym and all this and I can run still and beat people. I'm quite a masculine kind of guy. So, I can be one of the lads, I can swear with the best of them. I can 'fuck' and 'cuss' with the rest of them, it doesn't bother me. When I'm in that situation, I don't feel gay but I know I'm only playing a role for a certain period of time, but I play it with conviction. When I'm away from that, I can go - Thank god, I can be me! Which is the same guy really, it's just that I'm more laid back and I'm just more relaxed, you know what I mean? I can say I enjoy a thing where guys would go: What the fuck's that about?

Media Box 2. The Naked Civil Servant



The Naked Civil Servant (1975) is based on the biographical novel of the same name. It follows the life of Quentin Crisp a flamboyant homosexual man who decides to come out in 1931, a time when gay liberation remained unfathomable. (IMDb, 2017)

iMDB (2017). *The Naked Civil Servant*. iMDB. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0073438/>

As a young man, the environment he grew up in instilled in him a clear heteronormative doxic understanding of gender and sexuality that painted

gayness as something deviant and not to be talked about. His interpretation of this media portrayal of explicit violence against a gender non-conforming man was a negative reinforcement that contributed to the decision to conceal his sexuality, shaped his practices and initiated his life theme of 'missed opportunities.' It is in

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large part due to his careful impression management (Goffman, 1963) that George has not directly experienced any of the “prejudice and sheer hatred” he sees reflected in this movie. His utterance that he is so good in it, in fact, that sometimes he can “feel not gay at all” illustrates the naturalisation of these practices in his habitus (Bourdieu, 1990).

One could say Quentin Crisp here represents an ‘undesired self’ (Hogg and Banister, 2001). This notion of the ‘undesired self’ is based on self-image/product-image congruency theory, which itself is based on the ‘image congruence hypothesis’ (Sirgy, 1982). It asserts that individuals will seek out products that complement their (social-) self-concept or an ideal (social-) self, while rejecting those that are incongruent with either of these selves. It is through this process that individuals attempt to establish self-consistency (ibid). In this instance, however, it is not Quentin Crisp himself or the movie that George rejects. In a way, the portrayal is congruent with his self-concept, but not his ideal self-concept. It is the fate that has befallen Quentin - whom George otherwise admires for the openness in which he lives his life - that he wants to avoid.

In a study of University students, Lockwood (2002) uses theories of analogical reasoning to describe how participants make inferences about themselves from a worse-off-other. She finds that when participants perceived a strong resemblance to the worse-off-other and thus a vulnerability to become like this other, they became more focused on preventing such negative outcomes. Lockwood also found that presenting students with a plausible future self as the worse-off-other, such as a recent graduate of their same degree, increased this effect. For young George,

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Quentin Crisp was such a plausible future self and, similar to Lockwood's students, his reaction to this other involved managing his behaviour to prevent this outcome.

While many studies suggest that by reflecting the reality of homophobia, the media have the power to instil this kind of fear in SGNIs, the empirical evidence for this effect remains highly limited (Venzo and Hess, 2013). Here, George's account shows the media's symbolic power that both reifies the attribute as deviant and suggests 'punishment' as the norm and thus acceptable. Through characters such as Quentin Crisp, both Jo and George experienced a mediated form of stigma that has instilled in them a fear of becoming the target of homophobic violence and a belief that homosexuality remains a deviant identity to the majority of society. Due to such portrayals, they have learned to either conceal or normify their behaviour in certain social contexts (Goffman, 1963). George's reading of the film was thus a *negative motivational interpretation* - in contrast to Hirschman and Thompson's (1997) motivational interpretation - which has stayed with him to this day.

Most participants recounted similar experiences of mediated homophobic violence that solidified their stigma habitus and affected their outlook on the world. High stigma viscosity could then lead to the rejection of even positive portrayals for fear of a negative association:

MAX: I think even then I had an idea that, like, if I watch [shows with gay themes], people would think I was gay. And this was even before I even had a sexuality, like, you know? [laughs] It's just that – Gay was bad!

Max here describes how the doxic beliefs about gayness led him to avoid gay-themed media from a young age, before he even self-identified as a gay man. It was the same

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fear that led most informants to either hide their media use from others, or to use portrayals to ‘scan the environment’ (O’Donohoe, 1994) appraising others’ stance on LGBTQ⁺ issues and thus considering their possible reactions to a coming-out.

Due to their social environment as they grew up, Boomers recounted more instances of such negative media experiences. Whereas LGBTQ⁺ themed media content was either non-existent or entirely negative during their adolescence, Millennials described a somewhat better environment offering some positive portrayals. This did not mean, however, that Boomers’ stigma habitus generally had higher viscosity. Although field stigma viscosity at the time of growing up played a part in the establishment of the stigma habitus, the variety of sub-fields within a national field allowed for a wide variety of experiences. In other words, despite growing up at a time at which homosexuality was a criminal offence and stigma thus had a high viscosity, an individual could develop a low stigma viscosity thanks to other ambient factors, such as high economic or social capital, or due to field movements in some of the few heterodoxic, low viscosity fields.

This is best exemplified in Peter’s recollection of *The Naked Civil Servant* and the character Quentin Crisp who, like George, was the first out gay character Peter had seen. He watched the movie as an adolescent when he “was aware of what [he] was” but would not come out for a few years after:

The first gay character I suppose I ever came across would have been *The Naked Civil Servant* which is Quentin Crisp. Quentin Crisp was this really flamboyant gay character. He lived through the war, he was a social darling during the 70’s and 80’s. It was just the story of his life. For me that was ground-breaking because it was the first time I had seen a gay character. That was 1979, 1980, something like that.

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While he remembers feeling slightly uncomfortable while watching it with his family on the only TV they had in the house, Peter does not reflect on the homophobic violence depicted in the movie with the same intensity as George. Rather, he describes the movie as “fascinating,” as it opened his eyes to the possibility of life as a gay man. Having grown up in a working-class environment, despite knowing that the general attitude towards homosexuality was negative, it was not something that was ever discussed openly in his environment. Other troubles that befall a poor household of eight were more salient during his adolescence. In addition, unlike George’s, Peter’s family was “very close-knit” and he had always felt supported in all of his endeavours, as reflected in his family’s ultimate acceptance of his relationship with his partner Ian. When asked towards the end of his media interview whether he felt that media portrayals had been important throughout his life he points to this support:

Not really, no. I don’t think I’m... I am who I am, so it’s real life people who have influenced me more than actors in a film. I think my character is moulded by situations I get myself into.

Thus, his experience of the movie is decidedly different from George’s because of the lower viscosity of his stigma. In stark contrast to George, Peter even laments not having seen more portrayals like these at a time when they could have helped, namely before his coming out. His media memory emphasises the film’s positive aspects over the homophobia portrayed in it.

Sage’s media experience tells a similar story. He remembers being confused about the outrage after a kiss on the cheek between two male characters in popular British TV soap opera *EastEnders*, which follows the lives of a group of neighbours in

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London's east end and has aired since 1985:

[I]t was not that long ago. Huge, huge furore. When I saw it, I was like 'Wow, why are they so worked up about that?' I kind of thought the world had changed at that point but obviously not. ... I'd been around the scene for like eight or nine years when people were doing that sort of thing all the time. It was like, 'What?' It seemed, because I was in that scene, like it was perfectly normal, totally normal. So, I still to this day can't work out why there was such a fuss, but a fuss there was.

Having spent much of his adolescence in a very accepting environment, very much immersed in the 'bubble' of punk and queer culture, he was somewhat oblivious that outside of these fields the world still had a very different outlook on 'deviant' sexuality. Both Peter and Sage describe being very much aware of the negative reception the few existing portrayals of SGNIs received during their adolescence and young adulthood. The mediated stigma they experienced, however, was directly opposed to the more accepting or simply indifferent fields they moved in. In large parts due to the fields they moved in, Jo and George's media experiences stand in direct opposition to this.

Previous research has suggested that the support individuals receive through alignment with their in-group, in this case the LGBTQ⁺ community, another sub-culture, or even a supportive family, can increase resistance and decrease the likelihood of internalised homophobia (Goffman, 1963; Thoits, 2011). My interviews suggest that it is those participants whose habitus is structured by low stigma viscosity who are most resilient when encountering negative media content. This low viscosity could stem from familial or peer support structures, or diminished salience of one's sexual- or gendered identity due to the importance of other categories of difference.

8.2. Proactive Identity Exploration

For all participants, both their engagement with as well as their experience of LGBTQ⁺ themed media changed substantially over their life-course, with most narrating these changes through a coming-out discourse. Fitting into existing research on the formation of the self-concept (e.g. Klein et al., 2015; Sirgy, 1982), for most the period before their first coming out was characterised by an intensive and proactive search for portrayals that could help them understand their ‘deviant’ identity. Due to the amount of available material this period differed slightly across the two generational cohorts.

Faced with a lack of publicly available information, Boomers often accidentally came upon magazines, music bands or one of the few available film portrayals, which prompted them to actively search for other media content. As a young adult, for example, Pádraig bought a magazine in a bookshop without noticing that it was a gay magazine as it included reviews of movies he was interested in. It was this magazine that ultimately introduced him to the wider gay scene:

It was through that magazine that I learnt about the [gay] bookshop which was on Forth street. In the end that was the first gay venue that I actually went into on the third attempt.

It was only as a result of this purchase that Pádraig’s engagement with the media changed from mere entertainment to actively seeking out books and magazines on LGBTQ⁺ themes to identify venues on the scene, connect with others, and understand his own identity.

Many Boomer participants, however, did not have access to these types of explicitly

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gay magazines. Instead, for some, it was gender-bending, rebellious music and sub-cultures that introduced them to the possibility of non-conforming sexualities and gender identities. This was especially pronounced in George's life story and the important role he believes the media has played in his decision to leave his wife to start his life as a gay man. He describes how the emergence of sexually explicit music fuelled his pent-up desires and provided him with the hope and motivation to change his life completely, despite the potentially devastating effects this could have on himself and his family. The media in the 70s and 80s made it seem as though society was finally starting to become more accepting. All participants from the older generation made use of a discourse that described this as one of the main drivers for the slow assimilation of SGNIs into society that they had experienced over the course of their life (Peñaloza, 1996).

Millennials, on the other hand, having been brought up in environments in which they were aware of the possibility of LGBTQ⁺ identities, were able to engage much more pro-actively with a variety of LGBTQ⁺ themed texts across different mediums, including social media, books, TV series and movies.

OVIDIA: Just after I came out I just watched a lot of *The L Word*, almost to, like, teach myself how to be Queer.

CC: I went through a period where I was looking up trans YouTubers, like, just to see, like, how do I feel about this? Do I still get that feeling when I watch something like this? Do I feel like I connect with this? ... It's helped actually with the gay stuff too, watching lesbian YouTubers and trans YouTubers and queer YouTubers, just hearing their personal stories and comparing them with my own. When I heard a lot of trans stories in a lot of ways I thought, - Oh yeah, I never felt that.

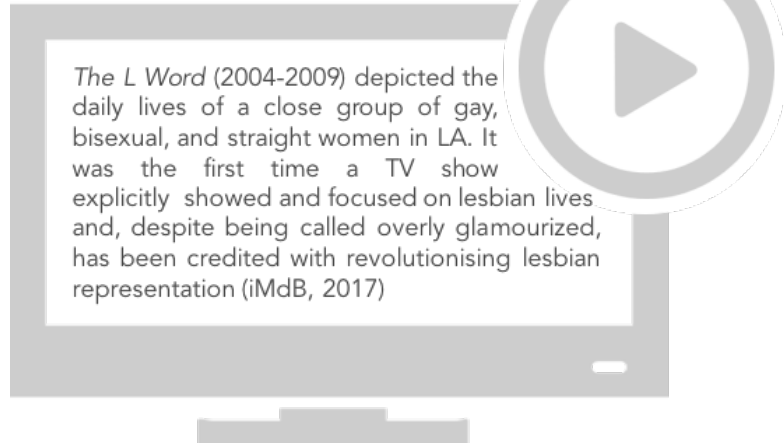
Both Ovidia and CC here describe the media as a tool to learn about the self and to

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engage in social comparisons, affirming or disaffirming potential identity categories, actively shaping their selves, as well as their understanding of social norms within the LGBTQ⁺ community as well as outside it (Ritson and Elliott, 1999).

Media Box 3. The L Word

Like Ovidia, most female identified participants specifically referenced the show ‘The L Word’ (Media Box 3) as the first real representation they had found. There was a common theme in which



iMDB (2017). *The L Word*. iMDB. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0330251/>

participants during this time would search for anything and everything, irrespective of it being ‘exaggerated’ or ‘unrealistic’, a theme that will be discussed further in in subsequent chapters. Elena, for example, watched ‘*The L Word*’ avidly despite believing it to be “exaggerated.” When asked why she still liked it she responds:

ELENA: Yeah because it was also during my time of confusion. It was a time in my life when I was watching a lot of [lesbian] movies and I guess that yeah, I needed a little bit of external validation to help my head get accustomed to the idea [of me being a lesbian]. It was a very strange time, but I think... Yes, I guess in a way all those things I watched helped me with that.

INTERVIEWER: How did you start watching it?

ELENA: I don’t know really. I guess I searched for it, because during that time I didn’t speak to absolutely anyone about this topic.

Due to the high viscosity of her stigma habitus before coming-out, the gratification

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of “external validation” seemed more important to her than the show’s lack of realism.

Like Boomers, however, not all Millennials had extensive access to LGBTQ⁺ themed media content. In lieu of portrayals that resonated with their identity they turned to those offering other types of difference or deviant identities. Titus, for example, believes that the lack of LGBTQ⁺ representation in his adolescence allowed him to develop this own unique Queer identity:

The wonderful thing about being gay in a royally isolated place without any media is you don’t know how to be gay. The only role models I had growing up were vampires because they did the exact same thing that I would do. So, we would talk about guys we had pulled from our school and how we had converted some. It was totally fine that we were doing this, yeah, like vampires.

His gay identity was shaped by fantasy and science fiction movies and TV series such as *Star Trek*. The shows he watched revolved around themes of equality, teaching him “right from wrong” and thereby developing his sense of morality and fuelling his unconditional acceptance for those who are different from the rest of society.

Jamie, having grown up in a very religious household, knew about (sinful) gay identities, but had no conception of trans-ness until his late teenage years. Despite not relating it to his self-concept, he engaged with gay literature in an attempt to understand his own precarious identity, finding solace in the existence of difference:

[I]t just normalises the whole issue that there is something different to just - You’re a male or a female and then you live your life and get married to the opposite of what you are and then you have kids.

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His reading of these texts was thus not connected to their portrayal of sexuality. Rather, his interpretation provides him with proof that there is an ‘out’ of the heteronormative life-course prescribed in society as a whole and his church congregation and family in particular. This motivational interpretation (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997) tells him that he does not need to adhere to the life path laid out by his immediate environment.

Thus, during their time of identity exploration following their first self-identification, participants were active users of the media in various ways (Katz, 1960; Katz et al., 1973). For those who grew up in an environment where sexuality and non-binary gender forms were not discussed, the media served as a vehicle to identify and name a felt difference from others. For most participants, the need to find a ‘label’ fitting their lived experience was ever-present. Participants thus used media portrayals to actively “construct themselves as self-recognising gay subjects” (Tsai, 2012), and to educate themselves about sexual- and gender non-conforming identities and the ‘appropriate’ behaviour and appearance associated with these (Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011; Kosenko et al., 2016).

8.3. Media Experiences and Changes in Viscosity

This active engagement with the media displayed during the identity exploration phase, however, was generally not maintained over the life-course. Whereas much of the literature implies a fixed relationship between stigmatised groups and consumption activities, characterised by constant management of their dual identity (Crockett, 2017; Kates, 2002), my participants’ engagement with the media usually changed after their initial coming out.

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For those who had a traditional ‘coming-out’ experience, their pre-coming out identity-finding phase was followed by an ‘*exploratory phase*’ during which they immersed themselves in the LGBTQ⁺ local scene (Dunlap, 2014). During this time, media portrayals could be used as a form of cultural capital to form connections within the LGBTQ⁺ sub-culture, highlighting its phatic role (Ritson and Elliott, 1999; Tsai, 2012).

While some subsequently stayed in the LGBTQ⁺ field, creating a collective self under that particular field’s doxa, many others maintained their positions in previously frequented fields, maintaining only sporadic relationships with individual LGBTQ⁺ peers rather than the community as a whole. As a consequence, many participants described a waning interest in actively searching for LGBTQ⁺ media content as they got “more comfortable” [Max] with their sexual and gender identities. Visconti (2008) has suggested that, as sexuality loses in importance for younger generations’ identity, so may their need for sub-cultural belonging. This is reflected in the way many informants’ life stories and media experiences were first characterised by identity essentialisation followed by de-essentialisation. This was not restricted solely to Millennials, but was found across both age cohorts among those who moved in mixed social fields. Often the catalyst for this move away from the scene seemed to lie in the development of a long-term relationship and the support structure found therein. Hence, where informants re-entered the LGBTQ⁺ field in later stages of their life-course it was generally to find a new partner. As a result, the ‘need’ for LGBTQ⁺ portrayals experienced prior to coming out was often followed by using such portrayals merely for entertainment, as other parts of their identity project gained in importance.

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This effect was most telling in the lack of awareness most participants displayed of LGBTQ⁺ content in the media overall. Most were only able to recall a limited number of fairly recent, widely publicised, mainstream news or portrayals of well-known celebrities, such as Ellen DeGeneres, Neil Patrick Harris, Laverne Cox, and Caitlin Jenner. Only few recalled LGBTQ⁺ -themed adverts and those that did were unable to recall the brand or product. All informants stated that they barely watched television and obtained most of their content from social media or on-demand services, contributing to their limited awareness of portrayals.

Despite previous research suggesting that it is the younger generation that is highly tech savvy and moving away from television (Gudelunas, 2011; Venzo and Hess, 2013), this was found across both cohorts; as Peter observed, 'Perhaps it has moved on because like I said, we don't watch much television'. This lack of salience suggests the media's waning importance as a form of sub-cultural capital once informants felt comfortable in their identity. Emma, for example, describes a clear life-course progression in terms of her interest in LGBTQ⁺ news and content. When she first started exploring her sexuality she already lived in a women's shelter, in which everybody was trying to get by and get back on their feet. In this safe space, she did not experience any form of discrimination or hatred. She had no contact with her family who could have instilled in her the orthodox view of gayness as deviant. In this field, thus, she felt secure enough to build her own understanding of her sexual identity. Like other participants, when asked whether LGBTQ⁺ media has ever had any importance in her life, she thus points to the period in her life when she had just started exploring her sexual identity:

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I think probably earlier on, in the 80's maybe. Because there was the whole AIDS thing going on and I was very new to the scene. I think at the time the biggest LGBTQ⁺ newspaper medium was *Pink News*, which I think is still going on online. I don't tend to look at it very often. I always used to go and pick up a copy of that from a local shop. ... That was probably when I was most interacting with the media, just because it was all very new as well. Probably when I was first coming out it was quite important just to get a feel for what was going on and as I said, the whole AIDS thing was massive and incredibly important at the time. ... That was also about me and my journey coming out.

As can be seen in this excerpt, gay media publications helped Emma in her “journey of coming out” as it helped her “to understand society’s view at the time.” She was aware that the rest of the world ‘vilified’ gay people, but LGBTQ⁺ publications showed her a different picture, denouncing the sensationalist nature of mainstream media portrayals of gay people. Once she started to form her own opinions and lived experiences within the community, she was able to differentiate between ‘sensationalism’ and ‘reality,’ and she believes that she was never hugely affected by such inflammatory reporting. It seems plausible that, because she had already been rejected so many times by people who were supposed to care for her, she considered the impact of any further rejection through the media inconsequential. At this time, she had found a safe space and people who supported and accepted her. Furthermore, her main life project at the time was to get her life back on track - overcome her drug addiction, finish school and provide for herself. In this environment, she was able to compartmentalize the stigma placed on homosexuality and build her own, “more balanced’ opinion about LGBTQ⁺ individuals.

Today, Emma does not actively read LGBTQ⁺ publications unless it is for pleasure on plane journeys:

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I don't think there is anything else that I tend to pay too much attention to. I'm trying to think. I don't subscribe... Diva sometimes, usually if I'm going on holiday to read on the plane. But that's about it.

She would much rather fill her house with books and gets the majority of her news from social media where she sometimes sees LGBTQ⁺ themed news. Her experiences have instilled in her a drive to live life to the fullest. She does not own a TV and has never watched many series or movies, as she considers them a waste of her precious time.

Similarly, Elena describes how she was affected “a lot” by *The L Word* in her pre-coming out phase because it was ‘novel’ and ‘normalised’ gayness for her. At the same time, she muses on how this has changed when asked if she still searches for such content:

I mean, whatever comes out I guess I do watch - if I like it. It's not like I only watch things of this type, obviously, because I am part of this world and therefore I like seeing other types of stories.

Today, she watches ‘whatever comes out,’ which, based on the content she remembers is limited to more well-known movies and series. This indifference to or lack of salience of their sexual identity for their consumption habits is also reflected in her and others’ reaction to the first ad [Honey Maid] that was shown to them, as well as Peter’s reaction to seeing a news report about an LGBTQ⁺ explicit ad on social media:

ELENA: Maybe a few years ago this would have surprised me more, but since I have already seen... I see it as a normal ad, like, you've shown me different family types, every one of them is valid.

JAMIE: I liked it, but it's also a bit ‘nothing.’ It's fine, it's cool.

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PETER: I'll say, 'Oh, I must watch that at home,' and then you get home and forget about it.

Elena's quote above again describes the life-course progression that was visible in most participants' media experiences: the liquefaction of stigma over time seemed to foster indifference towards portrayals that previously may have been used as signals of social acceptance and actively searched for. While one cannot pinpoint an exact timeframe when participants' media experience started changing, for CC, whose coming-out was a mere two years ago, the effect had already started to manifest itself. When asked whether she still searches for and watches LGBTQ⁺ YouTubers she concedes that she does so "to a lesser extent". While she sometimes falls back into the habit of watching trans YouTubers to make absolutely sure that she does not want to transition, thereby using the portrayals as a way of managing her precarious identity, her general media habits have moved towards watching content mostly for entertainment purposes.

Participants were well aware of this change in their habits over time, as well as the reasons for this. As aforementioned, Max talked about how his need for "external support" has become "diluted" the more he "has become comfortable" with himself. In the following, he talks about experiencing fewer gratifications but also less negative emotions when seeing LGBTQ⁺ portrayals:

The more I become comfortable with myself, but also the more society has become comfortable with Queers, like... I think it's nice that it's [LGBTQ⁺ portrayals] there, and I'm glad that it's there, because I live in a very insulated University bubble where, like, being Queer is no big deal at all. It's so uninteresting in fact, you know what I mean? [laughs]... It's so simple now. Whereas if I was in a different environment I might be more grateful, for [LGBTQ⁺ portrayals]. And I think with some of these [portrayals], I think

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it's a bit like the criticism that I was saying before about the movies and such, where it is easier for me, who is in a very privileged position, within an environment that is so accepting. But if you're from some backward state, you know, some Midwest state, then you might feel lucky to have that show, also to show family members who might feel uncomfortable. I still think there's family members who I would appreciate seeing these things and hopefully having someone to challenge their conceptions of the world. So yeah, it makes me feel good – when I think about it – but now a lot of the time I'm like – Pfff... Oh yeah, well... [shrugs shoulders] – You know what I mean?

He is well aware of the fact that his experience of the media has changed as his stigma liquefied. He attributes this to his movement in a field (“a very insulated University bubble”) that is structured by low viscosity (“where being Queer is no big deal at all”). At the same time, however, he is aware that his attitude might be very different if he were in a different social field (“if I was in a different environment I might be more grateful”) in which portrayals may change the habitus of family and friends, their disposition towards LGBTQ⁺ people. Thus, he distinguishes himself clearly from a perceived ‘other’, who moves in a more conservative, rural field, which has not changed according to the new doxa surrounding sexuality that are so normal to Max and is thus considered regressive (“some backward state, you know, some Midwest state”).

Media experiences did not, however, change only over the course of participants' life-course. Those participants whose habitus was split reported experiencing explicit portrayals differently across fields. Bill, Elena, Lea and Jamie all recounted slipping back into pre-coming-out media habits in certain situations that were characterised by uncertain power relations:

ELENA: For me, with my dad especially, I am really scared about what he

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might say. My dad is very traditional. But you know, what are you going to do? But that super awkward moment... [when something appears on television when he is there].

Here Elena, who has not come out to her very traditionally minded dad, describes her feeling of fear if a program they are jointly watching includes LGBTQ⁺ themes. Whereas she normally would enjoy such programming, the proximity of her father and his, as she perceives, orthodoxic views, induces her to conceal identity and manage her practices accordingly, changing her media experience decisively.

In addition, media portrayals had the power to revive participants' consciousness of stigma, temporarily altering their media experience. Max describes his reaction when watching an episode of the British TV series *Cucumber* (Media Box 4):

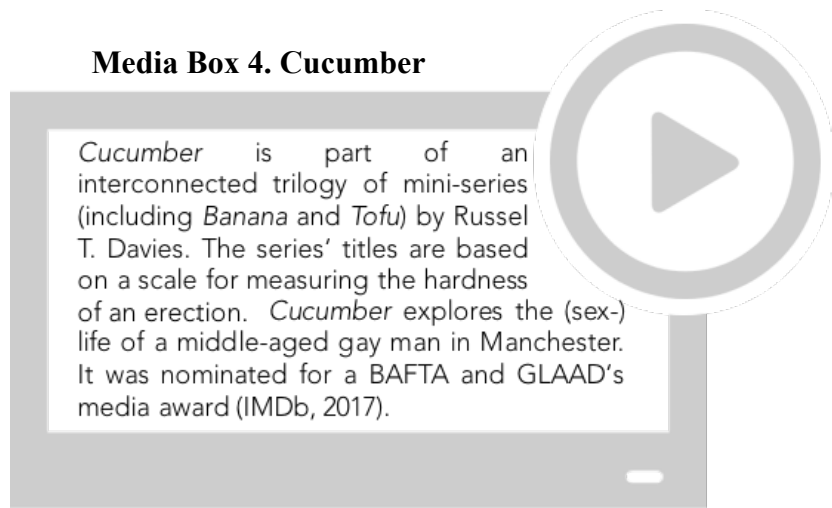
It featured a really gritty bit of homophobic violence, which was absolutely disturbing, one of these things where I couldn't sleep afterwards, because it was so affecting. It was messed up you know? But I do think it was a clever wake-up call.

He goes on to explain that he is usually "pretty irresponsible with the way I walk around with a guy". Here, he presents sexual stigma as nearly liquid, although the self-criticism implicit in his use of the word "irresponsible" suggests a degree of viscosity and neoliberal values underpinning his identity. He considered the show as an authentic reflection of life for others within the community and saw the violence depicted in it as a valuable "wake-up call", heightening his awareness of LGBTQ⁺ stigma and also of his "privileged" position in not feeling personally stigmatised. Paradoxically, this made him more aware of his own stigmatised position, colouring his consciousness for weeks after the incident.

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Media Box 4. Cucumber

Considering participants' reasoning for their growing indifference towards portrayals, it is perhaps not surprising that the only ones who still actively search for portrayals were those for



iMDb (2017). *Cucumber*. iMDb. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3848112/>

whom stigma viscosity was highest (Jo, George) and those who still moved in social fields in which they could be used as cultural capital (Ovidia, Titus). Jo's active engagement with the media extends beyond searching for content to reading the comment sections below LGBTQ⁺ news articles:

I'll start reading the comments and think: 'Oh my god, why do so many people hate me?' Even though they are not specifically talking about me, but about people like you in a really negative way. So, I think that's a new aspect of just watching the news. Now also you have everyone's opinion, like public.

Due to the high viscosity of her stigma, she is constantly on the look-out for validation and acceptance - especially in the news, which to her is the most important and relevant media outlet. George's engagement is similar. Although LGBTQ⁺ portrayals are on the rise, he believes that nowadays there is less LGBTQ⁺ content in the media than before and takes this as further evidence that homosexuality remains a stigmatised identity, validating his conception of the world:

I have seen no change in society from 20 years ago to 30 years ago, 40 years

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ago. That is sad and I think media has a role to play here. Because the hegemonic consensus is there is something wrong with being a homosexual.

He does not engage with the LGBTQ⁺ community outside of the cruising scene and online dating chatrooms. While he does search for LGBTQ⁺ movies and series to watch, he has no acquaintances to talk to about them. Thus, his main motivation is not to accrue knowledge of such portrayals as cultural capital, but to negotiate his own precarious identity and find some acceptance.

Ovidia's motivation to search for queer portrayals, on the other hand, is different from Jo and George's. It is evident from her life story that her identity is formed in decisive ways by Feminist and Queer ideologies. Her life narrative is framed around ideas of female sexual empowerment, as well as the deconstruction of binaries - with regards to sexual orientation and gender. Since high school, she has remained in a social circle of queer individuals or politically active feminists, culminating in the academic sphere she is moving in today with her doctoral studies. Queerness and advocating universal rights lies at the core of her being, which is why she will proactively search for queer representations to deconstruct and critique, an ability that can be used as cultural capital in her peer group: "I explicitly go out and try to find this stuff. My friend and I, when we do a film night, I'm like: ok, let's find a film about Queer women!"

She describes how her feelings towards media portrayals have changed from an uncritical, even euphoric acceptance to the more critical stand-point she occupies today, which allows her to notice the 'absences' of LGBTQ⁺ people in general, but in particular minorities and women. Before she came to acknowledge and accept her own sexuality, she believed her interest in such representations to be purely political:

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I'd have a, kind of, response to that that was more personally emotional than I thought it was. I just thought it was political. Now I think I notice the absences more, because I actively identify and I am much more engaged with that and I'll talk about this with my friends, and, you know, I went to see a play the other night that was amazing, and I was talking to my friend afterwards who is queer and she is one of the most critical queer people I know, and she is very like, right on about this stuff in a way that, you know, like, she will always have, like, while I was watching I could almost feel the critique at the back of my head, and I was kind of putting it to one side, because I was like: I want to enjoy this. This is present, but I am just going to put it to one side, because it is good, it's just not perfect, but nothing is. And afterwards we were talking about it a little bit and she mentioned these things and I was like: I know. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I totally agree and all of these different things. I was just trying not to engage with that because it's too exhausting all the time. [laughs] But I think it's much more present.

Her enjoyment of the theatre-play she recalls watching here is strongly influenced and tainted due to the pressure she feels to consciously employ her cultural capital to retain her status in the friendship and thereby furthering her life projects of 'being an academic' and 'learning to be confident in and true to herself.' Hence, even though her media consumption did not become less actively engaged, it has changed from using portrayals for educational purposes ("to learn how to be queer"), to using them for entertainment and social purposes - to pass the time with something that shows specifically queer women while always approaching these representations from a critical standpoint on the basis of feminists and queer ideologies. However, constantly dissecting the media from the standpoint of a feminist is exhausting to her given the media's pervasiveness. Her comment here illustrates Bourdieu's (2001) criticism that mere consciousness raising is not enough to change doxa. Ovidia's consciousness is 'raised', nonetheless, she struggles with the constant requirement to stay awake, so to speak, to be critical towards everything she sees.

8.4. Gendered Awareness

Throughout the interviews, it was noticeable that gender played an important role in terms of the attention that was afforded to media content. Most participants who identified as female described *The L Word* as important to them, whereas male identified participants talked about shows such as *Queer as Folk* (Media Box 5) and *Will and Grace* (Media Box 6), and trans participants pointed to *'The Danish Girl'* and *'Transparent'* (Media Box 7). Moreover, across all interviews, when asked about their ad experiences, participants almost exclusively focused on and deliberated about characters sharing their gender identity. A number of times I had to actively prompt participants to talk about characters of the opposite sex:

INTERVIEWER: What about the woman?


PADRUIG: She looked nice? Normal.

INTERVIEWER: And how do you feel about the guy?

LEA: Yeah, the same I guess. It was good. A good portrayal. No stereotypes.

These preferences are consistent with previous studies that have asserted that gay women significantly prefer lesbian imagery and gay men prefer gay imagery in advertising (Oakenfull and Greenlee, 2004), suggesting that

Media Box 5. Queer as Folk



The series *Queer As Folk* follows the lives of a group of gay friends in Manchester's gay village [UK version, 1999-2000] and Pittsburgh [US version, 2000-2005]. Both series were the first portrayals of gay lives in the UK and US in an hour-long drama series (O'Keeffe, 2015).

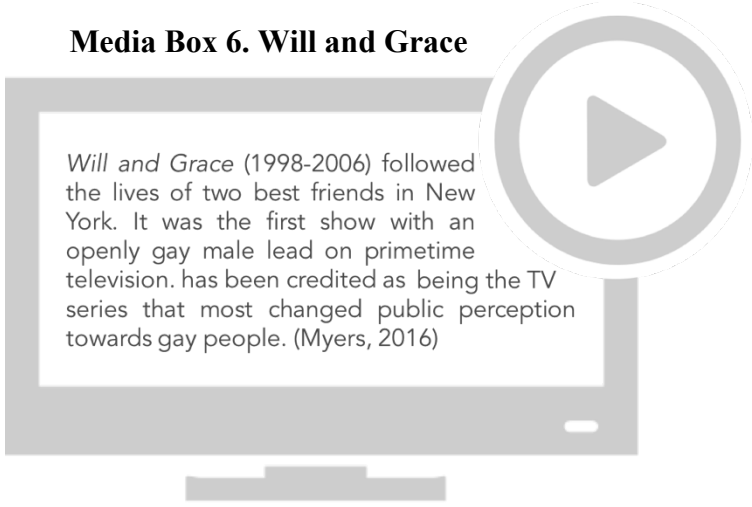
O'Keeffe K (2015) 'Queer As Folk' Should Be Remembered as the Groundbreaking, Powerful Television It Is. *Mic Online*. Available from: <https://mic.com/articles/120489/>

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the same preferences apply for media experiences in general, but refute others that have suggested that gay women prefer gay male imagery (Dotson et al., 2009).

Jo was the only one to reflect on her lack of interest in male characters while watching the example advertisements: “I was way more interested in the women, because I can identify

Media Box 6. Will and Grace



Will and Grace (1998-2006) followed the lives of two best friends in New York. It was the first show with an openly gay male lead on primetime television. has been credited as being the TV series that most changed public perception towards gay people. (Myers, 2016)

Myers J (2014) Will & Grace : The TV Series That Changed America. *Huffington Post Online*. Available from: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/jack-myers/will-grace-the-tv-series-that-changed-america_b_5543315.html

more with them, I guess” This preference was palpable throughout her whole interview as gay men were rarely mentioned, much less so than other LGBTQ⁺ minorities. Despite her questioning gender-identity, Jo seemed to self-identify more with the gender assigned to her at birth – as a woman with ‘masculine taste’ in fashion – perhaps due to the pressure she feels from her family and wider society to ‘choose a side,’ but also due to her romantic interest in women. For both CC and Sage, who consider themselves gender-neutral and -queer respectively, the same effect could be observed. Up until the following point in the interview, for example, Sage had not mentioned gay women at all. After he has talked extensively about the gay man in the Honey Maid ad, I prompted him about the woman:

INTERVIEWER: What about her?

SAGE: More difficult to read.

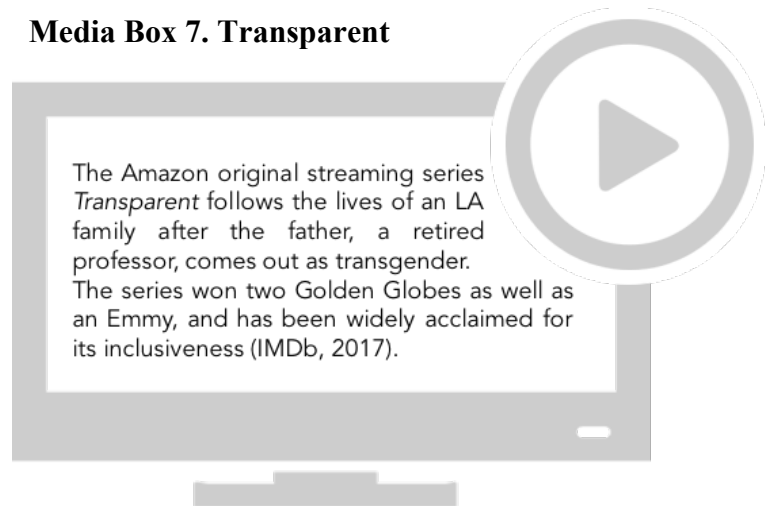
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INTERVIEWER: How would you say gay women are usually portrayed in the media?

SAGE: Hard. I think they have a hard... I've said this for years. On the ladder of sexual acceptability, gay women are down there. I think in general just in real life, they don't have the reputation that gay men have as being fun or good to have at parties. ... They're portrayed, but there's not many favourably.

Media Box 7. Transparent

As his comments show, he is aware of the denigrated position gay women occupy on the hierarchy of respectability. While, he goes on to detail some pervasive stereotypes, however, both his knowledge of and interest in



iMDb (2017). *Transparent*. iMDb. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3502262/>

female portrayals is limited. Both he and CC were considerably more interested in characters that matched their birth gender - women for CC and men for Sage. It is maybe telling that despite their chosen gender designation a membership categorisation analysis of their transcripts shows that all three of them go by their birth gender pronouns and consider themselves to be 'gay'. This indicates the difficulties individuals face when trying to break out of the doxic gender binary. Most continue to be perceived by their family and other social fields they move in as either a woman or a man.

The same bias was present for trans participants. Both Alice and Jamie showed little interest in depictions of LGB characters, consistent with the sense that sexuality is of

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less importance to their identity. At times, I felt uncomfortable showing them LGB portrayals because of a distinct feeling that it was irrelevant for them and downright rude to be lumping them in with non-conforming sexual identities. Their indifference is best illustrated by Jamie's reaction to the gay male family in the Honey Maid ad:

INTERVIEWER: What did you think of that?

JAMIE: Those biscuits look nice? [laughs] It's just like, a normal ad. I don't know whether there's much to comment on apart from that I'd buy those biscuits. Maybe a wee bit of a weird advert for a biscuit, because they don't show the biscuit until the very end, so to me it could have been about anything. Any product I guess. But yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What did you think of them [the gay family]?

JAMIE: The gay family?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

JAMIE: Just a normal family. Yeah. Just a normal family. [pause]

INTERVIEWER: Anything else?

JAMIE: No, not really. Just a normal family.

Instead of focusing on the characters in the ad, he shows more interest in the product that is being advertised. He reacts similarly to the Aetna advert. It is only when prompted again about the wider LGBTQ⁺ community after seeing the different example ads that he reflects on this:

The trans issue is just more of an issue for me, because I'm not in any relationship and, also, I'm pan. So, if I was in a gay relationship I'd probably be more relating to the gay couples, and if I was in a straight relationship I'd relate to that more, but since I'm in neither it's just like – I don't really relate.

It seems plausible that at the point in time that the interview takes place, his media consumption would be influenced to a much greater extent by his gender identity

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than his sexuality, considering his life story and the way in which he does not anchor his identity to his sexuality in any way. This is thus a good example of the benefits of an intersectional approach, over one focused on multiple-jeopardy. Jamie is able to set aside any possible negative effects of his sexuality to a time when it becomes salient due to a potential gay relationship.

I find it quite funny because I know a lot of people who are fine with me being transgender, as long as, like, I don't look trans or something, I don't know, whatever, but then they struggle with the fact that, like, not many people know I'm pan, because I just think – I'm not in a relationship, so why make that an issue? – But, like, so many people are just – oh, you're trans, but you're not gay, are you? As though that's like... [a horrible thing].

One could say that he is tackling the different intersections one step at a time. He cannot think about his sexuality until he feels 100% comfortable in his gender identity. The low viscosity of his sexual stigma has a direct effect on his media experience, whereby he cannot relate or identify with gay imagery, yet.

For Alice, because the advertising examples feel less relevant to her, her reading is structured through her highly anti-capitalistic, anti-government views as well as her work identity, which drives her belief that she is more immune to advertising than others. An IT expert, she has in recent years been involved more in big data marketing and advertising projects, and this has made her even more wary of advertising and data privacy. Indeed, she equates it with Nazi propaganda:

Ads, yeah, to a certain extent it's an abuse of our senses, sort of post Goering, he was the expert in a lot of the Nazi propaganda things which were incorporated into advertising after the war. So not great, but I guess that's sort of the society we are, we've got the consumerism. In the old days, it was: "You have feet. Get shoes." Once you've got shoes, that's the end of your market. But now it's, "Oh you've got to have these super shoes." The big

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thing is profiling and that is the projects I'm working on.

It is this discourse that is more prevalent in her advertising readings than any other. Her first reaction to the Honey Maid ad, for example, is to question the ad's message of wholesomeness with the actual product's unhealthy attributes:

Yeah, that's a good sort of bit of...sort of like word association with all the family values and wholesomeness and link it all in. Classic sort of propaganda to make you associate those Honey Maids with wholesomeness and family, even though they are full of sugar and probably being American, full of GMO and all sorts of rubbish and toxic stuff.

In general, ads that showed LGB characters did not resonate with her at all. Hence, while she noticed the attempt at diversity in the ad, she had no further interest in it and dismissed it as something that might sway working-class, less educated readers of *The Sun*: "quite basic but it would work for the sort of *Sun* readers of the world, wouldn't it?" She bases her assessment on her professional knowledge of social grades used by marketing and media professionals. Her use of this knowledge might be interpreted as her trying to assert her own advertising literacy, potentially due to my presence as a marketing academic, which can be seen in her use of the utterance "if you see what I mean", phrased not as a question, but as a statement of mutual understanding. Her interpretation of the Google ad, on the other hand, was very much a positive, personalising one:

It's kind of inspiring, linked into the gym itself but also linked into Google. So, it's kind of very subtle on the Google front. It was very professionally done and much more subtle than the first one. It gives you kind of a feel-good sort of thing without being very superficial. It hits you on a deeper emotional level, very good that. That would be more for your slightly more intellectual people I think.

Despite the ad being about a trans man, she can identify with the struggle of

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becoming who one wants to be, with the “sadness” of the main character and his “journey.” The more “sympathetic” and “emotional” portrayal thus engenders a positive association and is ultimately determined as more intellectually stimulating than a “propaganda” ad.

8.5. Summary

The media plays an active role in shaping participants' habitus, teaching them the 'rules of the game,' the consumption (ortho-)doxa, both within the restricted LGBTQ⁺ field, by providing them with an understanding of what it means to be LGBTQ⁺, and within the wider field of the societies they are moving in at any given time. The media have symbolic implications, both negative and positive, for the viscosity of the stigma habitus: participants referred to negative reinforcement via mediated stigma, but also acknowledged the media as highlighting positive possible selves to help them assimilate within society.

While there were some participants whose sexuality or gender identity formed later in life, most reported a more traditional coming-out narrative. Media experiences emerged as structured around this narrative, moving from passive awareness of negative portrayals, to pro-active search for positive portrayals and active engagement with these as part of the formation of the self, to lastly more critical and selective attention given to relevant content. Apart from those for whom stigma had a high viscosity and those moving mostly in Queer social circles, participants described waning importance of and interest in media portrayals as they became more comfortable with their identity. However, movement across fields or mediated stigma experiences through portrayals of homophobic violence could re-solidify

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participants' stigma habitus temporarily, changing their media experiences.

In addition, gender emerged as an important factor as participants generally paid more attention to portrayals of individuals of their own sex. For those considering themselves gender-neutral or questioning, gender assigned at birth was the most salient, whereas for trans participants their felt gender identity played the dominant role. Furthermore, since sexuality was not an important part of the current identity project for participants identifying as trans, their media experience and readings of LGBTQ⁺ explicit content was characterised by lack of interest and, in the case of Alice, cynicism and marketing-related considerations due to her work identity.

9. EVALUATING INTERSECTIONAL AUTHENTICITY

Whereas the previous chapter looked at media experiences through the life-course, the following explores a recurring theme whereby participants constantly evaluate portrayals' 'authenticity' both pre-consciously and consciously. While most participants agreed that the media has moved on somewhat from stereotypes in recent years, the anticipation of such stereotypes in LGBTQ⁺ portrayals created a lens for critique through which such texts were read. Participants' media experiences were clearly influenced by evaluations of perceived authenticity, as has been found in other contexts (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Vannini and Williams 2009). As mentioned in Chapter 2.7.1, authenticity can be conceptualised as a constantly changing social process that is subjectively assessed by each individual (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). Thus, audiences can convert even 'fake' content, such as reality TV

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shows, into something phenomenologically real (Rose and Wood, 2005). Constant references were made to portrayals, characters, or storylines as “authentic”, “real”, “genuine”, or “honest.” Participants used these terms interchangeably to evaluate representations in a process of negotiation that considered stereotypes, individual and group identification, narrative quality, and author’s intent. Each of these will now be discussed in turn.

9.1. Stereotypes as a Lens for Critique

Taking a life-course perspective allows us to recognise the importance of prior experiences of LGBTQ⁺ portrayals on participants’ habitus and thus on their disposition towards new experiences. Previous media experiences for both generations were overwhelmingly of stereotypical portrayals, and these formed a frame of reference when reading new media content (Fiske, 2010; Hirschman and Thompson, 1997; McCracken, 1987).

Consistent with existing work on LGBTQ⁺ media representation, participants described portrayals of LGBTQ⁺ people they had experienced previously as hyper-sexualised and über-dramatised, with “no spectrum of personalities whatsoever”, as Jo noted. Characters were perceived as lacking intelligence, defined solely by their sexuality and gender-bending performance. Many voiced the belief that LGBTQ⁺ characters were included not ‘for’ an LGBTQ⁺ audience, but to add excitement and difference into media programmes for the mainstream audience. Generally, gay males were perceived to be portrayed as “sidekicks”, “never protagonists”, very “conservative”, “extremely camp”, “overly effeminate”; they were people who “do not have relationships” and thus are “always about sex”. They “love shopping,” are

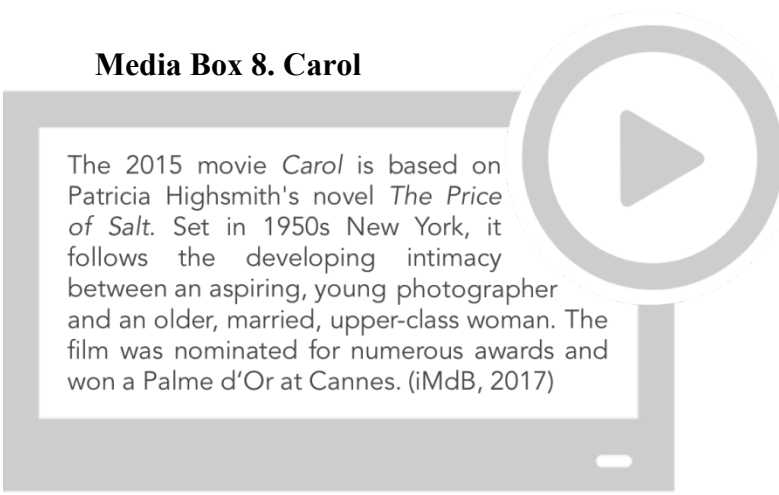
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“fashionable”, “toned and sculpted.” For lesbian portrayals, there is “always some drama going on” and storylines are “always about sexual relations”. Such characters are described as “stupid” and either “very butch” with a “chequered shirt and short hair” or as “upper-class”, “lipstick lesbians”, “feeding the male fantasy.” Trans people are either “beaten up”, portrayed as “sex workers and Thai lady boys” or the story focuses on “surgery or trying to have sex when they don’t have the right ‘equipment.’” They are used explicitly to shock the cis-gendered audience or are “just interesting to people because it’s a trans issue.” In addition, female participants were very aware that LGBTQ⁺ characters usually have “horrible tragic stories” and are quickly “killed off or commit suicide”. This well-known TV trope - known as ‘bury your gays’ or ‘gay/lesbian death syndrome’ - has been criticised for perpetuating the view that homosexuality is evil (Butler, 2016; TV Tropes, 2016).

Authenticity was in part established in contrast to these stereotypes. Participants often juxtaposed media portrayals, designating one as “more” authentic or real, because of the absence of pertinent stereotypes. Thus, Joy describes the film *Carol* (Media Box 8) as more authentic than the series *Orange is the New Black* [OITNB] (Media Box 9) because it focused more on the loving relationship of two middle-aged women than its sexual aspects. Elena considers OITNB as “more realistic” than *The L Word* for similar reasons: “in *The L Word* they misused sex scenes a lot.” Similarly, Emma, like others, rejected the Starbucks ad because she felt it bordered on inauthentic, stereotypical ridicule.

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Media Box 8. Carol



The 2015 movie *Carol* is based on Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Price of Salt*. Set in 1950s New York, it follows the developing intimacy between an aspiring, young photographer and an older, married, upper-class woman. The film was nominated for numerous awards and won a Palme d'Or at Cannes. (iMDB, 2017)

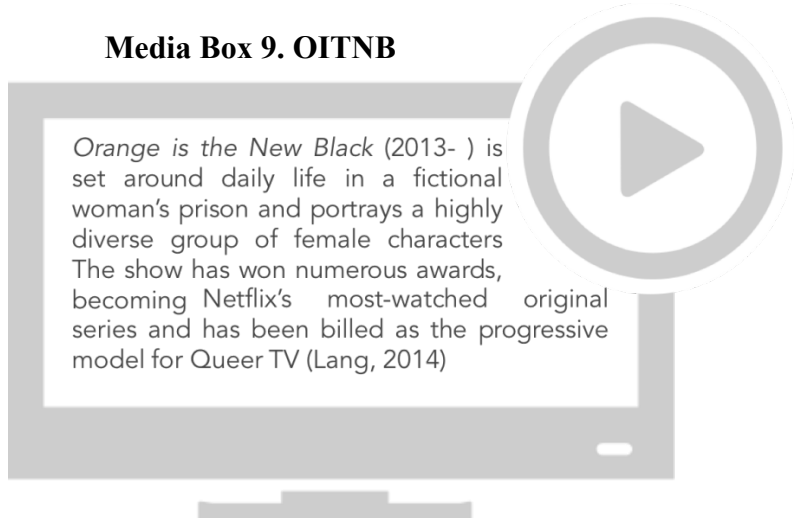
iMDB (2017). *Carol*. iMDB. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2402927/>

Despite this framing, most participants concede that things have been changing in recent years. Joy, for example, suggested that the media have started to include more of a “cross-section” of LGBTQ⁺ characters and

“people are beginning to realise that it is getting more normal”. Similarly, Emma stated that the media have moved away from the butch lesbian/camp gay male divide, as a consequence of which “there is more diversity to portrayals - as people, for a start - who have the same kind of problems and issues that anybody has.” Those with lower stigma viscosity were amongst the biggest believers in this change, while those with higher stigma viscosity acknowledged the change but attributed it to distinct ‘liberal’ channels, with homophobic discourse still thought to prevail in many conservative media outlets.

Media Box 9. OITNB

Throughout the interviews, a clear theme emerged whereby stereotypes would be used as a lens for critique, a first



Orange is the New Black (2013-) is set around daily life in a fictional woman's prison and portrays a highly diverse group of female characters. The show has won numerous awards, becoming Netflix's most-watched original series and has been billed as the progressive model for Queer TV (Lang, 2014)

Lang N (2014) 'Orange Is the New Black' Proves to Be the Model of Queer TV. *The Advocate Online*. Retrieved from: <https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2014/06/30/op-ed-orange-new-black-proves-be-model-queer-tv>

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hurdle, so to speak, that needed to be overcome for participants to move past an initial critical interpretation to more personalising or motivational ones (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997), let alone to be considered ‘authentic.’ This is best captured in this excerpt from Lea’s interview:

I think when it comes to LGBTQ⁺ representation in advertising or TV shows... I am almost... quite critical of them, more so than some people. I actually had this conversation with Jo the other day. We were talking about *Glee*, and like, how you could see the way that the LGBTQ⁺ community was represented was really good, cause it opened the door, and exposed people to different characters that they may not have been ok with and just kind of portrayed them the same as any other character. But I also saw that they portrayed them very stereotypically. So, I feel like I am a bit critical when there is a character on TV and they are gay, I’m not just going to like them or identify with them cause they are gay.

Whereas existing research asserts that gay consumers will prefer gay imagery and feel positively towards it even if it is stereotypical (Gudelunas, 2011; Peñaloza, 1996), my data suggest that the continued and widespread use of gay stereotypes and tropes in the media in previous decades has rendered them a negative intertextual reference point that participants draw upon to situate their reading of new materials.

It is not surprising, then, that for many the very first reaction when faced with the example advertisements was to qualify and point out whether a portrayal had any stereotypical qualities:

ELENA: The woman [In the Aetna ad] is very feminine, well-dressed. The man, well, normal. I don’t see him as being effeminate, they didn’t recur to any stereotypes... They have not taken a lesbian with short hair and a chequered shirt, without make-up.

Informants’ media experiences again differed mostly along the lines of their stigma habitus. Those for whom it had a higher viscosity were decidedly more critical, at

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times actively trying to find stereotypes in the smallest signifiers. This difference can be illustrated in the ways that Emma and Jo approach the example advertisements. Emma is less critical and generally only reflects on stereotypes if they are highly apparent or to remark on their absence. She herself asserted that she tends not to engage on a deeper level with media portrayals unless they are "obviously offensive". She liked the Honey Maid ad ("I think it is fantastic... Nothing about it offends me. I don't think there are any stereotypes there.") and the Aetna ad ("Again, not stereotypical in the sense it's not butch women or a camp man"), particularly lauding how they presented long-term relationships, against stereotypes of promiscuity.

Both George and Jo, on the other hand, had a much greater disposition to search for stereotypes, no matter how small:

JO: My initial thought was, when they showed the gay couple, like, he was in a pink chequered shirt. Something like that, it wasn't pink, but it was pink-y, and I was like: 'Oh, ok...' [rolls eyes]. [Honey Maid]

JO: I thought: 'Oh, they've chosen a woman who is wearing a suit.' You know like, people can make a clear distinction in their head of who's the male, who's the female, because people seem to be obsessed with doing that. [Aetna]

It appears as though to Jo, the notion of a non-stereotypical portrayal was almost unfathomable, prompting her to look for any possible stereotype in the characters' appearance or storyline. At the same time, however, she was able to dismiss small transgressions as a "minor thing" if the overall image was not over-caricatured. In general, amongst those whose stigma viscosity was higher, the potential gratification of social acceptance to be gained from a portrayal outweighed minor transgressions.

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The same propensity to ultimately dismiss stereotypes was observed in most Boomer participants who employed the logic of “one step at a time” to legitimate a slow but steady societal change towards acceptance of LGBTQ⁺ portrayals even if these were stereotyped. This phrase was characteristic of the patience Boomers have developed over the course of their lives, which was ultimately reflected throughout their media experience:

EMMA: We knew it was going to be long. I wasn't particularly activist or anything like that, but we kind of knew it would take time to change. I genuinely didn't think I would see gay marriage in my lifetime, so it's been quicker than I expected. But the young by their very nature are impatient.

While Millennials living with low stigma viscosity were less forgiving at even the slightest hint of stereotypes, Emma's comments demonstrate her resignation in relation to what she saw as the necessary pace of social change. She chooses to see the good, the progress that has been made, instead of blaming society or the media for the way it has treated LGBTQ⁺ individuals. Thus, she purported that acceptance is a stage that is reached through a process that takes time, comparing this to the time it took for race to become more accepted in society: "it's changed drastically, and I think it's the same journey that the LGBTQ⁺ community has taken in the whole TV perception."

Consequently, there was a consensus amongst Boomers that even if an attempt at media inclusion is not perfect, it should not be discounted.

SAGE: It's a step forward which is always good rather than a step back. Anything that's a step forward in life is ok by me.

ALICE: I think it's like all things, it will get there. ... Transgender issues will get there.

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Boomers were consequently more likely to turn a blind eye to portrayals that were not deemed overly stereotypical and thus not harmful to the cause.

This is not, however, a motivational interpretation, which is described as occurring “when a media image is interpreted as an ideal self to which the consumer can aspire” (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997: 47). Nor is it, as purported by Ginder and Byun, an acceptance of stereotypes due to the “symbolic validation they felt from targeted inclusion” (2015: 827). Rather, it can be described as a *social progress interpretation*, that occurs when a media portrayal is interpreted as furthering a social cause by educating those who are against it in a manner that is sensitive to their concerns. This interpretation is clearly driven by an assimilationist discourse (Sender, 2003). Whereas in motivational interpretations individuals may suspend their disbelief surrounding the production of media and advertising, under a social progress interpretation what is suspended is a formerly critical interpretation. Informants choose to temporarily give portrayals the benefit of the doubt, so to speak, to defer a critical judgement due to a perceived potential benefit for society, or a marginalised community. A social progress interpretation was only possible, however, if the portrayal is not considered too harmful, and does not run the danger of further reifying stereotypes.

Informants who settle for this interpretation, then, are not “reading within the dominant code” (Hall, 1980) per se. They are aware of the dominant code, and actively deconstruct and reject aspects of it in a critical interpretation. The dominant code here is not a naturalised doxa, but rather an orthodoxa that informants are aware and wary of, but choose to accept for the longer-term good of society. Thus, while

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societal progress interpretations can occur by themselves, they can also follow on from a critical interpretation, leading to ambivalence and complex evaluations driven by contradictory emotions of like and dislike. It is this paradoxical response that quantitative methods simply cannot reflect in a 5-point Likert scale. To explain this phenomenon, one could evoke Foucault's (1980) belief that individuals do not actively refuse and combat that which has no direct effect on themselves. The greater the possible effect, however, in this case the harm done to LGBTQ⁺ acceptance, the greater the resistance will be.

Previous quantitative research has asserted that gay consumers will look favourably upon explicit gay portrayals, even when portrayals are stereotypical (Gudelunas, 2011; Tsai, 2011). My findings suggest that participants' expectation of negative stereotypes acts as a critical lens, an intertextual reference through which portrayals are read and a first hurdle to be passed for them to be afforded any attention at all. For most, the use of a stereotype is grounds enough to dismiss a portrayal as inauthentic. However, findings further suggest that individuals living with high stigma viscosity and those from the Baby Boomer generation may be willing to accept stereotypes that are not deemed too exaggerated or harmful. For the former, this is due to the gratification such portrayals afford, whereas for the latter it is due to patience acquired over time. This may explain the findings of existing studies that are based on samples of older generations who might have had higher stigma viscosity. It also challenges quantitative studies that merely enquire about general attitudes towards portrayals without an understanding of the potential criticism that precedes a final evaluation.

9.2. Individual and Group Identification

Previous literature has pointed to emotional identification with characters as playing a key role in an individual's media experiences. Individuals draw from their personal experience to make sense of and actively produce perceived meanings of media portrayals (Cohen, 2001; Mick and Politi, 1989; Scott, 1994). Participants in this study, however, did not merely "pull" portrayals into their subjective life world. Personalising interpretations or identification with characters was actively used to determine a portrayal's perceived authenticity, contributing to its subsequent acceptance or rejection. Participants compared certain situations, characters' appearance and behaviour with their own lived experiences to assess whether a storyline was realistic and hence acceptable. As a consequence, assessments of authenticity could differ substantially between them, particularly with regards to their lived stigma experiences.

For many there was a natural progression over the life-course from the motivational interpretations before coming-out and more critical, personalising interpretations and assessments of authenticity thereafter. Jamie, for example, clearly remembers the first time he saw a trans character. It was shortly after he had first learned about the possibility of a trans identity and he was watching the TV show *Hollyoaks* with his brother. Like himself, the character had a brother to whom he was close:

I found that quite interesting, the way the brother reacted, because I was thinking: How would Connor react? And I thought the brother reacted quite well, and quite realistically, because he had his moments of being like: This is not normal, just be yourself, stop being... that's not you. But then he had these moments of... I think he got into a fight with people at school for his brother and stuff, because they were making fun of him for being trans.

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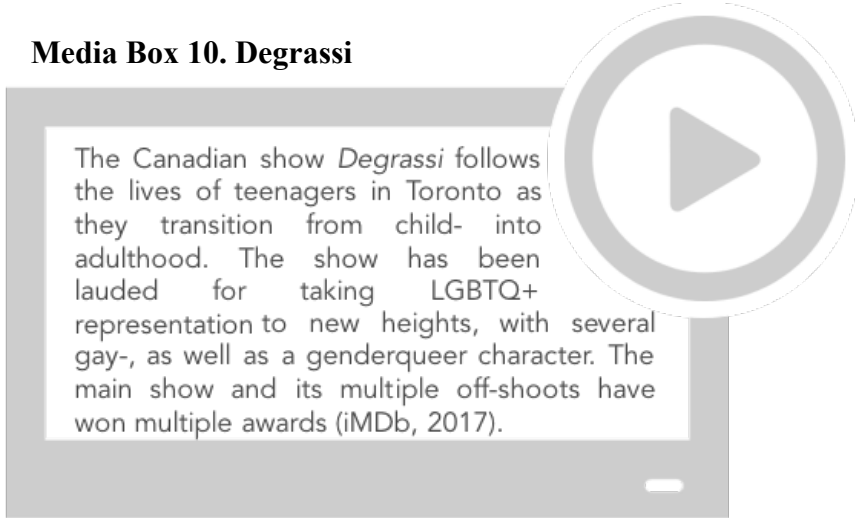
At the time, he used Jason's portrayal in *Hollyoaks* to 'scan the environment' (O'Donohoe, 1994), thus helping him imagine his brother's possible reactions to his coming out. In addition, however, at the time of the interview he also retrospectively evaluates the portrayal's realism, its authenticity, based on his subsequent experiences. Thus, his interpretation of this portrayal has changed over time from a motivational reading to a more critical assessment of authenticity based on personal experiences during his life-course. The same assessment is employed in his reading of the show *Degrassi* (Media Box 10), as well as of the Google ad:

INTERVIEWER: What made it [the Google ad] realistic to you?

JAMIE: I guess because he was just talking about fishing, it wasn't like he was... which is quite a realistic thing to do. Like, so many people have asked me recently whether I belong to any trans groups and stuff, which I don't currently, but I have in the past, but it's just kinda like another aspect of your life, but that seems to be a big thing that people ask you on and how is, like, the surgery, and how is being on 'T' and what is being on 'T' like and all that kind of stuff. And kind of forget that I play football and, well, normal stuff. So yeah, that was good.

His interpretation is both personalising and motivational. He would like to be perceived as someone who has normal, although notably male, hobbies, instead of being constantly questioned about his gender identity and transition story. Hence, it is motivational in the sense that it reflects an aspirational

Media Box 10. *Degrassi*



The Canadian show *Degrassi* follows the lives of teenagers in Toronto as they transition from child- into adulthood. The show has been lauded for taking LGBTQ+ representation to new heights, with several gay-, as well as a genderqueer character. The main show and its multiple off-shoots have won multiple awards (iMDb, 2017).

iMDb (2017). *Degrassi*. iMDb. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0090417/>

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identity that others are not yet seeing.

Many participants would equally recall specific events in their life to explain why a portrayal seemed authentic to them. Joy, for example, recounts watching *The L Word*, which to her was the first-time lesbian women were not portrayed as butch dykes, but as wealthy and feminine. She recounts watching the series with a friend to whom the concept of femme lesbians seemed unrealistic.

I remember my friend was sitting watching it and she went, ‘Do you know?’ She says, ‘I like this, and I like the idea of the stories, but it’s unrealistic, isn’t it?’ I said, ‘What makes you think it’s unrealistic?’ She says, ‘Because look at them.’ She says, ‘They’re all nice-looking women driving Mercedes cars and getting all dressed up. Who knows any lesbians like that?’ I said, ‘I live with one.’ Eleanor did drive a Mercedes at the time and she used to get all dressed up. She went, ‘Yeah right. I thought this was a load of rubbish!’ Eventually she met Eleanor and went, ‘You were right.’ So, her interpretation of that series was it was not realistic.

Joy later admits that her own perception of lesbians before meeting Eleanor was that of hyper-masculine butches. Both she and her friend lacked the sub-cultural experience of femme lesbians causing her friend to interpret the lipstick lesbian portrayal of *The L Word* as unrealistic. It was only due to her relationship with someone fitting this portrayal that Joy was able to relate more to the character and accept her as “a realistic portrayal” with “a certain honesty of the characterization.” At the same time, her story illustrates how pervasive stereotypes primed both her and her friend’s understanding of what it meant to be a lesbian, to the extent that the idea of a Femme lesbian was felt to be unrealistic.

Elena, in talking about the same show, related in particular to one of the characters because her initial storyline closely resembled her own experience of first realising

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her attraction to the same sex:

I went to a party and there was a girl that just left me dazed ... that moment, entering a party and then later being next to your boyfriend and thinking - what the hell am I doing with him? - You know?

Her reading of this scene as realistic due to its resemblance to her own life story greatly enhanced her initial positive reaction towards it.

Max, when asked to describe a portrayal he particularly liked, for example, points to ‘authenticity’ as a main factor of his media experience:

MAX: *Cucumber*, Episode 1, *Banana*, Episode 1 - cause they have, the stories kind of interlink and it’s nice to see how the characters all kind of fit together.

INTERVIEWER: What did you like about that?

MAX: Well, it felt more authentic in a way.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think that it was more authentic?

MAX: Cause, there was a real range of characters, right? And I sort of thought it was a better... You know it was very... definitely a very condensed view of things, but also because it featured, like, middle-aged gay men. So, it was kind of like... As well as the young generation. So, it wasn’t just focusing on pretty, young things doing whatever.

To Max, who struggles more with his attraction to older men than with his sexuality overall, it is the inclusion of a greater variety of LGBTQ⁺ characters, particularly regarding age, that makes these two shows more authentic. The representation is a validation of his sexual preferences and his overall experience as a gay man.

Across all interviews, an evaluation of a portrayal as ‘authentic’ or ‘realistic’ mostly elicited positive emotions. For those informants living with higher stigma viscosity

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who could draw extensively from lived or mediated experiences of stigma, however, it was often the negative experiences that were deemed ‘authentic.’ This stands in opposition to Hirschman and Thompson (1997) who describe personalising interpretations as exclusively positive. Max, for example, ads to his above answer:

Basically, it’s funny, because, the whole series starts with this sort of break-up between two of the main characters, this guy and his boyfriend, you know, because he refuses to get married to him, because one of them has a bit sort of this internalized homophobia. Which I also think is realistic.

While, Max does not suffer from internalised homophobia himself, he can relate to not feeling entirely confident with his sexual preferences. Having only recently moved away from close engagement within the local LGBTQ⁺ community after his phase of exploration, the mediated experiences gained in the community have made him more aware of others’ struggles, influencing his judgement of authenticity.

George’s constant self-reflexive concern with his stigmatised identity is reflected in his reading of the Honey Maid ad. He is very sceptical of the gay couple, reading them as brothers or maybe son and father due to the perceived age difference. His life story shows that he struggles to accept intergenerational relationships, refusing to get involved with younger gay men. Interestingly, he did not realise that it was the same two men who appear again towards the end of the ad. While he did perceive them as gay this time around, he did not read the baby as being their child, choosing to interpret it as possibly their nephew. His refusal to interpret the baby as the gay couple’s child is again shaped by a heterosexist ideological interpretation. To him the concept of a gay family remains inconceivable, leading him to dismiss the portrayal as inauthentic.

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With regards to the Google and AirBnB ad, he still interprets both through a heterosexist ideology, but notes the way neither denies the stigma that exists in society. He perceives both to be authentic, because they confront the struggles people still face today. Unsurprisingly, thus, when watching the AirBnB ad, George wholeheartedly agrees with the sentiments the characters espouse because it validates his view of the world and confirms the fear or stigmatization that is the cause for his social isolation and ‘missed opportunities.’

The awful thing is that it hasn’t changed. Same as way back in the 60’s. Fear. Gay people live in fear, no matter where they go, be it the country, be it the city, be it in home countries or abroad. We live with an inherent fear of not being accepted in some way or another.

One of the paradoxes that emerged in informants’ assessment of authenticity, was the simultaneous experience of negative personalising- and motivational interpretations and vice versa. A number of scholars have asserted that consumers’ media experiences are more complex than traditional models show (O’Donohoe, 1997, 2001; O’Donohoe and Tynan, 1998). Jamie’s lived experience, for example, causes him to critically evaluate portrayals where “[e]veryone is fine with it, they get surgery within 6 months, they got on T within four months.” He deemed them to be “unrealistic”, while at the same time admitting that he “quite like[s] these stories, because they are quite reaffirming or whatever, I guess.” Thus, even if a portrayal is deemed unrealistic as it does not fit into the life story, it can still be positively evaluated if it provides gratification in the form of felt social acceptance.

Conversely, negative coming out stories could be evaluated as authentic, but potentially harmful due to their negative reinforcement of stigma. This is evident in

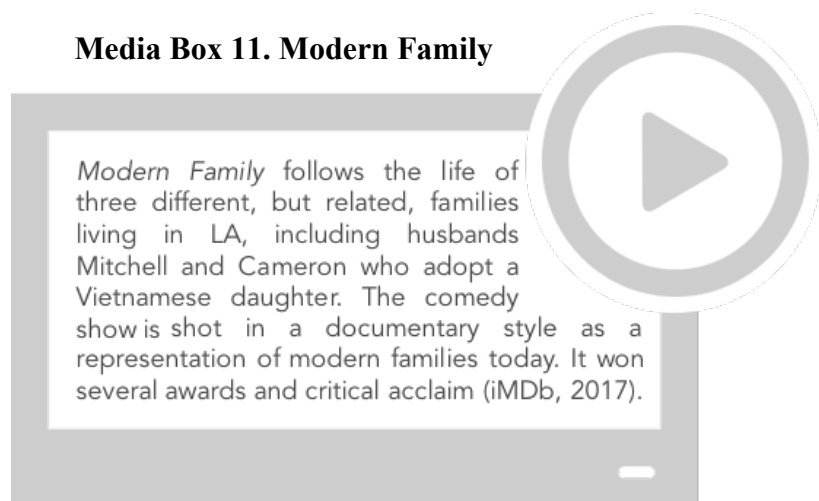
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the following interview excerpt, in which Jo talks about the TV show *Modern Family* (Media Box 11) and recounts how the whole family accepts the gay couple unconditionally, despite their stereotypical camp-ness:

If they just come out and everyone is like: ‘Oh, that’s great!’ Then it makes me just a bit sad really, because it makes me think: ‘Oh, it would be so nice if people actually reacted that way.’ But I really don’t think they do, because I don’t think anyone, ever, other than a gay person, has ever responded normally towards me being gay. ... But when everything is like really awful, I think it’s good in that it’s more realistic, but it’s bad in that it probably terrifies the life out of some people who would be lucky enough for their family to be fine about it. ... You know when you are really young, and you’ve just realised that you’re gay or something, and then you saw some kind of awful response on TV and then you think: ‘Oh my god, that’s going to happen to me!’

Media Box 11. Modern Family

Her lived experience of marginalisation makes her sceptical of overly positive coming-out media portrayals, assessing those that show the struggles of being LGBTQ⁺ as more ‘realistic.’ At the same



iMDB (2017). *Modern Family*. iMDB. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1442437/>

time, however, she considers the drawbacks of such ‘realistic’ portrayals for someone who has not yet come out. Her statement implicitly relates the experience of being terrified at an LGBTQ⁺ media portrayal back to her own experience when she was young. Thus, she uses self-referential processes to determine the worth and authenticity of portrayals (Beverland et al., 2006). This, however, creates

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ambivalence in her media experience and reaction towards it, as her lived experience stands at odds with the portrayals she believes others need to see.

While this ambivalence was greater for those who had grown up in high viscosity fields, all participants drew from mediated experiences of stigma related to moving across fields. In fact, amongst those for whom stigma viscosity was lower, portrayals which reminded them of the existence of stigma, such as the AirBnB ad, elicited the strongest emotional reactions:

OVIDIA: If you have not experienced that than you may never have thought about that, so it's a real light bulb moment of like: "Oh my god, yeah! Gay people might not be safe in other countries, oh my god, they might not be able to travel. Ah, what?" I think that's like a point of realisation, and one that just strikes very true... I remember having that moment of realisation of, like: shit!

PETER: That was good. That's a good service because that's one of the things that when we plan on going somewhere on holiday, that's something we have to think about. ... Ian's got a friend who lives in Dubai and she keeps saying, "Come over, come over and visit." I'm not going to go there because you hear horror stories. ... So that's good. Good advert.

The AirBnB ad uses sexual stigma to create an emotional connection with viewers by appealing to their awareness of different stigma viscosities across fields. The ad plays on the fears for personal safety of those whose stigma habitus is structured by lower viscosity. It temporarily 'bursts' the bubble of acceptance these informants live in, thereby eliciting a more emotional, personalizing reading, which was then translated into an evaluation of the ad as authentic. For most, then, their reading of the ad was highly positive, combined with the belief that such portrayals are necessary to educate others about the struggles some LGBTQ⁺ people face even today.

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Satisfying authenticity, however, was not only a function of individual identification. The negotiation process included considerations of other identities within the LGBTQ⁺ spectrum, using sub-cultural capital, when it existed (Kates, 2002; Tsai, 2012) Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was those who have moved most in LGBTQ⁺ fields and thereby acquired sub-cultural capital who assessed portrayals according to sub-cultural cues. This applied mainly to Boomer informants, even those who had moved away from LGBTQ⁺ fields over time. In line with their limited engagement with LGBTQ⁺ fields, most Millennials lacked the cultural competence previously shown in consumers belonging to the LGBTQ⁺ sub-culture.

George was particularly keen to show-off his insider knowledge of the gay male world, critically evaluating gay male characters against his own sub-cultural knowledge, as illustrated in his scepticism about the Honey Maid couple's sexuality:

Well they [Honey Maid couple] are very stereotypically American, clean cut, not the way that all gay men look, to be honest. They have restricted, if you like, what a gay man looks like.

He goes on to describe the different types of gay men (the “military group of gays”, the “bikers” the men “who love leather”), whom he has seen mostly on websites and who deliberately “dress differently”, adopting a “rebellious look” to express their difference:

I think a lot of gay men adopt certain types of physical attributes and styles of hair and dress to, I don't know, to establish themselves as a free thinking free man, free gay man. That advert certainly does not... that's very middle-class American. This is to please everybody.

His interpretation is again personalising, as he considers it another sign of the media's denial of homosexuals. The conservative, middle-class gay ideal represented

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in this ad as well as in many existing representations does not fit the perception he has of the gay community. His comments belie the fact that his experience of out-gay individuals stems mostly from his limited ventures into the gay scene, online dating sites, and pro-active online research where individuals generally communicate their sexuality more overtly (Holt and Griffin, 2003; Lea et al., 2015). Thus, George's mental image of a gay man does not fit the subdued heteronormativity of most existing portrayals. Through a critical sub-cultural interpretation of the HM couple, he attempts to establish his status as an authentic, knowledgeable member of the sub-culture. George's reading was thus highly critical and may be interpreted as an active attempt to affirm his precarious identity as a gay man and potentially his way of asserting his status next to myself as a Queer researcher.

Other informants did not use their sub-cultural capital in this way. Instead, they mainly drew from it to positively remark on the use of characters that are represented less often in the media. Peter, Padruig, and Adam, for example, positively note the 'bear' couple in the AirBnB ad. Despite never having been involved in the bear community, they draw from their knowledge of 'bear nights' in their respective local scenes. As Peter commented, "You've got all these subcultures in the gay world, don't you? So, you know about bears and cubs and otters, beavers.". All provided a favourable reading of these characters who were not only considered an accurate representation of bears' appearance and behaviour, but, more importantly, a rare change to the stereotypical representations.

A portrayal could thus be considered 'authentic' if it was an accurate example of, as Adam asserts, "people that you would see in the scene". Max uses a similar phrasing,

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but struggles visibly to explain his use of the word ‘authentic’:

INTERVIEWER: You’ve used the word authentic a few times now. What do you think is authentic in terms of LGBTQ⁺ portrayals for you?

MAX: I don’t know. [pause] It’s sort of an honest interpretation of who people are. I don’t know whether it matters what it is. Because I think there’s the danger that some people would say... I think within the gay male community there’s a lot of... There’s still a lot of shaming people for being what is not perceived as masculine. And I think there’s a danger in saying [changes voice to a deeper tone] – ‘Oh, authenticity might mean people who are straight acting or whatever.’ – and I hate that term. I hate it so much. But, like... Ugh... I mean just people being their... I don’t know. They are not worrying about... I don’t know. It’s so hard to pinpoint what... It just feels like... It feels more realistic, I suppose. It feels like you could meet these people. And they are not a caricature as well. ... The people I go for - I like to know that they feel comfortable around stereotypes, you know?

He ultimately settles on authenticity being an “honest interpretation” of characters whom “you could meet.” In the end, his evaluation is based on his own lived experiences within the scene. At the same time, he draws from his movements within the gay male community to lament the fact that many within it consider non-masculinity to be inauthentic. This relates to Kates’ (2002) description of the undesired identity of the “ghetto queen” that is applied to gay men who uncritically adopt sub-cultural practices, thereby becoming a personified stereotype themselves. Max, however, does not agree with this assertion. In his view, camp-ness can be authentic. More importantly, to him it is a signifier of a person’s inherent self-confidence. As his last remark above shows, this a trait he finds admirable and even attractive due to his own lingering self-consciousness.

In this sense, the critical interpretation of a stereotype could be overruled by an assessment of the stereotype as somewhat authentic in itself. Many informants, for

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example, agreed that gay men tend to be more effeminate. Their sub-cultural experiences with gay men fit the stereotypes they are used to seeing in the media. As Alice puts it, gay men have “an extra kind of way of expressing themselves as gay men.” When it came to gay characters, informants often commented on the ‘gay quality’ of a character to assess whether a character was “really” gay:

SAGE: This is going to sound really shallow, but it was something to do with the age that he was and the fact that he was in quite good nick and how he buttoned his shirt. There was just that sign. Heterosexual men of that age, maybe not so much when they’re younger, didn’t take as good care of themselves usually.

Most were not able or willing to articulate the criteria or meaning behind this ‘authentic gay quality’. Those who did, however, point to “those visual and bodily cues through which we evaluate others and think others evaluate us” (Bauman, 1988: 63): a groomed appearance and effeminateness in men, as well as more masculine traits in women. Their interpretation of a ‘gay quality’ was thus structured along the very stereotypes they previously condemned, an indication of how deeply embedded these discourses are in informants’ habitus. As illustrated in Sage’s quote, such an explanation was often qualified immediately, as participants ostensibly defended themselves against potential criticism with regards to the reduction of individuals to their appearance. This could be as a result of social desirability bias due to the presence of the researcher.

Those who identified as male, those who were born male but later transitioned, but also CC, who identifies as gender neutral, turned to statistics to illustrate and lend credit to an assessment of stereotypes being based on the truth:

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JASON: I mean the stereotype exists for a reason. Like, most stereotypes exist for the reason that there is a certain cut-off whoever, whatever group the stereotype is aimed at, who actually is like that. You know? ... So, I absolutely agree that there is definitely more effeminate gay-guys than there are effeminate heterosexual guys.

In the same manner, most male identified participants used a statistical logic to justify the lack in Queer representations in the media, espousing the belief that representations should reflect a statistical reality:

JAMIE: Yeah, [the lack of trans male representations] kind of annoys me, but it is kind of realistic, because there's something like $\frac{3}{4}$ trans women and one quarter trans man, so that's realistic.

PADRUIG: As long as the whole overall media presence is as diverse as possible I don't expect every single program to be completely 100% diverse. I do recognise that a majority of people probably are straight, so they have to be represented as well.

Jamie here relates the number of trans representations back to his own factual knowledge which allows him to accept the fact that trans men do not appear as often in the media relative to women as “more realistic.” While he does try to reflect on the veracity of these statements, his critical reflection is bound by the information he has found on the internet. This resonates with previous research that asserts that men's readings of media texts are more cognitive compared to women's affective and thus empathetic interpretations (Brown et al., 1999; Hirschman and Thompson, 1997). Notably, amongst my participants, it was not only those who were assigned a male gender at birth who were more inclined to turn to statistics as rational and ultimately ‘indexical’ cues of authenticity, even if those statistics were based on anecdotal evidence. The same could be observed for those who had moved towards an identification as male later in life.

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As reflected in his life project of ‘becoming a man’, Jamie has spent a majority of his life ‘learning’ how to ‘be a man’, how to ‘do gender’ according to socially accepted norms of masculinity by observing his peers and media representations. His whole identity is structured around the gender role he believes he must perform. Thus, it seems only natural that his media performance reflects this. In addition to his more cognitive readings, for example, he is very adamant in his rejection of anything that he considers to be “too girly” such as *The Danish Girl* but also the Aetna ad:

JAMIE: [laughs] I think if you were more of a sentimental person who likes all that fluffy stuff, you’d be like – oh, that’s so lovely – but I just find it quite boring.

This adamant rejection of what he perceives to be female targeted portrayals may signal a fear of being perceived not man ‘enough’ (Zayer et al., 2012). His media experience and thus interpretations are clearly coloured by the dichotomy of men and women (Stern, 1999), by a more essentialist identity politics in which he progressively moves away from a transgendered identity towards a point where he can be perceived as his ‘true’ identity, as 100% male.

In a related vein, CC always wanted to be “one of the boys” and has cultivated extensive male peer groups who considered her their equal, thus developing a gender expression that lies somewhat between conventional norms of gender. It may be due to the tension between these that she adds the qualifier to her more rational reading. In any case, their readings illustrate how gendered differences in media interpretation are “based on socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity” (Brown et al., 1999: 11).

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Throughout all interviews only the Starbucks ad prompted all informants to engage in a discussion surrounding sub-cultural authenticity. These readings were perhaps the clearest illustration of the distance many informants maintain to the community and the resulting lack of sub-cultural capital. Apart from George, all Boomers correctly identified the characters as drag artists, considering them an authentic representation thereof. Most immediately compared the portrayal to their own experiences of socialising with drag queens, whom they believed to be part of gay culture.

JOY: That is quite interesting because that's quite a stereotypical drag queen, isn't it? They are usually portrayed as being kind of bitchy and I know from experience, they are! [Laughs] They must end up as that persona with make-up and everything. So yeah, it's quite interesting. As long as the end result doesn't portray them as being aggressive.

PETER: That was quite funny. It owes a lot to Ru Paul and *Drag Race*, which I haven't watched much of, I must say. The one in the front, Bianca Del Rio, I've seen her before. That was quite funny. Going back to this group we were with in North Wales... [long story about spending an evening with a drag queen]

Only Sage and Peter were familiar with the reality TV show *RuPaul's Drag Race* (Media Box 12) and therefore able to identify the drag artists by name. Their reading consequently drew both from lived and mediated

Media Box 12. RuPaul's Drag Race



iMDb (2017). *RuPaul's Drag Race*. iMDb. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1353056/>

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experiences. George, on the other hand, interpreted the characters as a Lady Gaga lookalike, a cheap copy of something else and thus inauthentic: “Immediately I saw that, and I thought, ‘Ugh, somebody trying to be Lady Gaga.’ It wasn’t an individual, it was somebody pretending to be something, which immediately turned me off.” He then draws a similar intertextual reference between the ad’s characters and ‘Danny LaRue’ a British drag artist of the 50s, whom he considers a pioneer and whose bravery in performing at a time of severe oppression he admires. This cemented his reading of the ad as “not original. It was done 40, 50 years ago.” His comments show that he is not very familiar with drag queens whom he reads as “cross-dressing men” wearing copious amounts of make-up: “The only time that we can go with that is dames and pantomimes. That’s ok, because they’re not pretending to be women, they’re looking very ugly deliberately.” His interpretation again demonstrates his lack of sub-cultural capital. His reading instead draws from intertextual frames of reference more familiar to him, which allows him to “accept” the Starbucks ad without being offended by it but is “bored” by its inauthentic attempt to rehash something that in his eyes is already “passé.”

Amongst Millennials, only five considered the ad to be an authentic representation of drag queens and only Bill and Max made an intertextual reference to Ru Paul’s Drag Race. Three informants were confused about the identity of the characters, reading them as trans women or cross-dressers.

BILL: Ok, I’m totally biased because I love *Ru Paul’s Drag Race*. So, I’m totally like - Oh my god! It’s Adore and Bianca! – So, I was just like – Oh no! This is totally going to skew my perception of this whole thing – I mean obviously I’m like, if you were like, if you saw that first thing you would be like – Oh my god, so offensive! – but if you’ve watched a whole season [of

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Ru Paul's Drag Race] then you know, all right, that's literally just who they are. It's just, it's hilarious.

JO: I don't even know what to say about it. Like, well, are they trying to portray transgender people or men who are drag queens? Like, what? I have no idea what they are trying to say apart from being really offensive to the entire gay community.

The drag queen is a widely recognised symbol of Queer culture. That a third of Millennial informants confused the characters for trans women suggests a lack of sub-cultural capital amongst their generation. When asked about any lived experiences with actual drag queens, only two had any meaningful interaction throughout their life-course. In his evaluation of the ad Jamie suggests that the character's identity needs to be made more explicit to avoid such confusion. The majority had highly conflicting views about their existence, which is reflected in Elena's and Bill's assertion that "some people might find it offensive." Padruig and Lea, for example, both judged the portrayal to be authentic, but rejected the portrayal overall, a theme that will also be discussed more in depth in the following chapter.

Hence, it is important to note again that authenticity does not necessarily equate to positive emotions towards a portrayal. While Sage judges the Starbucks drag queens, which he immediately relates to RuPaul's series, to be authentic, they do not conform to his personal belief of what a drag queen should be.

I just didn't overly love it. It was a bit like... I only watched one or two episodes of it, Ru Paul's Drag Race. I just went, "Oh my god." It was just the shallowness of it all. I don't think I'm that kind of queen, I think I'm more rock and roll oriented. So, all these disco references, it's not me. That kind of still had a little bit of that. The drag was fierce, but not fierce enough. It was still making a pretence towards glamour rather than complete out and out "fuck you."

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He goes on to elaborate that while some people he knows adhere to this ‘type’ of drag queen, he himself is not “that kind of a queen.” To him, thus the portrayal is an authentic representation of drag queens based on his experience within the scene, but does not reflect his own gender-bending, revolutionary identity. He immediately reads the intended audience to be “straights” to whom the “clichés,” the stereotypes in it, would appeal as they fit their preconceived ideas of what a gay person or drag queen looks like. He describes the type of drag seen in this ad as “probably one of the least sexy things you’re ever going to see” because all the make-up hides the real person. Echoing Queer theorists’ understanding of drag, to him, “fierce” drag needs to “lift a middle finger to society.” Hence, the revolutionary potential of the portrayal has not been fulfilled. Through this negative personalising interpretation, he furthers his disidentification from mainstream queerness. Nonetheless, this does not lead to its rejection. In line with a social progress interpretation, he conceded that it “is good to see,” welcoming the possible assimilation achieved through such portrayals despite his own reservations about it.

To summarise the above, throughout the interviews participants drew on individual and group identifications to evaluate the authenticity of portrayals. As proposed by Beverland et al. (2006), this suggests that the same processes are used to assign authenticity to oneself and to LGBTQ⁺ media portrayals. Their lived experiences ultimately shape their self-authentication and media experience at the same time (Arnould and Price 2000). Consequently, those who had more extensive experiences in LGBTQ⁺ fields drew more heavily on their sub-cultural capital to assess authenticity than others, which led to some differences across the generational divide, but more distinctly across stigma viscosity. In addition, participants whose

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gendered habitus was structured fully, or partially along masculine norms were more likely to employ a rational, statistical logic to assess the authenticity of portrayals. While assessments of sub-cultural authenticity contributed to a positive evaluation of a portrayal, the overall assessment could still be negative if the representation did not resonate with individual concepts of self.

9.3. The Production of Authenticity

Informants' lived and mediated experiences were not the only factors contributing to an evaluation of authenticity. Akin to previous research, informants in this study emerged as media literate consumers (Elliott and Mark, 1995; O'Donohoe, 2001). In their readings, they would actively deconstruct a portrayal, discussing how its production design, the acting, the overall message and, in the case of the example ads, the fit between the ad and the message contributed to a feeling of authenticity. These evaluations were then used to ascertain the author's intent, judging the genuineness and sincerity of producers', advertisers' or companies' reasons for including LGBTQ⁺ individuals.

9.3.1. Using 'real' actors

Throughout the interviews, all informants discussed whether the storyline or characters in movies, shows or the example advertisements were real people "expressing real feelings" or at least "acted with sincerity" i.e. in a manner that informants considered authentic. Many expressed a clear desire to see more characters performed by actors who identify as LGBTQ⁺ in real life. While most acknowledged that homosexual characters can be played by heterosexual actors and vice versa, there was a consensus that performances would seem more authentic if

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performed by an actor who has “struggled” with their identity also in real life. This topic was particularly pronounced in discussions of trans portrayals:

JAMIE: I’d also say that I’d also quite like, I know it’s not quite wrong, because I know Neil Patrick Harris plays straight characters, so it’s not wrong to have that cross-over, but I’ve never seen – actually that’s a lie because of OITNB, but I don’t watch that show – but I’ve never seen apart from that, a character portrayed as trans played by a trans actor and I don’t understand that, because you would never have a male character... not played by a male, so why, or a black character played by a white person.

Many voiced their displeasure at this type of erasure of trans actors. Participants’ awareness was likely heightened due to the recent media coverage of what has been dubbed ‘transface’ by trans activists (Reynolds, 2015), due to films such as *The Danish Girl* (Eddie Redmayne) and *Dallas Buyers Club* (Jared Leto) (Serjeant, 2015), as well as similar considerations regarding white actors starring in media content of ethnic origin (e.g. *Ghost in the Shell*; *The Great Wall*). Nonetheless, participants generally were only able to name the most recent movie, *The Danish Girl*, when prompted for examples, perhaps due to the general invisibility of such characters, but also because they did not pro-actively search for such materials in more targeted media channels.

A judgement of characters as ‘real’ emerged as even more important for advertisements:

MAX: I don’t know whether [the couples in the Aetna ad] are just actors or whether they are... But it seemed authentic. It seemed like they had actually gotten a couple who, or couples who are real.

INTERVIEWER: They are, they are real.

MAX: Oh, they are. And I approve of that. In fact, I would be pretty pissed

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off if they weren't. And it's obviously pretty easy for them to find couples who would talk about each other fondly. But it felt, like, you know, authentic in this way.

When a character was read as a “real” person and the story was perceived as “coming from them” without being “scripted”, informants seemed more comfortable establishing an emotional connection to them. For George, for example, merely seeing a gender non-conforming individual overcome his struggles in a fictional world might already lead to a positive motivational interpretation about his own ability to do so. Perceiving the character as authentic, however, intensified these positive emotions, likely because it increases the relative possibility of him reaching the same ideal identity state, thus facilitating a motivational interpretation.

Despite this preference, however, many amongst the older generation were quick to point out that, while trans actors would be considered more authentic and better for the community, using well-known actors such as Eddie Redmayne increased the chances of the movie to “make it”, thereby growing its educational potential:

EMMA: The fact that it was released as a mainstream movie that they had a guy who was a mainstream actor play the role and play it incredibly well, none of that can do any harm, is my view.

Whereas most Millennials were adamant in their calls for real LGBTQ⁺ actors taking on LGBTQ⁺ roles, Boomers here were again espousing an assimilationist, social progress interpretation.

9.3.2. Authenticity of Everyday Nuances

As opposed to Boomers, whose media experience focused exclusively on the characters, most Millennials lamented the substandard production design of most

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LGBTQ⁺ movies and series, describing them as “corny,” “crap” and the stereotypes employed as the “easy exit” that allows producers to include LGBTQ⁺ characters without much thought about character development. Since participants expected portrayals to resort to stereotypes, those that included a well thought-out, nuanced storyline in which sexuality is not the core of a person’s identity were received much more positively and perceived more authentic:

PADRUIG: It’s the sort of things you accept, that happen, that help define straight characters. Again, minor things like do they drink coffee? Do they drink tea? Do they drink orange juice?

OVIDIA: Talking about the tiny, tiny, tiny everyday things of just being that person. So, for example, if you are a Cis-woman, then just period stains on your pants, I think that one just stuck out to me, or, like, when you see the, like the backstage stuff, that you only know in like the intimate moments with partners, or flatmates, or close friends or yourself.

Fictional characters could thus be read as authentic if their story included more nuanced aspects that focus on everyday struggles and concerns and show “the fullest spectrum of their emotional life”, creating a multifaceted character that showcases contradictions and “treats the audience like a smart, thinking group of individuals.” It was due to this preference that most participants were pleasantly surprised about the Human-Interest example ads, as they did not “insult” their intelligence (O’Donohoe, 2001: 102).

When asked about their expectations of LGBTQ⁺ characters in advertising, ads were generally described as not only too short to be able to engage with the nuances of a person’s personality, but too focused on the ‘nice,’ idealized aspects of life to be authentic. Informants shared a critical, cynical pre-disposition towards companies and advertisements (Dobscha and Ozanne, 2001; Lee et al., 2009), expecting the

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general intent behind LGBTQ⁺ inclusion to be profit-motivated (Tsai, 2012). Many described existing diversity advertising as a “tick-box exercise” that companies have to engage in to uphold their reputation, while at the same time maintaining heterosexuals as their main target group:

PADRUIG: They say, ‘Well we must have a lesbian couple, a trans couple, gay couple: tick, tick, tick, and make sure they’re all there. Can we make sure that some of them are difference races? Tick.’

BILL: The cynic in me thinks: Are people now saying – ‘Uh, we can cash in on this!’ - Which to me is kind of like, ugh, double-edged sword. Yes, it's probably good to get exposure and so forth and they get a bit of money out of it, but how do I really feel about that? It's gonna happen whether I feel good about it or not! [laughs]

This sort of representation was reminiscent of TV and movie’s traditional use of minority characters to fill a diversity “quota” and thus construed as inauthentic. The fact that the Honey Maid ad was in the format of a ‘typical’ diversity ad contributed to the market logic that participants applied to its reading and strengthened their view of the ad as pandering to the gay community to seem more diverse, which is perhaps best illustrated in Bill’s sarcastic comment that capitalism was finally allowing ‘the gays’ to eat [Honey Maid] cereal. At the same time, however, the fact that it was an ad simultaneously softened their criticism, as many conceded that due to their shortness, ads will never be able to address the full spectrum of diversity: “it was only a 15 second or whatever second advert and they cannot address every issue at every level” and therefore must resort to stereotypes: “they showed extremes for the other couples as well, so it’s not like a specific discrimination. They are doing it for everyone.” The negative reading of opportunistic tokenism was thus softened by the orthodox beliefs that advertising will never be able to truly reflect human diversity

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and must resort to stereotypes to transmit its message within given time constraints; as the proverb goes, ‘Time is Money’. It must be foreshadowed here, however, that the HM ad was the first shown to participants, and many would retrospectively adjust their reading of it.

Once participants had been shown subsequent ads in Human Interest form, these views changed perceptibly:

ELENA: I think the last one [AirBnB] is the one I liked the most, because it’s something that I have thought about a lot. In general, I think, I liked them all more or less, because of their message, the intent behind them. Because I think it’s necessary. But of course, the biscuit one [Honey Maid] is not going to leave an impression on my life. This one for example, [AirBnB] that is an ad that makes me think more. Or the Google one.

OVIDIA: You see how advertisements have become more nuanced and story like, and kind of mimic TV/Film things, even if they are still only showing positive bits and even if they are still not as nuanced, and even if they are still for the purpose of selling a product. And I think that they are getting a lot better at that, because that is what draws people into you. ... People might post that [the Google ad on social media] and be like: Oh, that’s so nice, as a piece of content, rather than... Why would you expose me to advertisements? So, I suppose it’s much cleverer advertising.

Once participants had seen all ads their thoughts and feelings about the Honey Maid and to an extent Aetna ad worsened. The possibility of Human Interest ads, an advertising form which none of my informants had been exposed to previously, challenged the orthodoxic market logic that had overshadowed their previous advertising experience. Non-HI ads were suddenly construed as scripted and thus inauthentic. For most, the Honey Maid ad had been forgotten entirely and was not mentioned once in further reflections. Most, like Elena, could not recall the brand name or product correctly, echoing research that has asserted that “advertising-

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literate consumers may choose to consume ads independently of the brands which they promote” (O’Donohoe, 2001: 98).

Informants thus experienced a clear preference for HI advertising. This was most visible in description of ads as a “lovely piece of film” or a “great story”. These utterances locate HI ads closer to the film genre than the advertising one, thereby counteracting possible anti-capitalist readings even amongst the three most cynical informants, Bill, Alice and Ovidia.

INTERVIEWER: You said a feel-good feeling. Why do you think it gave you that feeling?

ALICE: Because of the sadness of the person you identified initially as a youthful lad and the sadness of his uncle having passed away and then finding out he started off as an unhappy girl. Then taking you through the journey to the gym where he was able to feel tough and toughen his body and get more confident as the guy he always wanted to be. It was very good on quite a few levels.

Her interpretation of the ad was very much a positive, personalising one as she can identify with the struggle of becoming who one wants to be. The fact that the format was an HI ad that she could identify with diminished her cynicism substantially to the point where she believes that she would be likely to seek out the gym if she was looking to join one and would feel better about Google as a consequence: “If I was looking for a gym, I would probably say, ‘That’s the sort of place to go,’ and ‘Aren’t Google good for featuring these things?’”

For advertisements, informants were thus most positively inclined towards portrayals that were perceived to be unscripted stories of real people. For TV and film, participants’ experiences were structured by a desire for hyper-authentic stories

balancing ‘real’ mundane nuances with fiction (see e.g. Rose and Wood, 2005).

9.4. Genuineness of Authorial Intent

EMMA: The reality of life is there are always going to be people that find something offensive. It’s whether the intent was to offend, in my opinion. I think most things that I’ve seen, they do not have the intention to offend but there will always be an element of people that you will offend, regardless.

Emma’s quote reveals the last important aspect of informants’ evaluation, a theme that is already present in some of the quotes used so far in this chapter: authorial intent. This is reflected in participants’ continued use of the pronoun ‘they’ to talk about an imagined producer behind a portrayal, such as the director of a movie or series, TV broadcasters, advertisers, or the executives of the company behind an ad. Participants constantly discussed the author’s intention behind the portrayal, assessing it as either a genuine interest in bringing LGBTQ⁺ stories into the mainstream or capitalistic attempt to exploit and profit from a diversity angle, as well as providing recommendations of what the author could have done better: “They could have taken someone who is trans...” All previously mentioned elements formed part of the ultimate assessment of the portrayal author’s intent - the design of the message, the perception of actors as real, the diversity of the cast, the nuance of the story. In addition to these factors, however, participants further discussed authorial intent based on three additional elements: the amount of risk the author was perceived to have taken in choosing an explicit LGBTQ⁺ theme, pre-existing background knowledge about the author, as well as, for advertising, the fit between the message and the advertised product.

9.4.1. The Risk Factor

Throughout the interviews there was a clear consensus that first-movers were “pioneers” and “brave” for portraying LGBTQ⁺ stories despite the risk of alienating the majority of consumers. Their intention was consequently read as an attempt to further the acceptance of LGBTQ⁺ issues within society, a social progress interpretation, which allowed participants to dismiss the use of (harmless) stereotypes. Many of the female participants, for example, talked about *The L Word* in this way, describing its portrayals as exaggerated and stereotypical, but nonetheless accepted and revered because, in Elena’s words, “it was a pioneering series in this sense, one that reflected a world that had not been reflected previously.” This first-mover advantage can also be seen as one of the main drivers behind Boomers’ “one-step-at-a-time” stance with regards to the use of stereotypes in the ads shown. They reflected the lack of LGBTQ⁺-explicit advertising in the UK back to a lack of bravery in the advertising industry. As Emma states: “It’s just a shame that we’re just not brave enough here yet to do that.”

While Millennials generally expected western companies to include SGNIs in advertising, they did show sympathy for advertisers struggling “with the possibility of homophobic hostility and backlash” (Tsai, 2012: 54). Portrayals that showed the least accepted parts of the LGBTQ⁺ spectrum, as well as those aired or shot in social fields where LGBTQ⁺ individuals remain less accepted were seen as particularly courageous. This was the case, for example for the highly explicit portrayal of Jacob’s transition story in the Google ad. Many informants commented on the “graphic” nature of the portrayal due to it showing the syringe and visible scars. It was such brave and frank portrayals that many believed are necessary to further

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educate people about trans individuals' lives and journeys. Likewise, Bill read the AirBnB ad as being shot in Kansas, a field he perceived to be hostile towards LGBTQ⁺ individuals. Thus, he interpreted the connection of the ad with this location as a positive sign of bravery, challenging discrimination against trans people.

At the same time, however, there was a clear awareness that this first-mover advantage will be lost in the long run as can be seen in Max's comment about the Honey Maid ad:

Aw. That's sweet. Yeah. Cool. Sweet. I think it's one of those things where, as well, it would stand out as well, because we're still at a point where this is relatively new. So, if that was only straight couples or whatever, you wouldn't give a shit about that. [laughs]

Max acknowledges outright that the ad's singular appeal is the fact that the use of explicit LGBTQ⁺ characters in ads is still novel. Thus, he acknowledges that "the whole selling point is diversity", a tenuous point of differentiation that will vanish as soon as more companies jump on the bandwagon. The change in participants' evaluation of the HM ad after seeing other HI ads illustrates this finding further. Jason even suggested that the more portrayals move into the mainstream, the less "brave" they will become, because they will have to be more standardised to appeal to a wider range of people.

Maybe because it used to be that only brave directors and screenwriters would actually touch the topic, so they were very well aware of it and they would invest a bit more thought. And now a wider group is including this into their stories and it becomes more routine and less attention is paid to it.

The perceived risk involved in airing a portrayal was thus used as an indicator of the "gay- friendliness" of the author, so to speak, and could thus favourably affect the

media experience.

9.4.2. Political ideology

Where informants had pre-existing knowledge of the author of a particular portrayal, this knowledge was another important contributor to their overall experience of it. When it came to fiction, some gay male participants, for example, pointed to Russel T. Davies (RTD), an openly gay screenwriter and TV producer who, amongst other shows, worked on *Doctor Who*, *Queer as Folk*, as well as *Cucumber*, *Banana* and *Tofu*. Knowledge about RTD's life and work, which can be characterised as cultural capital, both within the Doctor Who sub-culture as well as amongst gay males, affected participants' experience of his work considerably. Padruig describes watching *Queer as Folk* avidly when it first aired in 1999, not because he was overly interested in the gay storyline, but because of his love of Doctor Who and his consequent admiration of RTD's work, whom he describes as a writer who liked to include "minority characters" in his scripts: "it annoyed me because when some of the TV audience feedback would drag on a person like - 'I do not see my life represented there at all.' - Yeah, well I don't necessarily expect my life to be represented. I enjoyed some connection and it was always with Russell T Davis."

Many described a similar connection to RTD, with some asserting that it was only because they understood his persona that they were able to enjoy his work:

MAX: Russell T. Davies has such a preoccupation with fucking. [laughing] When I say this, right, I mean, the way he portrayed it, was like – If people weren't into fucking they're failing at gay sex, basically. Was the way it felt was his narrative. ... I think, like, he almost shamed people for not wanting to fuck [laughs]. So, for me it was very telling about what he thinks is the pinnacle of the gay sexual experience, you know what I mean? But, you

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know, that's fine ... Yeah, it's obviously reflecting his own life. He was younger when he wrote *Queer as Folk*, and wanted to talk about that, and now that he's older he's written *Cucumber* and it reflects some of the changes that him and his friends' experience.

As can be seen in Max's statement, his experience of any of RTD's shows was always intertextual, considering his former work as well as additional knowledge about his life story. Hence, even though these series were works of fiction, informants read the storylines within them to be accurate, authentic reflections of RTD's lived experience. His involvement with a project was thus considered a sign of authenticity that had the ability of balancing out other transgressions, such as the use of stereotypes or storylines that did not resonate with informants' experiences.

Female participants, on the other hand, did not display similar background knowledge with regards to those involved in the creation of movies or series. This might be due to the general lack and lower profile of female directors and screenwriters, which some informants, like Ovidia, pointed out themselves: "you can just tell there's not enough female writers, and producers and directors to give the parts to those who would be good to do them."

Background knowledge of authorship further emerged as important when it came to advertisements, as in particular Millennials considered organisations and even brands their 'authors,' talking about them in the same manner as they did human authors. Their ad evaluations were clearly influenced by the reputation, size and perceived political affiliation of a company or brand, which contributed not only to a perception of 'gay friendliness' (Kates, 2002; Oakenfull, 2013; Tuten, 2006), but also a more general stance on equality. In the following excerpt, Bill explains why

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his experience of the Google ad was more positive than his more cynical reading of the previous ads:

I think because in a sense I can ‘let Google get away with this’ all in air-quotes, just cause, not get away with it, but I feel like they can, kind of, do that portrayal, and it seems much more honest because they have had that kind of history. ... I mean all the Silicon Valley ones... they are inherently more liberal.

His comments are illustrative of a general theme across Millennial informants whereby ‘younger’ companies, especially technological companies specialized in internet- and mobile-related services - the ‘Silicon Valley’ companies - are ahead of the curve when it comes to overall diversity. Bill reads the ad as more ‘honest’ because it comes from a Silicon Valley company. He associates these companies with intelligence and by extension with liberal ideologies of equality and progressiveness. In this sense, the company is not only assigned a personality but a whole political persona. Google is thus, in his view, inherently preoccupied with matters of free speech and equality - it is part of the fabric of the company. Therefore, their ad is seen not as mere tokenistic inclusion for a capitalistic end, but a political statement aligned with Bill’s own opinions. Max asserts that the Google ad has more honest intentions because, as a company whom

everybody knows” it has “nothing else to sell.” Therefore, it “doesn’t feel like – ‘Please, please, buy our stuff. It’s really great stuff!’ ... That makes me think Google are a nice company, and that they have a nice ethos.

Ovidia’s reaction to the AirBnB ad uses similar language to describe the same experience:

I think it’s a Silicon Valley company, and I think you can feel these kind of younger companies, uhm, that are right-on, and that are, that are fully like: we

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are in this world. We are not changing to be in this world. We are in this, accepting, like broader definition of acceptance world, make these kind of... a clever appropriation of people's experiences.

It might be that the artificial differentiation between 'older' and 'younger', 'conservative' and 'liberal' companies helps her to rationalize her positive attitude to the ad in the face of the anti-capitalistic stance she previously defended wholeheartedly. Indeed, it is ironic that some of the harshest critics of capitalism also seemed infatuated with companies like Google that are arguably the most fervent advocates of unregulated free-market capitalism.

Amongst the Boomers only Alice indicated that background knowledge about a company could change her experience of an ad. Asked what might reduce her cynicism about the capitalistic intentions behind any ad, she points to knowledge of company "founders", their intent and genuine concern for LGBTQ⁺ welfare, although she would not actively seek out such information. In general, viscosity of stigma emerged as a key factor influencing the effort that participants would make in searching for background information about a company's stance on LGBTQ⁺ issues, irrespective of generational belonging. Only Jo and George thought that seeing an ad could lead them to find out more about a company's policies.

9.4.3. Commercialisation as inauthentic

Positive evaluations of authenticity are easily eroded by perceptions of tokenism and commercialization (Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2002). This is exemplified by some participants' reactions to the AirBnB ad:

ALICE: I don't actually see how they would achieve what they are claiming to, so there is a mismatch of what they are claiming and the lead up to it.

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Unless they've got their own chain of hotels that they control and police, they can't possibly do that. How would you know as a gay couple that you haven't booked some sort of evangelical fundamentalist house? Or the neighbourhood even might be that. So it's very misleading.

MAX: I don't know what they are trying to sell here. I think the difficulty is... They are just like saying – 'Oh, hi there. We're AirBnB and we like Queers.' – Ok, cool. What are you saying then? That everybody who signs up to be an AirBnB host must be gay friendly or Queer friendly and otherwise there will be disciplinary proceedings, or you would stop that person from being on the site? How are you regulating that?

As aforementioned, this AirBnB ad uses the stigma that persists in other parts of the world to create an emotional connection with viewers. Max and Alice's comments illustrate a concern that the promises in the ad would be impossible to uphold due to the nature of the company, whereby anyone is able to rent out a room or entire flat or houses to others. Thus, the product being sold did not fit the message of the ad, casting doubts on the company's genuine intentions behind producing it.

While all informants wholeheartedly agreed with the sentiments expressed in the ad, those for whom stigma had the lowest viscosity did not voice concerns about the potentially misleading message. The negative reaction towards this message was strongest for Jo, who had only limited knowledge of the AirBnB brand. Initially positive about the ad, her opinion changed when the ad ended with the AirBnB logo and tag line: "We look forward to a world where all love is equal #hostwithpride":

I think you form a really emotional attachment to the advert, because you really relate to it and stuff, and then it just really feels like: 'Oh, you are just using me to buy... to go to your website or whatever it is.

She read the AirBnB ad as claiming to provide a safe space for LGBTQ⁺ travellers, which, in her experience, is not possible:

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I just feel like: a) they can't guarantee that and b) it's actually dangerous to imply that you could guarantee that. I mean maybe if I looked more into it they do have some kind of thing, but otherwise I'm kind of disappointed in the people in the advert for even being in the advert.

Thus, her own experience of stigma and knowledge of marginalization abroad fuels her mistrust of the claim that she will be safe by using AirBnB's services. This mistrust fuels her critical reading of the ad (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997); focusing on its commercialization aspect, she feels this "trivializes what they've just portrayed." After the interview finished, she immediately went to investigate Airbnb's policies about LGBTQ⁺ travellers and hosts. For high viscosity informants in particular, then, AirBnB's product could not deliver on the promise of safety espoused in the ad, leading to an interpretation that differed substantially from the intended meaning (Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999; Kates and Shaw-Garlock, 1999).

9.5. Summary

This chapter has shown that my participants' media experiences were predicated on both pre-conscious dispositions stemming from the habitus and conscious deliberations that are intimately tied to their perception of a portrayal's authenticity. Their lived and mediated experiences, as well as doxic beliefs about the media and advertising, formed intertextual frames of reference that influenced their subconscious tastes as well as their subsequent reflexive deliberations. Generally, portrayals deemed inauthentic were rejected. An evaluation of inauthenticity meant, first and foremost, that a portrayal did not reflect informants' lived experiences, such as those related to stigma or prevalent within particular sub-cultures. Participants were strongly averse to potentially harmful stereotypes in general, unless they had sub-cultural experiences that corroborated their veracity. Portrayals could, however,

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be perceived as inauthentic for oneself, but authentic for an ‘other’ that participants were aware of. Informants further evaluated the authenticity of portrayals in terms of the genuineness of authorial intent. This was based again on the use of potentially harmful stereotypes, but also the quality of narrative and acting, the risks behind airing these in specific social conditions, and, ultimately, the author’s identity, political affiliation, and prior work.

The chapter also shows, however, that such evaluations shift and change over the life-course, as individuals move through new fields and new experiences extend their frame of reference. One theme that has been present but not explicitly discussed throughout this chapter is the decidedly assimilationist perspective that appeared to inform many participants’ media experiences (Peñaloza, 1996; Sender, 2003; Tsai, 2012). The following chapter delves more deeply into the doxic discourses that seemed to shape their pre-conscious tastes as well as their reflexive deliberations.

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Assimilationist portrayals have been described as “expunged of explicit subcultural signifiers, decontextualized from the LGBTQ⁺ community, and rendered gender-normative or ‘straight- looking’” (Tsai, 2012: 55). Previous work has attributed the preference for such portrayals to LGBTQ⁺ consumers’ marginalised interpretive subjectivity and an incessant reflexive fear of having their sexuality “exposed” (ibid:52). The findings in this chapter provide a more nuanced picture, whereby the desire for assimilationist portrayals was driven by three main factors: fear of losing the fragile societal acceptance that has been earned; heteronormative tastes that have become embodied in the habitus; or a desire to drive inclusion and acceptance for ‘others,’ namely underrepresented LGBTQ⁺ minorities. Each motivation seemed to be shaped by the viscosity of participants’ stigma and the fields in which they moved.

The chapter first describes participants’ awareness and acceptance of the hierarchy of respectability. It then describes the three motivations in turn, focusing also on the ambivalence arising from multicultural belonging or habitus clivé, before going on to

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delineate how low stigma viscosity leads to a refusal of taste in relation to individuals not adhering to heteronormative doxa of appearance and behaviour. This phenomenon illustrates a loss of queer sensibility that ultimately leads to acts of symbolic violence amongst LGBTQ⁺ identified individuals and undermines collective transformative action.

10.1. The Hierarchy of Respectability

As previously indicated, participants displayed an implicit awareness of the hierarchy of respectability (Warner, 2000) that gives more screen time to a certain white, middle-class subset of the population who are, as Pádraig and Alice noted, “more acceptable,” “more accepted into the mainstream”:

GEORGE: They’ve [HM ad couple] got that professional look. They’ve got that ‘We’ve spent a lot of money at the dentist’ look. They’ve got that middle class ‘We earn a bit of money’ look. The way they dress as well is very conservative. It’s like, if you’re going to be gay, you still have to fit into society and not stand out as being gay.

MAX: I mean, it just looks like a very normal family. It is very heteronormative. [laughs] ... It’s very heteronormative, even though it is very inclusive. And that’s fine. I’m not going to be begrudging of that. ... There’s too much diversity in people for you to get everything right all at once and get the right proportions of things. You know, it’s tricky.

While this conservative, clean-cut, middle-class, slim ‘look’ was often, sometimes mockingly, remarked upon as ‘too perfect’, it was considered the normal standard for media portrayals by all participants apart from Ovidia and George. Readings displayed an implicit orthodoxic belief in the media as idealised and gay representations as white, middle-class, and young-adult to middle-aged (see also Tsai, 2012). This was also often related to a felt ‘Americanisation’ of the media,

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whereby American portrayals were described as generally less ‘real’ when compared to British ones. It should be noted here that only Max and Ovidia, who have both spent considerable time within the LGBTQ⁺ community as well as undertaking PhD research in Molecular Biology and Gender Studies respectively, employed more academic jargon, such as Max’s use of the term “heteronormative” above.

Despite accepting such portrayals, Millennials were also vocal in their desire to see more diverse representation of ethnicities and body types:

LEA: It seems like most commercials, especially when they are talking about families, focus on the white family. You know. White, straight couple with two kids, and so that [Honey Maid ad] was nice that not only did it have like a family with two dads, but also had an African-American family.

Their cognizance of race and body image issues is not surprising considering the media’s “issue-attention cycle” (Downs, 1972) at the time of the interviews was focused on the *Black Lives Matter* movement, following the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014 (Carney, 2016), and fourth-wave feminism (Munro, 2013) through online and social media initiatives. Nonetheless, apart from Ovidia, none of my participants criticised this heteronormativity of portrayals in terms of class, gender or disability. Ovidia’s criticism of the “safe” representation of “the white, middle-class gay men” whose only difference is the fact “that they are gay” reflected her intersectional feminist identity and rejection of “all of these horrible, horrible terms that are about assimilation and about pretending that you are heterosexual and heteronormative.”

Boomers, on the other hand, did not voice any explicit concern or critique about the lack of class, race, or age diversity in the media overall, apart from remarking

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favourably on portrayals where a character did not fit into this mould - for example the inclusion of a mixed race-family in the Honey Maid and AirBnB ads. When prompted about representations across these categories of difference, they acknowledged the lack of such representations, without engaging more critically with the topic. Instead it was explained as, in Pádraig's words, "*the way the industry works*", and dismissed through a social progress interpretation:

SAGE: No. Black and gay... no, that doesn't seem to have come out much at the moment, does it? No, you're right. One step at a time though.

PETER: I think that's just general about age. It's very ageist anyway, isn't it, the advertising industry? They are dealing with people who have money to spend.

Hence, even though this generation is aware of the hierarchy of respectability (Warner, 2002), there is a distinct sense that it must be reconfigured slowly, first assimilating those who are most acceptable and working one's way towards more 'deviant' identities. This was combined with a feeling, as noted by Emma, that media producers and advertisers are not able to do 'two things at once.' Figuring out how to incorporate sexuality is already a big ask, a big step; adding a second category of difference into the mix is too difficult or maybe too risky:

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about the way race is portrayed? In general, in the media? Like, LGBTQ⁺ portrayals that are...?

EMMA: Listen, don't give them two things to try and portray at the same time. They do get themselves awfully confused. No, no, no. They can't multitask, that's for sure. I just don't think they get it, full stop, to be honest. The media here doesn't get it. I think they could learn a lot from those adverts. We've still got a long way to go here I think.

INTERVIEWER: So, I better not even ask about class?

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EMMA: No. I just don't think they think outside the box enough. There is still this view that you have to appeal to the world's middle-class heterosexual community when you are advertising your product. That's the bottom line. ... There is still a very white middle-class heterosexual community, a hierarchy in media that still thinks that is what they have to pander to sell anything.

Emma's comments reveal the underlying market logic behind her opinion. In a sense, media producers and advertisers are absolved of responsibility as they are merely reflecting their target audience. Eventually, they will realise that as society changes, so does their market, at which point more diversity will ensue.

10.2. Fear of Losing Acceptance

This implicit acceptance of heteronormative portrayals was not the only indicator of the decidedly assimilationist perspective many of my participants espoused. Upon being asked, all, without fail, described their preferred media portrayal in a manner that can be summed up with one simple word: 'normal'.

The characters and stories they wanted to see were designated as "just like everybody else", with their sexuality not portrayed as central to their identity. For some, the desire for 'normal' portrayals was based on fear. This fear was not, however, an "incessant anxiety about being exposed" (Tsai, 2012: 52). Rather, it was a fear that stereotypical or more radical portrayals could lead to a loss of the acceptance gained over the past decade. Among those for whom stigma retained a high viscosity, their fear related to society as a whole, but for those still coming-out and those for whom stigma had liquefied but who maintained contact with others in high viscosity fields (e.g. conservative family members and peer groups), the driver appeared to be acceptance by these specific groups.

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Jo, for example, is adamant that existing portrayals prevent others from being able to “*see us like normal human beings.*” This is especially difficult for her as she describes herself as moving in mixed circles, feeling at ease both with LGBTQ⁺ and straight people:

Some gay people want to live with the rest of the world and not just be sectioned into going to gay bars and hanging out with gay people. Not... I mean I like to hang out with gay people, but I also like to hang out with straight people.

This chimes with previous studies claiming that the post-gay generation is moving away from the traditional community (Savin-Williams, 2005). Moreover, Jo’s argument is characteristic of an assimilationist discourse through which she limits her ties to this subculture and thus her social marginalization as the stigmatised ‘other’ (e.g. Tsai, 2012). She distances herself from ‘gay people’ who ostracize themselves from society, emphasizing that she lives in the ‘normal’ world and wishes to be represented as such. Her media experience displayed a constant reflexive concern about losing the acceptance that she has already gained. This assimilationist position is paramount within her media experience, which resonates with her desire to make the world a better, equal place for everyone, but also stems from her own lived experience of stigma. Unsurprisingly, the two celebrities whom she considers the best role models reflect the type of ‘normal’ LGBTQ⁺ person she wants to see. Laverne Cox, a transgender actress of colour is “a very strong woman who is going to stand up for what she believes.” Claire Boulding, commentator of the 2014 Olympics, on the other hand, is

in a committed relationship and she is quite academic, she’s an intelligent person, and she was also doing sports stuff as well. ... She is portrayed as a

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normal human being. It's really good, because it is never portrayed that way.

Both celebrities are women to whom she can relate and aspire to be like, providing a positive, motivational affirmation of the life path she is taking (Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011).

George describes his thought process in watching the Aetna ad similarly, trying to see the ad “*through the eyes of a straight person,*” how they would find no reason not to like the ‘normal looking’ couples, agreeing with everything they said, and then would be surprised at the reveal. The high stigma viscosity in Jo and George’s embodied habitus and the resulting search for acceptance in wider society appears to shape a ‘need’ for assimilationist portrayals and consequent interpretive subjectivity. For George in particular, these portrayals resonate with the practice of ‘passing’ (Goffman, 1963) that he has perfected in his years of dealing with stigma.

At the same time, however, this desire for normality causes ambivalence in Jo’s media experience. Her need to protect herself against marginalization by distancing herself from stereotypical portrayals is juxtaposed with a feeling of connection and responsibility towards others in the community who have similar experiences to hers – a feeling that can be described as an embodied *queer sensibility*. This is reflective of her struggle to reconcile her life projects of ‘being accepted’ and ‘treating everyone equally.’ While she can live in both worlds, she is acutely aware of others who are not able to avoid stigma by passing. This sensibility is experienced as a collective imperative, and leads to ambivalence as shown in her reflections on the perceived masculine attire of the actress in the Aetna ad:

I don’t know about you, but how many times I’ve been asked: who’s the

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male, who's the female? It's ridiculous, and it's rude, and I don't think people realize how offensive it is. ... But then again, they were portrayed quite nicely, and there are people who, you know, they have a more male or female role in their relationship, so it's not that I think that it's wrong.

The statement illustrates how she pulls the portrayal into her subjective lifeworld to assess the women's clothing in the ad, deeming it to be potentially stereotypical and symbolic of the gendered expectations she has struggled with all her life. However, she immediately adds a qualifier to concede that 'others' in the LGBTQ⁺ community might be in a relationship defined by clear, binary gender roles, so that the portrayal cannot be regarded as 'wrong' per se. These thoughts do not, however, translate into a wish for more radical portrayals that challenge heteronormative assumptions. Jo adds them almost as an afterthought, as a qualifier that assuages her critical interpretation and appeases her conscience.

Her reading of the drag queens in the Starbucks ad illustrates this point further. She finds drag queens to be a "tricky subject," seeing them as entertainers who have the potential to be harmful by ridiculing gender and being confused with transgender women by "heterosexual people." As discussed previously, she herself confuses one of the drag queens in the ad for an exaggerated trans woman. That reading paves the way for her critical interpretation of the ad as "really offensive to the entire gay community" prompting her to take "issue with it because I feel like it's a minority, it's a stereotype and it's damaging to people trying to be..... like, their friends."

Again, she immediately adds a qualifier, however:

[H]ow can you say really? Because you could say - 'Yes, it's a bad representation of a transgender person' - but if there are transgender people like that and they're genuinely like that, then, how can we say that's a bad representation?

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Thus, the ambivalence arises from her preferred assimilationist portrayal, juxtaposed with her queer sensibility and resulting sense of equality and recognition that more radical portrayals are needed to assimilate those who do not meet heteronormative ideals.

The same need for ‘normal’, assimilationist portrayals was displayed by those living with low stigma viscosity who previously moved in high viscosity fields. For them, however, this desire was usually coupled with specific individuals or groups. True to Lea’s life theme of *Harmony* she describes ‘normal’ portrayals as those not overly drawing attention to their sexuality or even the discrimination they face, thereby enabling characters’ harmonious assimilation:

I feel like I would like to see a show where there is an LGBTQ⁺ couple, where they don’t have to be consciously dealing with the fact that they are an LGBTQ⁺ couple. Like, they don’t have to always be talking about someone offending them, or saying something, or dealing with this, you know, issue. Like, just be a regular couple, and that not be the focus of the show. ... I really like when the ads, like when you can’t tell who they are talking about. Like, when it just portrays that love is love, you know? It’s not different because it’s two women or two men.

Having grown up in a religious household, with parents who accept her, but still struggle somewhat with her sexuality, Lea is acutely aware that portrayals that may be deemed too challenging of heteronormative ideals could offend those who are not yet comfortable with or used to seeing such images:

Yeah, I definitely think it [portraying LGBTQ⁺ characters in the media] makes a big difference, and I think for me, even if it hasn’t made as much of a difference on me, like, impact on how I view things, I think it helps people that are struggling with it being accepted. Like, my mum grew up in a time, and in the south, where you just didn’t hear about the gay community, you didn’t see it anywhere, and when you did see it, it was very stereotypical.

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Like... she thought it was all rainbows and pride parades, and stuff like that, that's the only identification with the gay community she ever saw. So, like, seeing it on TV, just kind of helps people to see how normal they are, just like everyone else, and just kind of introduces them, so they are not something that you don't see, or something that's strange, because it becomes part of the norm. And I think my mum, seeing that kind of stuff on TV, and seeing loving couples on TV has actually helped her to be able to see me more easily.

When Lea first came out, her mother asked her: "you're not going to start going to Pride all the time, are you?" This question exemplifies her parents' fear of the stereotypical, radically different aspects of the LGBTQ⁺ community that have subsequently shaped Lea's habitus. It is not difficult to see that her habitus and in particular her life project of being a good daughter and being accepted by her family influences her tastes and thus the types of portrayals she favours: 'normal' portrayals of characters that may 'pass' as straight based on their gendered behaviour and appearance, such as the Femme in the Aetna advert:

You looked at her and people would probably just assume she was a straight woman, you know. She looked like she could be a soccer mum.

Similarly, when asked about what type of portrayal she would use in an LGBTQ⁺-specific ad, she described a Femme woman who "has long hair and is feminine in a lot of ways, but also a strong character you know, and likes sports, but also likes theatre, and like. You know is a good actual mix of just normal." Throughout the interview, thus, Lea rejected portrayals she deemed too radical. It was only when actively prompted to describe the characters she refused that she reflected on this refusal:

It's not that other ones I don't like to see, because they also represent real people, like, there are, you know, lesbians out there that are butch, and that

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kind of stuff, there is that type of person that is out there, it's just... I don't like when that's all that you see.

Lea's defensive reaction to the question and immediate qualifier may be due to an emerging queer sensibility as a result of her relationship to Jo. It may also, however, be interpreted as an attempt to deflect a felt criticism of her rejection of large parts of the LGBTQ⁺ spectrum and thus as a form of social desirability bias, given the prominence of certain social movements and discourses calling for greater equality. In any case, Lea's general stance is best captured with this quote: "It's nice, you know, to be represented, ... but they don't have to also say 'gay-friendly' or have a rainbow flag out somewhere to advertise it." Representation is good, as long as it is not exaggerated or highlighted - as long as it fits into the heteronormative tastes acceptable to her habitus and does not sacrifice social capital through the alienation of her friends and family at home.

CC's reaction is very similar to Lea's: "Just don't label them even. Just like, make it don't ever mention that they are gay. Have it as if it was a straight couple. And the same would go for like gay men or trans people." Her preference for queer inclusion would be a 'normal' portrayal, where no importance is placed on sexuality. For this reason, she exhibited very positive reactions to the ads she saw:

[Honey Maid] [laughing] That's so funny! I thought it was good. I thought it was, especially at the beginning, pretty seamless - you know, it was really, like, how I was saying before, they just portrayed the gay family the same way as the other families. And then at the end when it was like - 'For every wholesome family - and they were just right there, like - We're gay and we're wholesome. Hah! - [laughs]"

[Aetna] [laughing] I thought that one was great. I liked that one. ... To someone really conservative it would humanize gay love in a way, because,

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you know, they talk about how much they love this person, and the person watching thinks they are talking about a man and a woman [starts whispering] and then: It's the opposite! [mock shocked expression] That's like, it's the same, it's love, it's great, it's happy

Throughout the interview she uses similar terminology of 'the conservatives' for her parents, the town she grew up in and as a general membership categorisation device that emphasizes her distance and difference to this 'other'. Having grown up in a very conservative family and neighbourhood "not conducive to a gay upbringing," it is not a stretch to link her approval of heteronormative portrayals for the purpose of education to her desire for acceptance at home. Her habitus is split between her upper-middle class religious upbringing and her non-conforming gender identity and peer group. She recounts the negative emotions she has seen her mother display when watching lesbian characters on television:

I think I mentioned this before, there was this lesbian couple on *Grey's Anatomy* - I used to watch *Grey's Anatomy* all the time with my Mum, and she would, like, shut her eyes whenever they were on screen, so that was not good.

Thus, while she herself cannot relate to the conservative portrayals, she is positively disposed towards them because they help further acceptance, particularly amongst those living in the conservative middle-upper class environment in which she grew up:

People who think gay people are bad, or gross or something weird, they need to know that it's good and positive and really no different from straight love or a straight way of being. Not different in any negative way at least. ... It's a matter of nurturing acceptance through this exposure.

In the same vein, Alice contrasts Caitlin Jenner's very public persona and inconsistent backing of trans rights to Stephanie Hirst, UK radio and TV presenter,

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whom she describes as more “normal” because she “hasn’t been in people’s faces about transition, ... has been very much a flag bearer for trans people but in a very positive and low key, more mainstream sort of way” and “because she’s more accessible. She just comes across as very nice and reasonable rather than kind of disconnected from people.” Whilst Caitlin Jenner embodies an undesired self (Hogg and Bannister, 2001), Hirst’s persona is congruent with Alice’s self-concept. Hirst is thus not so much a role model, but a validation of Alice’s chosen transition “strategy”, reflecting the way she is dealing with coming-out to her colleagues “explaining things to them so it won’t be such a big shock.” Just like the others, she prefers normal portrayals due to her own preferences, as well as a consideration of others around her.

I think that’s a problem [with radical portrayals] because it’s the relatives and friends of the trans person who are more likely to be affected by those things than the trans person themselves. Hearing something negative in the press isn’t necessarily... it can be depressing I suppose, but it’s unlikely to change their path, isn’t it? Whereas it could make it quite difficult for acceptance from a relative if there is too many negative things. So, I think it can sway those kind of significant others and relatives that you would sort of like to be along with you on the journey who might hesitate otherwise.

As this excerpt shows, her refusal of radical or negative portrayals stems from a concern about how it may impact others, particularly (in line with her life project of being a good parent) her children. If anything, she herself feels indifferent to radical or negative portrayals, a stance that again emphasises her lack of queer sensibility. She does not feel threatened by such portrayals because she feels secure in her identity thanks to the low viscosity of her stigma. Rather, it is the prospect of the potential negative effects of such portrayals on those close to her that drive her

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refusal of these.

Most studies to date would describe these experiences as “a coping mechanism for obliterating stigma” (Tsai, 2012: 56). Coping, however, implies an agent who actively attempts to manage and overcome a negative experience. It is defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984, in Hamilton, 2012: 76). Participants’ refusal of radical portrayals was not presented as a conscious decision, however. Rather, their behaviour can be described as reflecting status anxiety. Both Lea and CC’s habitus remains structured by the higher stigma viscosity in the fields they grew up in and are thus pre-disposed, both consciously and unconsciously, to practices that will help them be accepted as ‘normal’ members of their respective family and peer groups.

10.3. Heteronormative Tastes

As discussed earlier, rapid changes in society and the consequent lack of exposure to the Queer field have led to sexuality losing its place as the most salient part of the identity project for many participants (Formby, 2012; Visconti, 2012). Thus, for low viscosity participants in this study, preference for portrayals that normalise LGBTQ⁺ individuals was not a consciously chosen strategy to counteract stigma at home. Their preferences were based on their habitus, and their tastes developed from their upbringing in fields that had a higher viscosity but nonetheless accepted them (see e.g. Marchia, 2015; Plummer, 2015; Savin-Williams, 2005). Most described themselves as living a “normal”, “ordinary” life, using assimilationist language, and this is what they wanted to see reflected in the media:

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MAX: *Banana* featured a trans actor, but the story wasn't about a trans thing. It was about them being a boyfriend who was, like, jealous and then posted pictures of them online... It was a story a story that happened to be about an LGBTQ+ character. Rather than like – this is about gay!

PETER: There has been progress. It's good to see more people portrayed. But like I said, I wish that the characters... being gay is part of the story, you see what I mean? Rather than just being gay and getting on with stuff.

Peter's utterance "being gay is just part of the story" and Max's "happened to be about LGBT" were common across the majority of interviews and applied both to media portrayals and to participants' life stories. For those participants who did not move extensively in Queer circles and those for whom stigma had a low viscosity, media characters whose lives revolved around their sexuality and the discrimination arising from this were rejected as incongruent with their self-concepts. The best stories, it seemed, were those that not only felt real and were well produced, but also those in which gayness was not salient. In terms of advertising, this led to suspicion about ads revolving around LGBTQ+ themes. If an ad exclusively portrayed LGBTQ+ characters, participants would often assess whether the product had any relevance for the community:

ELENA: To be honest I found it a bit weird that it's for a life insurance company. I don't know why. ... Maybe because I expected - since it's an ad that is centred on two homosexual couples I thought it would be something more for the community, that's why I found it weird.

In this quote, Elena talks about the Aetna ad. While she liked the overall portrayal, she is confused about why the ad showed only gay couples. This confusion is echoed by others. Bill for example exclaims "life insurance – tenuous link. I'll accept it." Like Elena, most felt that an ad for a product that interests the general population should not restrict itself to portrayals of only one small group. Informants did not

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expect, nor want an ad to be focused only on gay characters unless the advertised product had a clear and obvious benefit for the LGBTQ⁺ community. This further suggests that for those whose habitus is not structured by Queer fields, gay window- and diversity advertising are preferred to out-of-closet styles as a less confrontational way to maintain societal acceptance. This finding resonates with those of Tsai (2012), but not of others who have suggested that gay individuals like explicit imagery as much (Oakenfull, 2005) or even more (Dotson et al., 2009) than implicit portrayals.

For informants like Lea, moving in LGBTQ⁺ fields, this preference for less explicit and refusal of more radical, gender-bending imagery was a catalyst for ambivalence, with many qualifying their media experience by implying that in reality radical portrayals are not “that bad” *when* considering the diversity of the community. As O’Donohoe (2001:94) states, “multiple loyalties, conflicts and pressures can arise from different social roles, relationships and statuses.” Through their engagement with Queer fields, even if limited, these participants developed a queer sensibility. Theirs was thus a divided habitus, *habitus clivé*, causing ambivalence in their media experience. Bill’s qualifying statement about his rejection of overly camp gay male portrayals shows as much:

But then it makes me think – if that actor who plays that character is like that, then it’s like, is that really a stereotype or... It’s like the chicken and the egg. Which came first? So that’s, I feel like that plays a part as well. Like is it a cultural identifier, or were they really born like that?

Bill is talking about effeminate gay male characters whom he initially rejected vehemently. At the same time, however, he muses about the possibility that gay men

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actually are “like that” – a question of nature vs nurture. He has not decided for himself which he believes to be true, but the possibility that homosexuality may have a biological link to gender-bending behaviour causes him to qualify his rejection.

While some participants displayed similar concerns about whether stereotypical or radical portrayals may be an authentic representation of a real person, this queer sensibility was not, however, the norm. Jamie uses the phrase “happens to be trans” to describe his preferred type of portrayal several times during the interview. For example, referring to the Google ad, he commented: “I liked that it seemed, like, that it was just a fairly normal advert for City Gym, but the guy just happened to be trans.” This preference, however, is mostly driven by his tastes, rather than his marginalised subjectivity. His media preference in general is directed more towards the genre of fantasy, using it as a form of escapism from the real world and its troubles. He is more inclined towards characters retaining a shred of possibility and stories about everyday guys who become heroes, like Iron Man and Batman, as opposed to his brother’s pick of Superman: “I’m like: But he’s an alien, so he’s not really... You can’t ever be Superman.” Throughout the interview, Jamie thus stressed several times that he finds ‘real life’ stories “boring” and “not too exciting,” “because I’m like: That could be happening right now.” This applies even to trans portrayals: “[A] lot of people they recommend books to me because it’s trans or gay or something, but to me it’s kind of boring as well, because it’s like: well, I already know... This is literally my life (laughs).” His preferences, his tastes when it comes to the media and what constitutes a ‘normal’ portrayal for him are thus not necessarily related to his sexuality or gender identity:

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I just want it to be the kind of film that I would watch. Like, *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, or *Iron Man* or something, but one of the characters happens to be trans and they live this exciting life.

His life story suggests that this heteronormative taste may have developed due to his upbringing in a more conservative, religious household. Nonetheless, despite his parents' own views, they accepted their son and he has received much support from them and their church congregation. His dislike of the few LGBTQ⁺ groups he has visited indicate his disposition to prefer things that fit into a conservative world view in which he is just another "guy." As he says of himself: "I much prefer to watch YouTube videos on fashion than on transgender issues." His preferences differ from those of Lea and CC, who were very concerned about approval from conservative family and peers, because he does not evoke the imaginary audience of his parents in expressing his desires. Whereas their media experience was structured both by their tastes and the fear of losing acceptance at home, his is structured entirely by his heteronormative tastes. Moreover, his media experience is not characterised by the same ambivalence as that of others. He does not display the same queer sensibility through a vocal fight for the inclusion of others. There is no ambivalence in his assessment of assimilationist or radical portrayals. He prefers portrayals that reflect the essentialist gender binary he himself desperately wishes to adhere to. Consequently, he dislikes more radical portrayals that challenge gender norms.

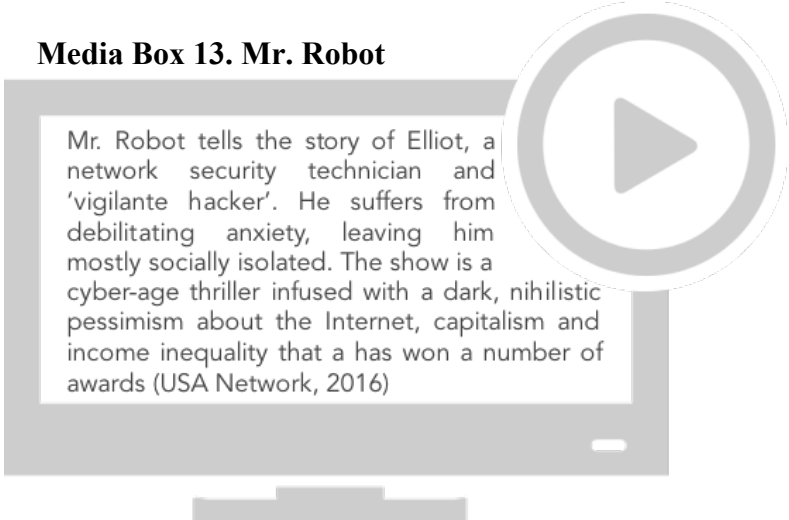
The importance of individual tastes over marginalised interpretive subjectivity in shaping participants' media experiences was not restricted to those living with low stigma viscosity, however. It also manifested itself as a result of a higher stigma viscosity but limited contact with the queer sub-cultural fields. In Bill's media

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experience, this is expressed through strong negative affect towards any type of LGBTQ⁺ portrayal that was not supremely ‘normal’, but also in his nonchalant indifference that was mentioned before. Bill only remembered two instances of representations that he liked, precisely because sexuality was not at the centre of these characters’ stories, allowing for more complex personality traits in line with his preference for ‘dark’ storylines. One of the greatest influences on Bill’s media experience is his pessimism, paired with his sarcastic humour and anti-capitalist mentality. He loves shows that include “dark, black humour and kind of like, shows where you hate the main character.”

He seems to favour characters that mirror his own cynical pessimism, such as the character Elliot Anderson from the Amazon series *Mr. Robot* (Media Box 13). He incorporates a number of Bill’s personality traits,

Media Box 13. Mr. Robot



Mr. Robot tells the story of Elliot, a network security technician and ‘vigilante hacker’. He suffers from debilitating anxiety, leaving him mostly socially isolated. The show is a cyber-age thriller infused with a dark, nihilistic pessimism about the Internet, capitalism and income inequality that has won a number of awards (USA Network, 2016)

USA Network (2016) *Mr. Robot* Cast - Rami Malek as Elliot Alderson. *USA Network Website*. Retrieved from: <http://www.usanetwork.com/mrrobot/cast/elliott-alderson>

including his anti-consumerist and anti-establishment spirit, his drive to help others, as well as, to an extent, his anxiety and ‘loner’ attitude (Stanley, 2015). Bill similarly described David, a gay character from the TV show *Six Feet Under*, whom he liked due to his “conflicted” nature and “mad self-kind-of-hatred and neurosis”. He discursively positions these attributes as the reason why he felt positively about this portrayal - not the character’s sexuality. In fact, to him this portrayal seemed more

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normal because sexuality was only “rarely” the focus point.

His aforementioned indifference towards a character’s sexuality mirrors the fact that he himself has never seen sexuality as central to his identity, nor has he ever felt the need to immerse himself in LGBTQ⁺ culture or social settings, fuelling his strong assimilationist preference and taste:

I feel like the more you draw attention to the fact, it becomes more about - that is them - rather than that’s just a part of who they are. I feel like that’s what accelerates or accentuates these stereotypes. Once that’s made to be the focus, then that’s it. That’s all the viewer cares about - ‘Oh, ok that’s the gay character.’

While he does not make an explicit reference to himself at this point, one can see the implicit connection - he cannot relate to others for whom sexuality is the be-all and end-all and does not want to be associated with them. Nonetheless, his media experience is more complicated due to his *habitus clivé*, structured by a culture ripe with anti-gay sentiments and lack of immersion in LGBTQ⁺ culture. This is painfully evident in his immediate reaction to the first ad shown [Honey Maid]:

I feel... Like, if I am being brutally honest I found this one awful, but some part of me, I don't know... Some part of me... If I see two men, like, I still feel horribly uncomfortable and I don't know why. I don't know whether that's an internal... I don't think it's homophobia. I just... You don't see it, you don't.... You're not used to it, so it's like - Uh, ok. What's happening? But I hate it, I hate that I feel like that. ... I mean, it's just. If you've had 18 years of that not being shown to you, and it's now suddenly [rocket noise and hand gesture upwards]. I think it has, it's just been - Nothing - and then - full on family! And - [gesturing towards an imaginary audience] ‘Oh, what do you mean? It's always been like this! - No, no it fucking hasn't. It hasn't fucking been like this at all...’ And it makes me kind of angry. And it's... How I am getting all of this from a 30 second wholesome video? I don't know? Suddenly I am really annoyed [laughing]”

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He experiences a strong negative affect for this portrayal - a non-conscious, physical reaction, a disposition that highlights his deeply embodied habitus and the doxa of the fields in which he grew up. His own reaction causes him to experience an internal struggle, which he manages to assuage by explaining that it has nothing to do with the ad per se, and more with the unfamiliar nature of this type of imagery. Once he had overcome this initial 'shock,' his reaction to subsequent ads quickly reverted to his anti-capitalist, critical self that felt indifference or dislike towards portrayals:

It [Aetna ad] was nice [question mark intonation] I mean, the big double door reveal was just kind of like, hammer and nail, well, like sledgehammer and really tiny nail. - Yeah, we're getting the point!

In context of his initial reaction to the Honey Maid ad his subsequent critique of the other ads, which most other participants described as nice and subtle, appears in a new light. Despite classifying the ad as 'nice,' his sarcastic comment emphasises the extent of the assimilationist type of representation needed for Bill to feel comfortable. His preference is for portrayals that are rarely about sexuality at all. In moving away from Northern Ireland, he has left a high stigma viscosity field and managed to liquefy his stigma habitus somewhat, slowly changing the durable dispositions that cause the negative affect displayed here. This process of overcoming his negative disposition towards homosexuality, however, is a slow and precarious one and his learned doxic attitudes can be prompted by explicit gay portrayals, such as the two gay dads with a baby in the HM ad, amplifying his distaste for non-conforming portrayals. As Bourdieu (2000: 161) argues, "dispositions are subject to a kind of permanent revision, but one which is never radical, because it works on the basis of the premises established in the previous

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states”. Bill’s movement to a low viscosity field allows him to become aware of his own disposition, essentially transforming the naturalised doxic relations of his childhood into orthodoxic ones. It is this reflexive awareness about where his distaste for portrayals comes from that invokes the internal struggle displayed here. At the same time, it is also palpable in his deliberation on his initial positive reaction to the Starbucks ad:

I personally think drag queens are hilarious, if done in a very kind of... in the framework that I think I’ve decided is acceptable, but not in a... acceptable is not the right word. [pause] I don’t know, I feel like people might see the danger that, maybe people will think that all gay people are like that, but I just think that being gay I just know that’s not the case, but then there is a risk... [long pause] ... I think any sort of intelligent person can recognize the difference between drag queens and people who are like, people who identify as male or female but maybe chose to dress... I mean people are smart.

He uses an intertextual reference to a news article he had read about drag queen being banned from a Scottish Pride event and the ensuing controversy to illustrate his opinion. The more he thinks about them, however, the more he falls into a zone of ambivalence where he entertains the possibility that drag queens may be conflated with gay men. His love for satire and dark humour is juxtaposed with his adverse reaction to radical portrayals of gay men. He only manages to resolve that tension by convincing himself that anybody who would make such a mistake cannot be very intelligent.

As Bourdieu (1998: 9) writes, “being inscribed in the space in question, he or she is not indifferent and is endowed with categories of perception, with classificatory schemata, with a certain taste, which permits her to make differences, to discern, to distinguish” in this case between that which is not normal - too queer, too different,

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too radical - and what is normal. These tastes are thus part of an orthodoxic discourse, a pre-conscious feel for what is acceptable or not within certain fields, borne out of an awareness of the possibility of differences, rather than a strategic decision to manage their stigma. This is further illustrated in this quote from Max's media interview in which he designates the couples in the Aetna ad as a heteronormative looking family:

It's very heteronormative, even though it is very inclusive. And that's fine. ... I think some people are still, you know, this sort of heteronormalizing of the gay community, they feel like they have been appropriated by it [laughs]. I don't know whether I believe that to be honest. Maybe some people just want this and they don't really need to explain to you why they want it. You know what I mean? And they don't owe it to any community to be a certain way. They are just human beings. I don't think... I guess that's why I have a hard time with anyone speaking for a particular community.

Max shows a clear awareness of the gendered doxa at work in the fields he moves in. LGBTQ⁺ people who argue for the "heteronormalizing of the gay community", he argues, are "just human beings" who "want this" and should not need to explain themselves because this is who they are. His utterances refute the heterodoxic standpoint of Queer theorists that condemn heteronormativity, instead advocating an orthodoxic view that uses assimilationist language and is enabled through the gay liberation discourse of being 'born this way.'

10.4. Assimilating the 'Other'

Lastly, some participants advocated inclusion of LGBTQ⁺ characters in the media as 'normal' not in a heteronormative sense, but rather as a way to include those identities within the LGBTQ⁺ acronym that have received the least attention to date. Here it is important to distinguish between participants' general wish to increase the

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visibility of minorities such as trans and African-American individuals who nevertheless can still adhere to heteronormative standards of appearance and the radical ‘other’, the “weird and dodgy” people, as Ovidia describes them, who relentlessly bend the norms of sexuality and gender. The use of the normalising discourse as a way of including these parts of the LGBTQ⁺ spectrum could be observed in particular for those participants who moved most in fields structured by heterodoxic relations who consequently were more politically conscious, such as Ovidia and Sage, as well as to some extent CC.

When asked about what type of LGBTQ⁺ character he would introduce if he had the chance to create one, Sage uses the same phrases as other participants:

I would put somebody who is just getting on with it where it’s not the central issue, where they’re not unhappy with it at any point. It doesn’t need to be raised that they’re gay at any point. People don’t sit around and discuss being gay but they have those relationships. They do it in films, they do it in TV series. It’s very rarely ever just taken at face value like it is for heterosexuals. So, I would put it in there and not mention it. That would be a step forward, where it doesn’t need some point for the gay relationship to be an issue, to be just as normal as any other relationship.

He talks about a point where gay characters are introduced as ‘normal’ as ‘just like anybody else’. His desire is born out of his habitus and the low viscosity of his stigma, out of the resilience gained through his wider social network, as well as the cultural capital accrued within the anti-establishment, non-conforming punk- and rock-and-roll sub-cultures, which he describes as his “stronger shell” that allows him to not care about what people think. This is visible in particular in his initial experience of the AirBnB ad:

SAGE: AirBnB. That was advertising, yes. That was a good advert. What I

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don't understand is why they all are still that bothered about what people think.

INTERVIEWER: What, do you mean, sorry?

SAGE: I just don't understand why they all seem really concerned about what people think. I think if you present something as normal, it will generally be accepted as normal. But maybe that's just me. My attitude has always been like, 'love it or shove it baby.' I'm a bit harsher that way, I mean I'm a bit more stronger shell.

He interpreted the message of the ad through the lens of these sub-cultural ideologies as one of overcoming one's fears and being true to oneself:

Just go and do what you want, where you want, with who you want and get over these... I think the message is get over this. Get over these things that hold you back from being yourself. I just find it really hard, that people just still in this day and age struggle to come out and be who they are. Fair enough I guess, some people haven't quite decided, which, not everybody does straight away, whether they want to make that commitment.

Thus, his interpretation is a personalising one, but a negative one - not in the sense that he dislikes it, or that it would be an undesirable self. He understands that there are people out there who adhere to a heteronormative lifestyle, but, having always moved in minority sub-cultural fields, he does not identify with them. His interpretation of the Honey Maid ad is a combination of assimilation and radical perspectives:

The gay wholesome... [chuckles] I was talking about this to someone last night when we were at band practice. I said something about, 'Oh gay people are becoming so dull since they were allowed to get married.' Where's the revolution now? They're not doing it. They've got nothing to fight. They've been given a little and I feel like they've rolled over too quickly for all the years of shit that they had. I get it. ... I always thought that was one of the best things about being gay was you didn't have to have that lifestyle. That option wasn't really available to you so that was sort of really exciting.

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His sexuality is inextricably linked to his Queerness, his gender expression, his being different from everybody else. This afforded him the possibility of breaking out of the mould set by society, to be free to live life as he chose to. He laments the fact that today many gay people seem to want a heteronormative lifestyle, something he would never chose for himself. Notably, he talks about ‘gay people’ in the third person, as a group he is not affiliated with, as the ‘other.’ He describes them as

...the happy hetties because they were living the heterosexual lifestyle without being heterosexual. And they’ve got matching outfits and they dressed the kids the same. I do know people who have done it and yeah that’s fine if that makes them happy. It’s not for me. I’m still out there partying.

Thus, while he can see why the Honey Maid ad might resonate with the ‘happy hetties,’ to himself the characters within it represent an undesirable self (Hogg and Bannister, 2001). In a sense, Sage perfectly encapsulated the de-essentialisation espoused by Queer theorists: “I try not to assign a comment [label] to anything.” He does not adhere to any labels or essentialist notions of identity. By asking for such a de-essentialised approach to be taken in the media, however, the discourse becomes an assimilation discourse interested in portraying the ‘weird’ as “normal:”

[*Dallas Buyers Club*] it didn’t really focus on the weirdness aspect. It was a normal character, just getting on with his own thing. You know what I mean? It wasn’t ever explained that’s what he was, he just was there, take it or leave it.

As he describes above, he feels that the emphasis that is put on gayness in films is not a reflection of real life. Assimilation here is not about using heteronormative couples, it’s about including any form of character, even more radical ones, in a way that includes them, resonating with his own values of individual freedom and letting everybody live their own life. While Sage’s tastes are framed by non-conformist

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identity politics, he is content to let the ‘happy hetties’ live their assimilationist life, which bemuses him, but of which he is not overly critical.

In contrast to this stance, Ovidia’s media experience has been highly political. Her comments about stereotypical representations show that she is very aware and critical of the hierarchy of respectability and the negative effects associated with heteronormative portrayals. She interprets the Aetna ad as challenging heteronormative assumptions, leading to a positive evaluation:

Very clever guys! I mean that’s a lot nicer because it plays on the audiences’ assumptions of heteronormativity. So, even if I generally have an issue with ads where I’m like: Stop trying to sell me things I don’t want! [laughs] Like: No capitalism! No! ... Anyways, but, I like that one a lot more, because the whole point of it is like: "Oh, you know how you assume everyone is heterosexual? They’re not! [laughs] And I think that’s a good thing, I think it’s good to, sort of, trick the audience like that, because it highlights heteronormativity.

She sees the ad as intending to educate the audience by ‘revealing’ the doxa inherent in what she expects their media interpretation to be. Despite her vocal critique of heteronormative portrayals, she herself also uses a ‘normalising’ discourse to talk about a necessary move towards the inclusion of more radical, non-heteronormative individuals - of “the weird and the dodgy” that more closely resemble her lived experiences and which she consequently considers to be more “real” representation.

Out of all informants, thus, her queer sensibility was highest:

My kind of people. People who are [pause]... There just has to be certain element of - if you are out like that, like, not giving a fuck, which I really respect. And I think that, kind of, rejection and/or inability to assimilate to the system ... I just feel like these are the people I am friendly with in real life, this feels like a better representation of the kind of people who I want to listen to and spend time with.

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The way she describes her “kind of people” makes it clear that she sees them as those who connect her to her life project of ‘learning to be confident in and true to herself.’ Her reading, however, illustrates the paradox in her media experience, a simultaneous desire for these identities to reject the system and be acknowledged by it as ‘normal.’ She describes radical portrayals as an important learning experience for others and for herself, a motivational interpretation that relates to both her life projects of ‘becoming an academic’ and ‘asserting herself.’ She sees assimilation portrayals as harmful because she feels that her in-group is excluded by them and wishes for more radical portrayals that allow her and others like her to be accepted in society.

Due to the feminist heterodoxa underpinning her identity, her media readings are decidedly critical. They are often structured around an assessment of the inclusion or absence of the most prominent categories of difference: race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and leanness. At the same time, however, her queer sensibility causes ambivalence due to the juxtaposition of her own preference for radical portrayals with the knowledge of the benefits of assimilation portrayals as a first step towards acceptance for “bigoted” people and those questioning their sexuality or gender identity:

I’m uncomfortable with it even though I am also like: Thank you for actually representing more people.’ It’s that dual competing thing of like, in representing more people, more people probably see it for the visibility, as helping change opinions, but in the same sense, that’s an assimilation route which is always going to hurt other huge amounts of people, and I don’t want to forget them/us.

Here she expresses the ambivalence and tension she feels towards assimilationist

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portrayals as simultaneously beneficial and harmful, both for SGNIs (us), as well as other minorities (them). In a description of the characters in *OITNB*, given at a different point during the interviews, she is very positive about the characters' diversity in terms of ethnicity and gender performance, while at the same time critically remarking on the heteronormativity of the protagonist who is "the nice white lady, who's like middle-class, so, you know, the middle-class can empathise with her, because it's so sad that she went to jail, but everybody else, well, they were always going to go to jail!" This ambivalence between acknowledgement and rejection of assimilation portrayals is further present in her readings of the ads, which were all structured in a similar fashion: an acknowledgment of the representation of LGBTQ⁺ characters is followed by a critique of its white, middle-class, heteronormativity, creating tension between motivational and critical interpretations:

I think great. Great, you are representing gay couples - but in an assimilation way. Which like: You know the way we used to think gay people were weird, and not wholesome, and deviant? Now they are not! Because they can pretend to be a heteronormative family, too! And I think, like, I think that is important [sighs]. Is it though? [sighs] I don't know...

Her ideological beliefs, coupled with her lived experiences, provide her with a number of interpretive positions that allow her to contemplate opposing values and beliefs simultaneously. Both her 'self' and her 'social self' are split and in tension with each other. Her academic self, her queer and feminist identity, demand to be constantly present which stands in opposition to her wish for romantic love and enjoyment of life. This is illustrated by her account of going to the theatre to watch a romantic play with one of her queer friends in the foregoing chapter. Despite actively trying to bracket the critique at the time, her enjoyment of the theatre play on its own

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terms is hampered by having a critical friend beside her: the constant need to work on her ideal self and ideal social self, namely her life project of ‘learning to be confident in herself’ in relation to ‘being an academic’ are exhausting. Constantly dissecting the media from the standpoint of a feminist is draining because the media are such a pervasive force in our everyday lives.

Both Sage and Ovidia thus use the same ‘normalising’ discourse as other participants, but include a wider range of people who should, in future, fall into the range of what is considered ‘normal.’

Interestingly, over the course of the interview, CC moved closer towards this group the more she reflected on her own media experience:

It would be interesting to see ads like this include people who look different, like. I mean, I was saying include gay family seamlessly into a straight-ish ad, but it would be interesting if they were, like, dressed really flamboyantly, or just something so that people could see it and know that even though they look different it’s still normal. Because you can almost not tell, like, [the character in the Honey Maid ad] could be his brother. Because at least in my experience, a lot of people - they don’t care if you are gay, they just care if you look gay, so - I think it’s good to also combat that, that looking gay doesn’t matter either. Yeah.

This is an inherent ambivalence in CCs media experience that reflects her life project - deciding on a life path. She is stuck between what she believes she should do, following the path to conformity set out for her by society and her parents, or following her heart and the call for non-conformity. Thus, her initial interpretation of the ad is based on her innate need to feel accepted, in particular by her parents. If she is given time to deliberate, however, she voices her desire for a different kind of life - thus her experience here reflects her ideal self and emerging queer sensibility due to

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her on-going involvement with the community. Both are motivational interpretations, but both take her to directly opposed conclusions. She tries to counteract this by distancing herself from being the target audience of the portrayal:

This is one of those ads that, like, I think aim towards people who need gay people to be normal. Which I mean has - I think it would have a good outcome, but yeah, as I was saying. I think ads and just the portrayal of gay people in general needs to be more like - not normal is awesome, and it's good. Instead of, we're normal too. Just be like: we're not normal and that's great!

By establishing the target audience for the ad to be more conservative, she is able to alleviate the tension that her life project creates for her. It is notable, thus, that she is never fully critical. She would like both options to exist harmoniously in the world - something that is ultimately not going to be possible in her life. She approached me again via social media a day after the interview to extend these thoughts, explaining that she believes that the 'next step' would be the inclusion of more diversity of characters, including those who do not fit into a conservative mould:

I understand that we need to take this in, like, baby steps, and I think it is good for now, to portray gay people as normal people, because I mean, a lot of gay people just do look like, you know, regular people. But then I think a next step would definitely be portraying queer people as queer meaning gay and trans and whatever, and queer meaning weird - and that's good.

Ultimately, for both CC and Ovidia, the only way the ambivalence between radical queer sensibility and wish for assimilation could be resolved was to settle for the 'one step at a time' mantra that is already espoused by Boomers: accepting current heteronormative portrayals while at the same time pushing for more diverse representation in the hopes of changing representations in the long run. Sage, on the other hand, did not display the same ambivalence. Having moved in non-conforming

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punk-rock circles all his life he does not ascribe to the same identity politics as others, not having developed much of a queer sensibility. His rejection of mass culture and labels coupled with his fierce independence structure his indifference towards conformist media representations. Instead of critiquing the heteronormative nature of the media, he ridicules it, in the same way that he ridicules those who live what he considers to be a “boring” life.

10.5. The Loss of Queer Sensibility

Scholars have argued that the division between assimilationist and radical perspectives demonstrates a class division within the gay movement, dividing it into first and second-class citizens (Shepard, 2001). Many have voiced the concerns that are echoed in Ovidia’s account, cautioning that the acceptance of assimilating portrayals may further marginalize those who do not adhere to heteronormative standards (Kates, 2004; Peñaloza, 1996; Sender, 2003). Significantly, these findings resonate with and deepen these concerns.

The ever-present discourse surrounding the desire for normality meant that those informants for whom viscosity was lowest, those who moved nearly exclusively outside of the LGBTQ⁺ field, and whose habitus had thus not been structured by the need to conform to its doxa or accrue relevant cultural capital, developed a dislike for radical portrayals challenging the doxic systems the wider society adheres to, particularly those portrayals violating gendered appearance norms. Echoing many queer theorists, informants’ utterances envisioned the loss of labels to be a signifier of the ultimate end-state of full acceptance in society - irrespective of the fact that all participants except for Ovidia did, in fact, label themselves and others constantly. For

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most, however, this de-essentialisation of sexual and gender identities went hand in hand with an embodiment of heteronormative norms and tastes and consequently a negative disposition towards those who do not adhere to it. This taste is passed on subconsciously through the habitus (Bourdieu, 1984).

For middle-class participants or those from a religious background this distaste was generally higher than for those from a working-class background (see also Tsai, 2012). Looking at the different life stories a pattern emerges in that those from a middle-class background have had heteronormativity imparted to them through their upbringing (Bourdieu, 2001a). The “proper” behaviour and appearance norms they have been taught has become part of their embodied class habitus. In creating certain stereotypes, the media has effectively created an undesired self, not solely for heterosexual individuals, but also for a large portion of LGBTQ⁺ individuals. This manifested itself amongst interviewees with low stigma viscosity expressing clear disdain for ‘radical’ queers who challenge accepted norms. A consensus existed that such radicals were endangering participants’ acceptance within society - the low viscosity of their stigma. Implicit in these discourses, however, was the condition that to be accepted one needed to ‘fit in’. This should not be confused with passing, however. One could fit in despite others being aware of one’s sexuality or gender identity. Rather, it was implied that this acceptance was conditional on dressing and behaving in ways that do not create unwanted attention. Therefore, those who dress and behave in a non-conforming, radical fashion actively *chose* to remain stigmatised. Stigma is here experienced as a choice, based on individual preference and modes of consumption (Bourdieu, 1984; DiMaggio, 1995). It is reduced to a stigma of appearance and thereby to one of consumption.

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All informants were implicitly aware of this condition, which shaped their media experience and, in particular, the rejection of portrayals. This was most notable in low viscosity informants' reaction to the Starbucks ad. Pádraig, for example, on the one hand feels admiration for drag artists' confidence. On the other, he points to his upbringing and strict gender divide in stating that he believes drag queens to cross this boundary too much:

In some ways, some of the drag artists, I am uneasy with them. Are you just being a character or are you actually taking the piss out of women?

The ad reminds him of his "initiation" into the scene. He vividly remembers one drag queen whom he criticises for her continued manly appearance:

[W]hat you imagined a miner might look like. Big, six-foot, very big massive big hands, hairy knuckles, everything, but he dressed up with slabs of... he must have gone through tons of makeup every week.

Drag kings, on the other hand, he finds fascinating because he considers it to be "a portrayal of masculinity that strikes [him] as more masculine than some gay men." He seems more comfortable with drag kings than drag queens because they can correctly 'perform' masculinity. Their performance, to him, seems more authentic than that of most gay men, linking back again to his perception of gay men to be inherently effeminate. His comments illustrate the gendered doxa that are deeply embedded in his and others' habitus. Many informants' readings of the ad were similar, as illustrated Lea's statement:

LEA: I feel like the drag queen character is a character that shouldn't really be associated with gay men or the LGBTQ⁺ community, but it is, and negatively so.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think it's negatively associated?

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LEA: I think because it's not an accepted, like [pause]. I think when it comes to things like Pride parades, when you are just supposed to be standing up there and being proud of who you are and want to be accepted as a normal person and want to be accepted like everyone else, they come in and kind of represent this differentness, and something that really wants to be set apart, and I don't identify with that.

Lea is strongly opposed to drag queens and the radical nature of Pride parades. In this excerpt she 'others' those who, her quote implies, do not want to be accepted as a normal person. She does not want to be associated with their "differentness" or, one could say, their "deviance".

Those whose stigma habitus is structured by low viscosity might be more disposed to adopting the markers of the dominant culture to draw symbolic boundaries between themselves and others for whom it is more solid. The viscosity of stigma thus contributes to an individual's choice to consume and present themselves according to or against acceptable standards of consumer culture. This fits into what theorists of reflexive modernization see as a move from 'living for others' to 'living a life of one's own' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 55). The ideal subject of late modernity is one who is 'flexible, individualised, resilient, self-driven and self-made and who easily follows nonlinear trajectories to fulfilment and success.' (Harris, 2004: 16).

Under conditions of low viscosity, those whose habitus is structured by greater stigma viscosity thus not only lose the security provided through traditional structures; they also risk being marginalised by other LGBTQ⁺ individuals, so the stigmatised become the stigmatisers (see, e.g. Goffman, 1980).

The media experience of a number of informants who move across mixed social fields openly discussed in-group discrimination and the need to work against it:

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MAX: The trouble is that now because there is more representation across the LGBTQ⁺ spectrum, I think there are people who are camp who are being shamed for that as a sort of hangover from when it was the only thing, the only visible thing. And I think people are sort of still scared that that's what they might be.

PADRUIG: There is a danger that if we're just looking after our own little backyard we forget the problems that are happening elsewhere and maybe in some ways just reproduce the discrimination or pass on the discrimination that we experience in some way to other people. Does that really make us better people?

EMMA: I think society still struggles with the cross-dressing aspect a little bit. I actually think the LGBTQ⁺ community does sometimes as well. There is just an underlying uncomfortableness and I don't quite get that. ... If within our community there is still that undercurrent of discomfort around cross-dressing, then how much more difficult is it for the straight community to try and understand what drives all of that and people who are transgendered and everything else?

Such participants displayed a pointed critique of these consumption norms and individual abilities to adhere to them: "They don't care if you are gay, they just care if you look gay... It's good to combat that, that looking gay doesn't matter either." (CC). Nonetheless, participants' discourses were not geared towards envisioning possible solutions to such discrimination, opting instead for a social progress discourse.

10.6. Summary

My participants' media experiences do not fit neatly into classifications such as dominant, oppositional, or negotiated readings (Hall, 1980). Rather, participants displayed a range of interpretations. Their wish for heteronormative, assimilation portrayals indicated either a fear of losing the fragile acceptance they have won over time; a preconscious physical and emotional reaction, or a judgement of taste, in

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accordance with their habitus, or even a challenge of the existing societal structures to extent assimilation to further minorities.

The existence of different degrees of stigma viscosity inevitably creates a distinction between those whose stigma habitus is structured by higher or lower viscosity. When one's habitus has not been structured by queer field conditions or lived experiences of stigma, one does not necessarily develop a strong *queer sensibility* – a felt moral responsibility towards the wider stigmatised community. It is the lack of this queer sensibility that seems to allow participants to reject people and portrayals of individuals they consider 'other' and thus threatening. The consequences of this will be deliberated further in the following chapter.

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11. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter draws together the findings of this study, providing a more in-depth discussion of the ideas espoused therein. Following the structure of the research questions, it first discusses the contributions made to the stigma literature by considering the advantages of the stigma viscosity framework in accounting for stigma experiences over the life-course. It then considers how the findings strengthen the study of media and advertising experiences among stigmatised consumers by accounting for life-course progression and fragmented identity development, pointing to the interplay between pre-conscious tastes and critical reflexive evaluations of authenticity. Drawing both together, it considers the tension between Post-queer and queer sensibility arising from stigma liquefaction and ensuing individualisation. Lastly, this chapter offers more subjective, critical-reflexive considerations of the implications of this research, and the practical actions that I

have taken as a “critical participant” in this study (Murray and Ozanne, 1991, 2009).

11.1. Key findings

11.1.1. The Changing Experience of Stigma

The first question this thesis aimed to explore is how and to what extent the experience of stigma has changed for two generations of LGBTQ⁺ consumers over individual life-courses and intersectional divides. My participants’ life stories clearly challenge the belief that stigmatised individuals make-up a homogenous sub-culture, actively managing their dual identity through consumption practices aimed at managing stigma while simultaneously establishing sub-cultural authenticity and status (Gudelunas, 2011; Kates, 2002, 2004; Kates and Belk, 2001). Instead, participants’ life-courses were markedly heterogeneous, and the importance of their stigmatised identity and the LGBTQ⁺ community for their identity development varied considerably across the sample and over time. A key finding and contribution of this thesis that is intimately related to the first research question is thus the emerging theoretical framework of the viscosity of stigma. Nonetheless, while the following discussion of the findings builds on it, its theoretical contribution will be deliberated in-depth in chapter 11.4.

In contrast to generational cohort theory (Carpenter et al., 2012; Dunlap, 2014; Russell and Bohan, 2005), my findings suggest that generational belonging was not the main driver of differing stigma experiences, since examples of both traditional and post-gay identity formation could be found in both Millennials and Boomers. Instead, viscosity of the stigma habitus emerged as a main factor of difference, and this was shaped by the doxic attitudes in the fields individuals moved in, in particular

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during the formative years of childhood and adolescence, as well as the resources, or capital, at their disposal. The one difference that seemed to be linked to generational cohorts was the patience exhibited by Boomers when talking about the slow pace of social change and persistent sexual stigma, in contrast to the impatience exhibited by Millennials who considered equality to be an in-born right and were thus less likely to excuse or condone any form of inequity. Overall, however, the viscosity of stigma was a better indicator of pervasive differences between participants' dispositions than generational belonging.

In both cohorts, those who had been faced with high field stigma viscosity from an early age struggled to separate their identity from the doxic attitudes that had become naturalised in their habitus. It was these participants whose lives fit into the traditional identity formation model of suffering, coming-out, and surviving (Plummer, 1995). For some participants, most notably George and Jo, this resulted in a hysteresis effect (Bourdieu, 1990) as field stigma viscosity liquefied over time but their stigma habitus was slow to adapt to the new field conditions. Instead, they continued to expect stigmatising attitudes and their dispositions and practices adapted accordingly. Hence, those living with greater degrees of viscosity lived in a state of hyper-reality in which stigma was always anticipated, thus predisposing them to constant and conscious employment of stigma management practices.

Others, however, did not consider their stigmatised identity unless it was made salient in specific power situations (Shih, 2004) thanks to movements in low stigma viscosity fields and multiple identity formation. Most Millennials fit existing accounts of a post-gay subjectivity whereby their sexuality or gender identity had

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little impact on their life trajectory and the fields in which they moved (Ghaziani, 2011; Lea et al., 2015; Reynolds, 2008; Savin-Williams, 2005). Many had little or no lived experience of stigma and consequently felt no need to search for support networks outside already established social groups. Thus, LGBTQ⁺ fields were mainly seen as offering a way to explore ones' identity, and/or a space for temporary experiences that were either hedonic or political in nature (Dunlap, 2014).

Differing from most existing work, however, this study found that the same was true for many Boomers. They understandably had more lived and mediated experiences of stigma, due to the pervasive views about non-conforming sexual and gender identities that structured the fields they moved in throughout much of their life-course. Nevertheless, the effect of such experiences often dissolved, liquefied, over time. Even among those for whom sexuality had played an important role in adolescence or early adulthood, its salience tended to wane if they moved mainly through social environments in which they were fully accepted, LGBTQ⁺ or not. This positive development certainly depended on socio-historic occurrences and was sustained by the amelioration of stigma in recent decades. In fact, most participants' life stories mentioned the 'sexual revolution' of the 1970s, as well as the AIDS crisis and Thatcherism as periods in which their stigma had liquefied or solidified respectively.

For many participants across both cohorts, engagement in LGBTQ⁺ fields generally all but stopped once close friendships or intimate relationships had been build, unless their stigma habitus had a greater viscosity, or they developed in these spaces a political identity and home for activist life projects. Participants who had low stigma

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viscosity and only limited experiences in Queer fields thus lacked or had a limited amount of what I termed *queer sensibility*. While connected, queer sensibility is not to be confused with group identification. Rather it is part of an individuals' moral habitus (Ignatow, 2009a, 2009b; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013); is characterised by a keen awareness of discrimination in society and discourses of morality that emphasise unrestricted egalitarianism and a firm belief in the social construction and performativity of gender.

My findings further show that higher levels of economic or symbolic capital could lower stigma viscosity. Participants rich in social capital had generally built better support structures and moved through their own “bubbles” of acceptance that decreased the saliency of their stigma (see also Austin and Goodman, 2017; Shih, 2004). For some, this support structure consisted of their family or heterosexual peers, for others it consisted of Queer or other non-conforming communities. This was true for participants across socio-economic strata. Similarly, high economic and cultural capital afforded some the possibility to move into fields that were structured by lower viscosity, contributing to the liquefaction of their stigma habitus over time, as well as helping them avoid movement into fields known for higher stigma viscosity, affecting, for example the choice of holiday destinations.

Even participants whose stigma habitus had a low viscosity were reflexively aware of social fields that were structured by doxic discourses that labelled non-conforming sexualities and gender as deviant. Movement into such fields could create a hysteresis effect (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 78–9), and, as they had not previously developed any stigma resilience or developed coping strategies, such

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power situations had temporary adverse effects on their well-being and future practices. As a consequence, their stigma habitus briefly solidified when stigma became more salient, temporarily changing their dispositions and thus their practices as they tried to manage the situation in question.

Hence, the amelioration of sexual stigma in western society has created the conditions under which both individuals and social fields can develop disparate degrees of stigma viscosity. As a consequence, some individuals' subjectivities remain stuck in a hyper-reality structured by expectations of stigma and constant stigma management, while others feel able to disregard stigmatised subjectivity unless confronted by certain power situations. The uncertainty that arises out of disparate field stigma viscosities leads to a reflexive awareness of which types of fields and situations should be avoided. This avoidance behaviour is not necessarily experienced as an infringement of one's personal freedom and becomes common sense. Outside of such fields and situations, one's stigma is not actively managed.

11.2. A Bourdieusian, Intersectional Model of Media Experiences

This thesis further sought to deepen understanding of the media's existential significance for potentially stigmatised groups, and in particular to explore changes in media experiences over individual life-courses as a result of the ambivalence surrounding stigmatised identities. Making use of the viscosity of stigma framework, my findings thus contribute to the study of media and advertising consumption by providing a more nuanced understanding of LGBTQ⁺ consumers' media experiences that refutes the notion of a homogenous, interpretive community by showing how

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media experiences are shaped by stigma viscosity and queer sensibility.

In accordance with the socialisation literature (e.g. Bush et al., 1999; Morley, 2003), the media played an important role both in the constitution of participants' (stigma) habitus and their identity formation (Hicks and Jeyasingham, 2016; Peñaloza, 1996; Sender, 2004; Tsai, 2011). For many participants, mediated experiences were the vehicle through which they were first made aware of the stigma connected to non-conforming sexualities and gender identities, solidifying their stigma habitus and structuring their subsequent dispositions in everyday life (Smith, 2007). Thus, the media exerted symbolic power, particularly over those who only recently came to realise their non-conformity, by presenting them with a scenario in which their difference was stigmatised – at whichever life stage this occurred. If participants' lived experiences did not match their mediated ones, however, stigma quickly re-liquefied, supporting arguments that lived experiences hold more weight than mediated ones (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Nonetheless, for many participants mediated experiences were the only type of stigma experience, suggesting that the role of those experiences in the formation of durable dispositions should not be underestimated.

Overall, my findings challenge an understanding of gay consumers as a passive, homogenous, interpretive community (e.g. Kates, 2004; Oakenfull, 2012; Tuten, 2005). The viscosity of the stigma habitus as well as that of the field within which media texts were consumed were central to participants' media experiences and dispositions towards media texts. Most importantly, existing studies' characterisations of gay consumers' media experiences applied only when stigma

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had a high viscosity. As it is only in recent years that the doxa surrounding sexuality and gender have changed and field stigma viscosity has liquefied, it seems plausible that the stigma habitus of participants in prior studies would have been structured by high viscosity. Earlier findings are likely to reflect this homogeneity: under high stigma viscosity, an individual's tastes are likely to be intimately tied to achieving social acceptance, at the expense of more critical reflexive deliberations (Bhat et al., 1996; Oakenfull, 2013; Tsai, 2004; Tuten, 2006).

Following from this, my findings suggest that it was only at times of identity confusion or life periods during which stigma had a high viscosity that informants pro-actively searched for media representations, both to inform their budding sexual- and gender identity, and for the gratification this afforded (Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011; Kosenko et al., 2016; Tsai, 2012). For many the 'need' for such portrayals dissipated over time, at which point LGBTQ⁺ themed media was consumed primarily for enjoyment.

Furthermore, my analysis suggests that LGBTQ⁺ consumers' awareness is primarily focused on the gender with which they identify. For gay, lesbian, and bisexual consumers, this effect was driven both by self-affirmation and transformation uses, as well as to 'check-out' the same-sex (see e.g. O'Donohoe, 1996). For trans participants, attention was exclusively placed on the gender with which they identified, to the point that characters of other genders were dismissed or ignored. These experiences may be explained by the enduring character of gendered dispositions and the difficulties of breaking with deeply embodied gender scripts. During transition, trans individuals spend a great deal of time actively observing the

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gender with which they identify in order to learn appropriate behaviours (see also Devor, 2004). As they start to fully identify and become ‘proficient’ in the performance of the observed gendered scripts, these are internalised, causing a strong essentialist identification with one gender that is predicated on rejecting ones’ birth gender (ibid). My findings suggest that this formally reflexive behaviour is naturalised over time in the habitus, leading to selective attention being paid to media texts and portrayals.

Those who identified as gender neutral, on the other hand, generally paid attention to characters of the gender they had been assigned at birth. It is likely that, faced with a lack of gender-neutral media characters, these participants were drawn towards representations that felt most familiar, i.e. that most closely represented the gendered scripts placed on them since birth. Furthermore, all gender-neutral identified participants in this study also identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Thus, an element of same-sex attraction cannot be dismissed at this point.

Participants’ readings were highly self-referential as the meaning of a portrayal and its perceived authenticity were negotiated with regards to their individual life stories (Beverland et al., 2008; Chalmers, 2008; Rose and Wood, 2005). As theorised by Visconti (2008), for those with limited experiences of moving through Queer fields, their lack of queer sub-cultural capital meant that it was insignificant in judging the authenticity of portrayals, whereas others actively compared a portrayals’ appearance and behaviour to those they had previously observed ‘in the scene.’ References to lived experiences, however, were not always positive, in contrast to previous research (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997). Where positive portrayals contradicted

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the marginalisation endured over the life-course, as was the case for high viscosity informants, they were considered inauthentic. This elicited diachronic polysemy (Puntoni et al., 2010), as this *negative personalising interpretation* was juxtaposed with positive feelings due to the portrayals' assimilationist potential. To resolve the tension between these meanings, participants generally favoured the social progress interpretation, essentially giving the inauthentic portrayal the 'benefit of the doubt.' This outcome also appeared connected to participants' high stigma viscosity and the associated desire for societal acceptance.

The same diachronic polysemy could be observed amongst high viscosity informants, with regards to portrayals regarded as stereotypical. Due to previous mediated experiences of LGBTQ⁺ media representations, stereotypes emerged as a pre-conscious, critical frame of reference for all participants. This revises earlier findings that gay consumers favour even stereotypical portrayals in light of societal changes (e.g. Borgerson et al., 2006; Tsai, 2011; Tuten, 2005). The mere existence of a stereotype was read, at best, as laziness of a portrayal's author to engage with queer subjectivities, thus failing an assessment of authenticity. At worst, it was seen as offensive, effectively stopping any further engagement with the portrayal in question. High stigma viscosity participants were particularly prone to search for even the slightest stereotype, due to their learned disposition to expect discrimination. At the same time, however, they readily excused their use if the benefit of the portrayal was perceived to outweigh its harm. This social progress interpretation reflects a belief in slow assimilationist reform that was particularly strong also amongst Boomers, indicating their socialisation into gay liberationist doxa, as well as the slow amelioration of stigma they had witnessed prior to recent, more rapid changes. This

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ultimately may explain existing studies' findings: the reflexive consideration of both a pre-conscious negative emotional reaction and high viscosity participants' conscious desire for assimilation ultimately results in a positive reading. Since existing studies are largely based on survey designs, it is likely that only the final, positive reading would be recorded, thus greatly simplifying our understanding of participants' true experiences.

Lastly, my findings do not support the claim that gay consumers will become loyal to brands who include them in their advertising (Greenlee 2004; Oakenfull, 2013; Peñaloza 1996; Tuten, 2006). The brand or product behind an ad was generally only remembered if it was a well-known company (O'Donohoe, 1994; Ritson and Elliott, 1999). While *diversity ads* were almost instantly forgotten, participants were more likely to remember the story line behind *Human Interest Ads* (Nölke, 2017). This was likely due to the personalising interpretation and consequent connection informants had created to its characters as a consequence of the authenticity imbued through this form of "commercial story telling" (Lewis and Bridger, 2000). Moreover, whereas previous work has pointed to gay-friendliness as an important factor in gay consumers' advertising evaluations (e.g. Tuten, 2003; 2006; Kates, 1998), the importance of this factor was reduced by the lack of salience of existing portrayals and lack of incentive to investigate the policies of companies portraying LGBTQ⁺ characters. In fact, participants' disposition may be influenced by a pervasive belief that companies nowadays were legally obliged to follow anti-discrimination and equal employment laws and thus an expectation that they had to be 'gay-friendly.' In this study, only those whose stigma habitus had a higher viscosity were likely to engage in targeted search to validate a company's claims. It may well be, however,

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that the American consumers dominating the samples of existing studies are more prone to hold companies accountable to their words than European ones, a possibility that merits future investigation.

As opposed to relying on a form of personal validation, then, participants judged whether the intent of the media text's author – the writer or producer, or company or brand – was authentic or genuine as opposed to tokenistic and potentially damaging. The criteria on which such a judgement was based were overall text design, perceived authenticity of the actors and storyline, the perceived 'risk' of the portrayal, as well as participants' prior knowledge about the author, such as their life-course and involvement with the community and their political leanings for individuals, and political affiliation for companies and brands.

Authors that were known to be LGBTQ⁺ or perceived as left-wing were regarded as more authentic due to their inherent concern for diversity and equality and thus judged less harshly. Furthermore, risky *first-mover portrayals* – i.e. those that were published in a field with higher stigma viscosity and the first to portray certain minorities – were also judged favourably. Compared to the concept of gay-friendliness that takes into account companies' pro-activity in addressing LGBTQ⁺ needs and issues and can thus be objectively determined (Greenlee 2004, Oakenfull 2004; 2013; Peñaloza 1996; Tuten 2005, 2006), perceived authorial intent is much more subjective, taking into account individuals' internal perceptions, irrespective of their accuracy or logic. At a point in time when many LGBTQ⁺ individuals expect companies to be gay-friendly, my findings suggest authorial intent is a more useful way of understanding such consumers' feelings and dispositions towards both

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general media and advertising texts.

The findings of this study add to existing research by challenging criticisms of the habitus as a static and deterministic concept (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004; Krajs, 2006; McCall, 1992; Mottier, 2002), in favour of understanding it as a dynamic phenomenon that can be shaped in later life and even fragmented in the case of multicultural identities or *habitus clivé* (Krajs, 2006; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; Üstuner and Holt, 2007). As a result of this dynamic habitus, media experiences change and shift, both over the course of an individual's life, as well as more rapidly as a consequence of field movements and power situations. Previous work in the media studies domain has lacked this dynamic understanding of media experiences.

11.2.1. Queer vs Post-Queer Sensibility

One of the most important findings with regards to participants' media experience was their pronounced preference for assimilationist portrayals and their rejection of those deemed too queer. As previously described, Bauman (2000) believed that liquid modernity entails the dissolution of a sense of community. The 'post-gay' generation has been characterised as moving away from the traditional LGBTQ⁺ community and its social capital (Visconti, 2008; Savin-Williams, 2005). In other words, with LGBTQ⁺ stigma liquefying, existing sub-cultural structures, built to endure solid stigma conditions, dissolve (Visconti, 2008). This phenomenon could be observed in my findings amongst participants for whom stigma was least viscous. Kates and Belk (2001: 421) in their study of pride marches observed that "more conservative gays were likely to focus on more radical members of the gay community as the out-group" (see also Tsai, 2012). My findings suggest, however,

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that it was not only those who grew up in conservative households, but more generally those who had never experienced any stigma first hand and had grown up without being socialised into queer fields who distanced themselves from their more radical peers. Their tastes were structured not by the heterodoxic discourses of queer social fields, but by the prevalent heterosexist orthodoxy. They lacked a *queer sensibility* and can instead be said to exhibit a *post-queer* one: since their sexuality and the stigma placed on it were not seen as central to their identity, they felt no need for community validation or the support structures afforded by the group, and thus felt little to no responsibility towards it.

Within participants' media experience, this post-queer sensibility was reflected in deeply embedded, pre-conscious emotions and reactions (Illouz, 2009) that led to the immediate rejection of exaggerated, radical portrayals considered 'too queer.' Hence, the rejection of radical portrayals cannot be described as a deliberate form of stigma management, nor can it be explained by a "constant and almost reflexive concern regarding heterosexual consumers' responses" (Tsai, 2012: 51). While some participants from more conservative backgrounds expressed concern about the reaction of a very specific group, for many the rejection was not tied to straight audiences in general. Instead, the radical, gender-bending behaviour and appearance that is the hallmark of heterodoxic Queer 'taste' was discursively positioned as not 'normal.' This belief stems from orthodoxic discourses about normality that have become naturalised in the habitus through primary socialisation as well as assimilationist discourses of the "normal" gay espoused by gay liberation movements (Warner, 2000).

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Post-queer sensibility is thus intimately connected to the postfeminist sensibility described by Rosalind Gill (2007). It is predicated on “a shift in the way that power operates: a shift from an external judging gaze to a self-policing narcissistic gaze” in which “power is not imposed from above or from the outside, but constructs our very subjectivity” (Gill, 2003: 104). Post-queer is thus also linked to homonormativity and the proliferation of what Lisa Duggan (2003) termed “neoliberal ‘equality’ politics,” a form of liberalism that is based on general inclusivity, legal equality, the right to cultural expression, and social welfare, while at the same time following free-market, pro-capitalist beliefs. SGNIs are accepted with open arms if and only if they form an identity that adheres to accepted standards of gendered consumption norms. This refusal of the very practices that Judith Butler (1990) believes to lie at the heart of “gender trouble” is thus the result of embodied cultural capital as well as a neoliberal emphasis on free choice and agency, based on the unashamed belief that SGNIs are, at least in the fields in which they move, or their “bubbles of acceptance”, already equal and empowered.

It is through such orthodox discourses that individuals can describe the rejection of radically Queer gender performances as personal preference. Enduring sexual stigma is discursively positioned as a stigma of gendered consumption and those who do not consume according to accepted norms remain “un-intelligible” (Butler, 2004: 23). Sexual- and gender non-conformity is no longer considered deviant, unless it is accompanied by gendered performances that go against the orthodoxa that have become embodied in a gendered habitus. Gendered performances, however, are judged on the basis of appearance and thus, ultimately, accepted forms of consumption. Their “liberation”, thus, “takes the form of a ‘desublimation’, that is, a

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liberation that takes place within the context of consumer culture and is even defined by it” (Illouz, 2009: 393). In other words, as an SGNI, to be accepted by society, one must merely consume in ways that are recognised as normal. Adherence to those norms is based on constant self-monitoring, a practice that is not reflexive but embodied in the habitus. Thus, the rejection of radical portrayals is a misrecognition of the arbitrary, gendered doxic norms that structure accepted consumption practices that results in the rejection of those who cannot or will not play by the ‘rules of the game,’ thereby condoning their symbolic annihilation. Those for whom stigma has a low viscosity are thus engaging in ‘symbolic violence’ against others who continue to be subject to LGBTQ⁺ stigma (Bourdieu, 1977).

While this form of individualisation is one of the defining features of late modernity as theorized by Bauman and others including Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992), as discussed in Chapter 3, others have argued, and I concur, that culture and societal relations still play an important role in the lives of late modern individuals. Arguing that our society is moving ever closer to self-seeking, neoliberal individualisation denies any conscious reflexivity and morality within individuals, a critique that has been made of the work of both Bauman and Bourdieu (Elder-Vass, 2007; McNay, 1999; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013). My findings demonstrate that a post-Queer refusal of radical portrayals was often accompanied by ambivalence and existential tensions that can be connected to their queer sensibility and the moral discourses and reflexivity associated with it. This is best exemplified in CC’s case through her simultaneous wish for normal portrayals that do not endanger her position in society and her desire for more radical representation in line with her emerging queer identity. Her primary habitus is in opposition to her budding queer politics, and the

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moral habitus established through her secondary socialisation. As she accumulates more experiences in queer fields, her media disposition may shift closer to that displayed by Ovidia, for example. For others, ambivalence was less pronounced and expressed itself in what I interpreted as feelings of guilt: guilt at one's rejection of others within a community to which one still felt a broad sense of belonging. This was reflected in the qualifiers some participants employed after an initial vocal rejection of a portrayal to insinuate that it was not necessarily radical individuals themselves who were considered 'bad,' but the possibility that they would be the only LGBTQ⁺ group to be represented, or that they would be seen as representative of all SGNIs.

Firat and Venkatesh (1999: 253–254) postulate that the “postmodern subject is willing to live with the paradoxes that may arise from the fragmentation, the free juxtaposition of objects (therefore even of opposites) in the bricolage.” My informants, however, were not ‘willing’ to live with this ambivalence or the associated feelings of guilt. They actively tried to resolve the conflict within their habitus but were often unable to do so. Elder-Vass (2007) and McNay (1999) are amongst a number of sociologists who advocate for a theory combining reflexivity and habitus. Elder-Vass considers “human action as the outcome of a continuous interaction between dispositions and reflexivity” (2007: 320). He further asserts that the effect of reflexivity on our actions depends on the situations, individuals, and historic contexts involved. These considerations resonate here, as my participants’ ability to consciously direct their actions existed in a constant dynamic interplay with external forces and power situations. What is more, participants problematized their own embodied dispositions through reflexive, critical considerations that point to

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their queer sensibility and thus moral habitus. Hence, the analysis demonstrates that both queer- and post-queer sensibilities need to be considered as contributing to media- and potentially broader consumption experiences.

11.2.2. Identity Compartmentalisation and Intersectionality

The final question posed in this thesis concerned how (marginalised) consumers navigate the previously outlined structural changes and the fragmentation of identity politics through (media) consumption. While theorists of postmodern identity formation suggest that “there is no single project, or no one lifestyle, no sense of being to which the individual needs to commit” (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995: 253), all my participants actively referred to themselves using specific identity labels, employing discourses that were clearly essentialist in nature. Such essentialist discourses were most pronounced for trans* informants, who explained large parts of their behaviour, including media preferences, with references to their ‘true’ gender, as opposed to that assigned to them at birth (see also Devor, 2004). Generally, among those for whom stigma viscosity was higher, the stigmatised part effectively overshadowed all other identity projects, whereas where it was lower, multiple, fragmented projects were at play.

Nevertheless, even where the stigma habitus comprised various potentially stigmatised characteristics that each had different viscosities and intersected with each other, which identity was salient depended largely on power situations and thus was based on a contextual awareness of stigmatisation. For many, one identity was generally more prominent than others, but others could come to the fore in specific

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power situations or become more prominent later in life, while others lost in importance. For some participants, their working-class identity was the primary concern, as it had a higher stigma viscosity than their sexuality. For others, it was gender-identity that was most significant in their development. Joy's life story, for example, was driven by her desire to escape her working-class roots, whereas Jo's was clearly structured primarily by her sexuality and gender identity. Most indicated that they only consciously acknowledged different sections of their identity in certain contexts. This can be described using the figure/ground metaphor, whereby "experience is conceptualised as a dynamic process in which certain events become figural (stand out) in the individual's life world while others recede into ground" (Thompson et al., 1989: 136). In this sense, certain aspects of our lives stand out, while others fade into the background. The latter are 'triggered' by certain power situations, prompting us to change our pattern of behaviour.

In addition, when it came to different gender or sexual identities, some Millennial participants suggested that they would 'deal' with a secondary aspect of their identity only once they had fully explored and accepted another. Hence, one part of their subjectivity was effectively subservient to another: for example, Jamie asserts that he will not confront his pansexuality until he has fully transitioned, and Tiger suggest the same for his poly-amorous identity. One could thus say that these participants dealt with the on-going fragmentation of identity politics by compartmentalising different aspects of their subjectivity and addressing them sequentially. Through this practice of *identity compartmentalisation*, thus, informants managed the intersectionality of different identities and their respective levels of stigma viscosity.

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This is not to say, however, that categories of difference that had a lower viscosity had less of an impact on their life-course. While Jo, for example, asserts that she does not consider class to be an important identifier, her life-course is clearly affected by the limited economic and cultural capital that made it difficult for her to follow the educational path she would have preferred. Thus, one must be careful to distinguish between the parts of the stigma habitus individuals are reflexively aware of and the structural forms of discrimination they disregard. While many informants were adamant that the labels they used to describe themselves did not necessarily define or affect their identity, the discourses employed to talk about them suggested that it was precisely because these identities were described as an essential quality of their identity that they became more prominent or could fade into the background and become ‘insignificant.’

The contextual awareness of stigmatised subjectivities was reflected in some participants’ accounts that their (media-) consumption experience and general dispositions towards the world could change temporarily depending on the field they found themselves in, or as a result of a lived experience of stigma. Thus, even if part of an individual’s identity has faded into the background, reflexive uncertainty about a field’s stigma viscosity as well as power situations could increase its salience, solidify the stigma habitus, and trigger conscious employment of stigma management techniques. One of my informants termed such situations that resulted in increased reflexive awareness ‘wake-up calls.’ Crockett (2017) uses the same terminology in describing a situation in which a number of his African-American informants enter a white-owned restaurant:

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‘Two of them discuss how stigma is made salient at other restaurants by people's reactions to their presence. ... Baxter's concerns about feeling unwelcome at establishments that are not black-owned are a worst-case scenario, not an expectation. His discussion is about stigma management, which is initiated when their presence at local restaurants prompts a “wake-up call,” making them cognizant of being viewed in stigmatized ways. Their presence violates other patrons' expectations, initiating stigma management, which will take on complex configurations of ideology, strategy, and tactics that differ by situation and person.’ (2017: 11).

Crockett describes this episode as an example where stigma management is initiated due to a situation that is seen as a wake-up call. The author does not further dissect either the patrons or his informants' beliefs and expectations, merely pointing to differing forms of stigma management that ensue. Looking at the same situation from the viewpoint of the viscosity of stigma, one could argue that his informants' stigma habitus with relation to race has a low viscosity as they enter the establishment. Discrimination, to them, is a “worst-case-scenario,” not an “expectation.” Crockett describes how his informants have frequented that space before without any problems. It is the configuration of patrons, most of whose habitus seem to be structured by doxic discourses of blackness as deviant, has changed the viscosity of the restricted field. The sudden, unexpected, confrontation with solid stigma attitudes in a field that is usually characterised by low viscosity leads to sudden stigma congealment and a subsequent change in practices that affects the way his informants ‘consume’ the space in question.

This identity compartmentalisation coupled with the figure/ground metaphor explain the notable absence of intersectional considerations within the majority of participants' media experiences despite the importance of other categories of difference such as class, age, and disability within their life stories. All participants

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were highly critical, advertising literate consumers, aware of the idealised, heteronormative nature of portrayals, sceptical of the commercialisation of diversity, and thus mindful of possible tokenism (O'Donohoe and Tynan, 1998; Scott, 1994). Nonetheless, when talking about specific media content or when faced with the example advertisements, sexuality and race were the only categories that were invoked and actively discussed without prompting. This was likely due to the increased salience of these two categories, the first being the central theme of the interview, the second, ethnic diversity, having received increased media attention at the time these conversations took place. The absence of intersectional considerations indicates the presence of deeply embodied naturalised orthodoxa about the idealised nature of media portrayals and the economic constraints underlying its production. This was noticeable in participants' repeated emphasis on the cost of media texts being dependant on their length and their success on their appeal for a (non-ethnic) target audience.

Moreover, assertions that one should not expect media practitioners to address more than one identity category simultaneously reflects the difficulties informants themselves faced in addressing multiple aspects of their identity at the same time. Thus, the fragmentation of identity politics has made it more difficult for individuals to consider multiple categories of difference at once. This fosters a blinkered attitude enabling participants to consider intersectional diversity a factor of competitive differentiation between media texts more broadly, while simultaneously failing to remark on its absence when confronted with an actual media texts.

11.3. Summary

The concepts of the stigma habitus and its viscosity provides a rich analytical tool to understand how individuals, who under solid stigma would have formed one community, can have vastly different experiences. It also allows for their experiences to shift and change depending on their social environment and over time. Individuals who have never come in contact with the LGBTQ⁺ sub-culture or experienced stigmatisation might become so individualized and comfortable in their heteronormative habitus that they do not feel any responsibility for the rest of the community, while others may have grown up in an environment that nurtures a pro-equality consciousness and thus developed a queer sensibility. Thus, my analysis suggests that the liquefaction of stigma within society, rather than aiding its complete erasure, merely adapts it in a way that does not challenge the existing orthodoxy. The only way in which the existing orthodoxy can be sustained in the face of adversity is by incorporating enough of the heterodoxic discourse that the rest is easily subverted by its former proponents (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Gramsci, 1971). The liquefaction of sexual stigma has brought with it an acceptance of same-sex love that does not challenge the existing deep-seated gender norms (Chambers, 2005), thereby creating the conditions under which the majority of a stigmatised group turn against the minority that is not able or willing to adhere to the changed field conditions. Denial of symbolic violence is predicated on “an unintentionally concluded or concerted agreement between the dispositions of the agents directly or indirectly concerned” (Bourdieu, 1998: 66). Symbolic violence is more effective than other forms of power precisely because it works with the implicit consent of those involved, making a subversion of existing norms exceedingly difficult.

11.4. Contributions to theory

This study provides a number of important contributions to the critical study of stigma and (media) consumption experiences, as well as some of a more methodological nature. Furthermore, in the spirit of critical theory, it has a number of managerial implications that can be used to change how SGNIs are portrayed in the media. These contributions are now discussed in turn.

11.4.1. Contribution to Studies of Stigma

As aforementioned, one of the main contributions of this work is the development of a new theoretical framework to be used in the study of stigma as a way of addressing current shortcomings of the literature, such as the use of stigma as a deterministic master identity, as well as reflecting a changing societal landscape and the associated uncertainty. The main characteristics of this framework are summarised in Figure 11.1.

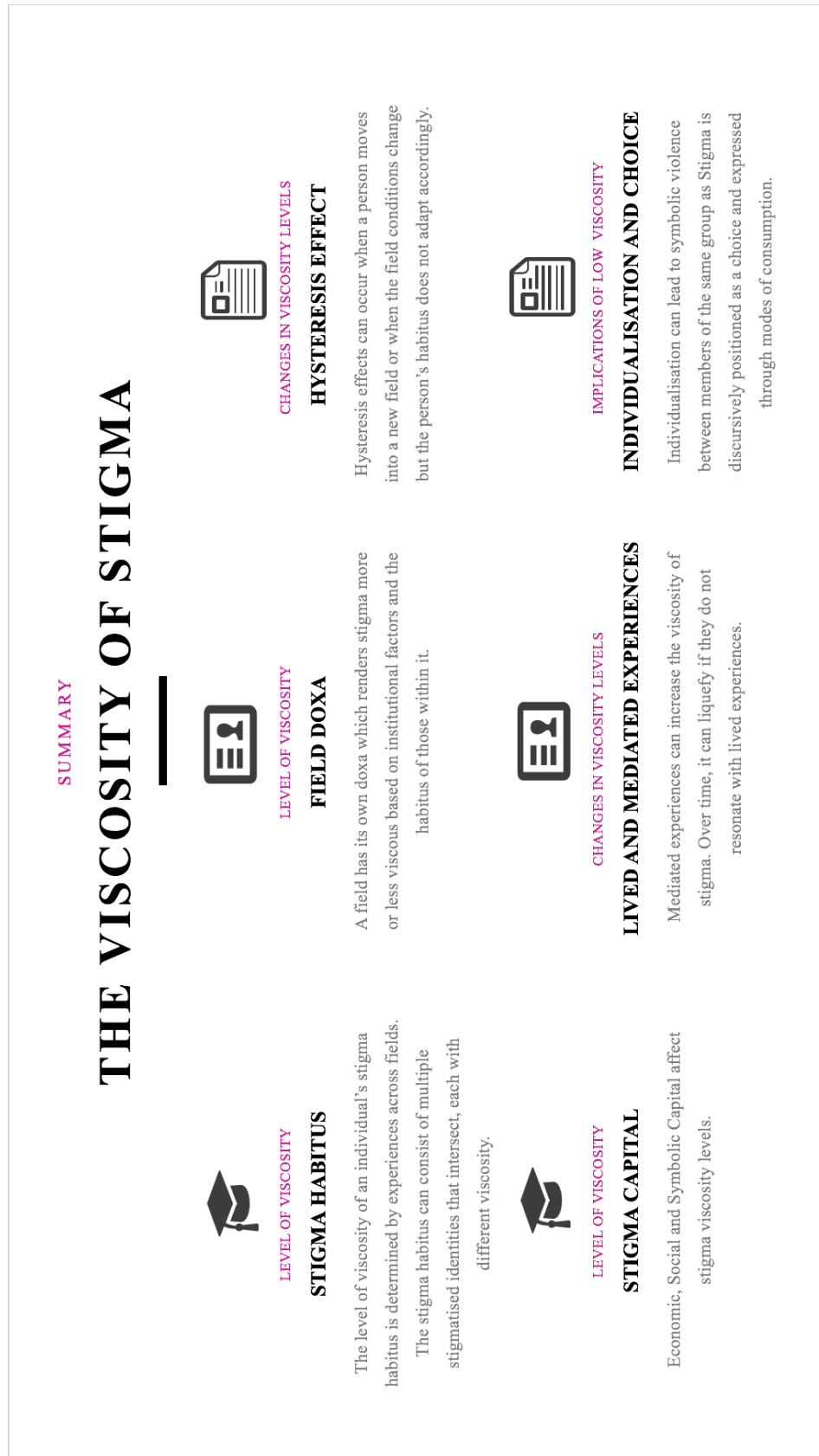
I have proposed that stigma emerges out of the dynamic interplay between doxic attitudes about deviance in social *fields*, as well as an individual's embodied dispositions with regards to that doxa, forming the *stigma habitus*. Fields and stigma habitus structure each other and consequently each have a dynamic viscosity. The emergence of doxic attitudes about certain attributes or behaviours is akin to the first two phases in Link and Phelan's (2001; 2013) social process model of stigma, whereby labels are attached to deeply held naturalised societal beliefs and consequently lead to equally naturalised dispositions of the habitus: emotional responses, separation, status loss, and discrimination. My research provides empirical confirmation of Link and Phelan's (2013:534) suggestion that stigma is a form of

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symbolic power since individuals misrecognise the label, stereotypes, and societal responses as legitimate and natural. This applies both to those who develop a disposition to stigmatise and to those who learn to expect their stigmatisation as normal. The ‘strength’ of these doxic attitudes, however, may vary across fields, thus leading to higher or lower field stigma viscosity. As a consequence, the habitus of those who grow up in fields where such doxic attitudes are held, i.e. where stigma viscosity is high, is likely to be structured by high viscosity as well. In other fields, however, doxic attitudes towards the behaviour or attribute in question may differ, leading to lower stigma viscosity.

The concept of the viscosity of stigma helps reduce the existing conceptual vacuum and confusion, as it renders many existing terms redundant. Differing levels of ‘*stigma consciousness*,’ (Pinel, 1999); ‘*minority consciousness*’ (Peñaloza, 1996); ‘*stigma sensitivity*’ (Major and O’Brien, 2005); ‘*symbolic interaction stigma*,’ (Link et al., 2015) and ‘*felt stigma*’ (Scambler and Hopkins, 1986) can all be addressed through the varying degrees of stigma viscosity. Higher viscosity is intimately tied to greater awareness of the possibility of stigmatisation, thus leading to higher levels of, for example, ‘stigma consciousness’ or ‘sensitivity.’ Thinking about viscosity, however, enables one to theorise how such awareness may fluctuate throughout the life-course and due to power situations. Thus, the concept of viscosity further contributes to the literature by replacing existing static concepts with one dynamic framework.

Figure 11.1 Main Characteristics of the Viscosity of Stigma



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It further presupposes an exploration of the under-researched area of stigma creation, as well as its amelioration or intensification across social fields, thus considering power in terms of the interplay of individual and structural dynamics (Dovidio et al., 2000; Link et al., 2004; Link and Phelan, 2001; Sandikci and Ger, 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013). It empirically illustrates the significance of power situations, showing that stigma exists only in situations incorporating a dimension of power, i.e. in situations when stigmatisers are able to generate real discriminatory concerns (Link and Phelan, 2013). Distinguishing between the viscosity of a stigma habitus and of fields allows researchers to better theorise when stigma is present and when it is not.

While this paper focused on one specific group of stigmatised consumers, future research could fruitfully apply the concept of stigma viscosity to other groups, such as those with non-concealable stigma. If a person verbally assaults a veiled Muslim woman in a bus, but is immediately denounced for that action, this constitutes verbal assault, not stigma. In fact, it is the actions of the perpetrator that are (rightly) stigmatised. If the same woman, however, moves through a different field or if societal relations change, such as has happened recently thanks to events such as Brexit and the election of Trump in the U.S., the power relations may shift and she might find herself stigmatised despite her own stigma habitus not having changed – a hysteresis effect. While the emergence of stigmata can hence be described as a process, the act of being stigmatised is less procedural than it is situational, limited to specific power situations that can arise due to differences in doxic attitudes towards a certain attribute, as a consequence of either an interaction between individuals or movement across fields.

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Thus, contrary to existing deterministic and overly procedural frameworks, conceptualising stigma as viscous shifts the focus onto explorations of changes in the degree of stigma not only across, but within individuals' stigma habitus as a result of power situations and field movements. Hence, it shifts the default focus from homogeneous groups to heterogeneous individuals and the intersectionality of stigmata, providing fruitful ground for future stigma studies to adopt such a perspective. This demonstrates that, despite the honourable intention behind its use, the term 'stigmatised consumers' is a misnomer, symptomatic of the literature's predisposition to concentrate on individuals and not the stigmatising context or situation. The framework thus adds to existing stigma theory not only theoretically but methodologically, as it forces scholars to consider both micro-level situated experiences and wider macro social changes.

11.4.1. Contribution to Consumer Research

The viscosity of stigma can be a valuable framework for consumer culture theorists. It can help us focus on the field conditions under which certain consumption practices are or become stigmatised and illuminate how consumption practices influence the degree of viscosity of the stigma habitus. Considering Kozinets' (2001) study of Star Trek fans through the lens of stigma viscosity, for example, generates a number of important considerations that are not addressed in the original study. The first is the question of whether Star Trek fans should be considered a stigmatised group. This question cannot be answered by a mere 'yes' or 'no,' as the response will always be contextual and thus needs to consider the fields that are important for the study at hand, as well as potential power situations described by informants. The framework forces us to examine the micro experience of individual Star Trek fans.

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We might well find that some of the members have joined the fandom precisely because their stigma habitus is already structured by high viscosity due to a stigma that has nothing to do with Star Trek. In other words, individuals may have purposefully moved into this field because of its low stigma viscosity and egalitarian doxa. The fandom becomes these individuals' *bubble of acceptance* and the social capital built within it helps reduce the overall viscosity of their stigma habitus. In such cases, the analysis must take into account the intersectionality of different stigmata, their individual degrees of viscosity, and the effect of membership on them. The study thus becomes less focused on the alleged stigma on Star Trek fandom, and more on how that fandom influences individual lived experiences across contexts.

In the same vein, applying the framework to Larsen, Patterson, and Markham's (2014) study of the stigma on tattoos would similarly shift the focus onto individual experiences in certain social contexts. At a time when many individuals are able to go to work with visible tattoos, the question would become: what are the environments where this form of self-realization is not accepted and what do we know about why stigma remains solid in these social fields? The viscosity of stigma puts the focus back on the context, allowing us to focus on why some environments are conducive to stigmatization and others are not, as well as the consequences for individual experiences of stigma.

Further research is needed to assess what relationship those with low viscosity of stigma have towards 'traditional' sub-cultural capital. My findings suggest that under low levels of stigma viscosity, SGNIs s may reject not only LGBTQ⁺ imagery but also other items and places traditionally connected to the sub-culture. As stigma

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continues to liquefy, what effect might their rejection have on existing sub-cultural structures?

It further raises important questions about the use of possessions to navigate ambivalence and uncertainty of a flowing stigma levels both in habitus and field. While some prior studies have discussed the impact of high or low cultural capital on individual consumption decisions (see e.g. Holt, 1995; Kates, 2002; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), they have not considered the importance of other types of capital, in particular social capital. Existing work has also not accounted for field changes that may render certain types of capital more or less important. A gay person's high cultural and social capital, for example, might be rendered worthless if they moved into fields structured by high viscosity of sexual stigma. In addition, it seems fruitful for scholars to examine further how consumers navigate hysteresis effects, when the stigma viscosity of field and habitus do not match. Deterritorialisation has been hailed as one of the main consequences of globalisation as consumers' movements across global borders become more fluid (Appadurai, 1990; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). How do those under low stigma viscosity manage sudden stigma congealment or situations in which they are required to move into fields that are known to be of high stigma viscosity? Are there ways in which possessions may be used to re-liquefy stigma in the same manner in which media portrayals do? Consumption and mobility have previously been combined mostly in acculturation research that separates host and home cultures. As traditional structures, built under solid stigma conditions, dissipate or become commercialised, how do those for whom it remains solid confront such changes?

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These questions are increasingly important considering recent events and social discourses, such as Brexit, the election of Donald Trump in America, increased resistance to migrants in many European countries, recent French legislation to ban full face coverings, as well as growing acceptance of white nationalist rhetoric; these developments have somewhat solidified these national fields and certainly increased uncertainty in particular in fields structured predominately by low viscosity. Whereas before those players whose habitus remains structured by orthodoxic views about gender and sexuality lacked the power to generate stigmatising consequences in such low viscosity fields and had to fear stigmatisation in return, recent events have brought them to the fore and emboldened them in their views. Whereas before one could move freely within a low viscosity field, today ones' movements require greater reflexive awareness, lest one come across such individuals.

My interviews were conducted shortly before these events took place. Thinking about Sandikci and Ger's (2010) study on veiling, for example, it would be fruitful to continue the investigation under current societal conditions. How do women, who have claimed the veil as a “fashionable and ordinary” (p.15) consumption choice, navigate the sudden stigma solidification within the field? How does the market react to such a sudden solidification? Since the US election, some companies have openly condemned Trumps' political actions and white nationalist discourses, while others remain silent. How do consumers whose stigma habitus is structured by low viscosity, who have almost entirely renounced the need for a sub-culture and have not previously had to employ stigma management techniques, react in the face of renewed stigmatisation?

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At the same time, however, the framework allows us to start thinking about the other side of the coin: How does the marketplace adapt to individuals who are now stigmatised themselves for holding onto beliefs now thought to be wrong? How do consumers and business owners who are holding on to traditional orthodox views navigate this hysteresis effect and their sudden stigmatisation in certain fields?

The findings of this study thus also add to existing research by rejecting criticisms of the habitus as a static and deterministic concept (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004; Kraus, 2006; McCall, 1992; Mottier, 2002) in favour of an understanding of it as a dynamic phenomenon that can be shaped in later life and even be fragmented in the case of multicultural identities or *habitus clivé* (Kraus, 2006; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; Üstuner and Holt, 2007). As a result of this dynamic habitus, an individual's practices can change and shift, both over the course of an individual's life, as well as more rapidly as a consequence of field movements and power situations. This is particularly important for potentially marginalised consumers whose stigma habitus may liquefy over time or solidify temporarily. Previous work in consumption culture and media studies domains lack this dynamic understanding of practices as a function of both the habitus and social context.

11.4.2. Contribution to Media and Advertising Studies

My study further contributes to the study of media and advertising consumption, both on a theoretical and methodological level. My fieldwork and analysis challenge the idea that the media deliberately use their 'media power' to generate a false consciousness, manipulating meanings to benefit a capitalist ideology in a way that leaves no way of escaping (McRobbie, 1997; Tuchman, 1979; Williamson, 1981). At

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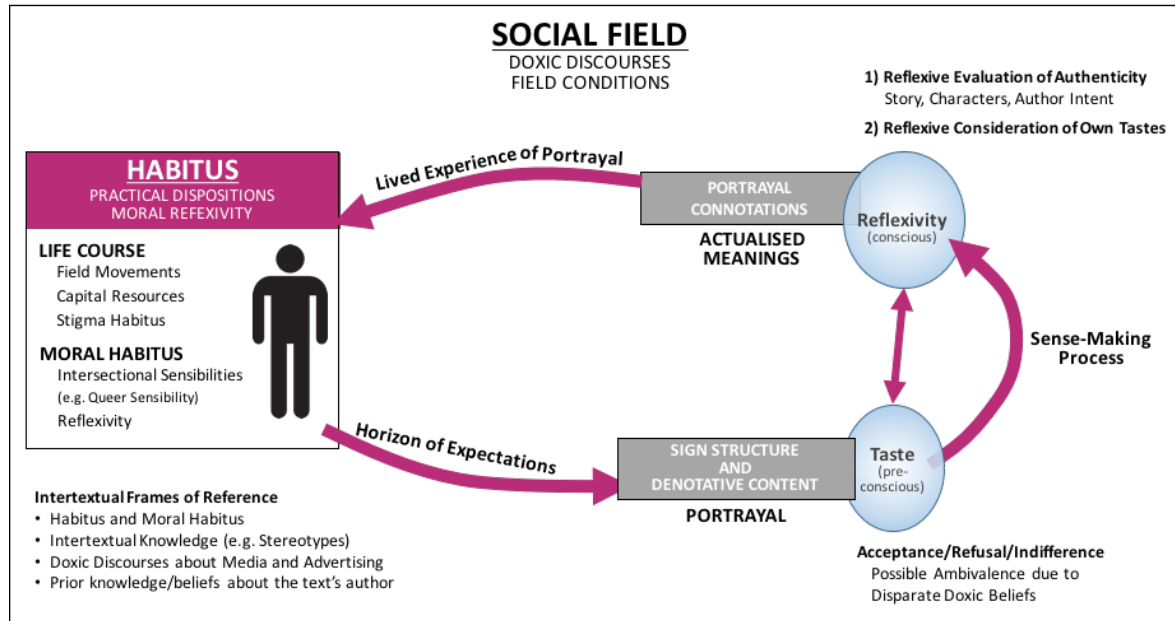
the same time, however, it challenges the view that individuals are entirely ‘active’ and critical consumers of the media (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997; Mick and Buhl, 1992; Scott, 1994). Instead, my thesis puts forward Bourdieu’s theory of practice as a promising avenue to foster better understanding of media consumption. I suggest that media experiences are bound and structured by the (dynamic) habitus in a constant dialectic with the fields in which it moves.

Based on the insights gained in this thesis, I thus present an extended model of meaning-based media experience that better accounts for informants’ naturalised dispositions in the (stigma) habitus, the intertextuality of their media experiences, and field movements and changes over time (Figure 11.2). The model illustrates that media and advertising experiences are influenced by pre-conscious tastes embodied in the habitus, mediated by more reflexive and potentially critical engagement with the content. An individual’s tastes manifest themselves in emotional reactions towards portrayals that lead to preliminary acceptance, refusal, or indifference. Following this initial reaction, the reflexive sense-making process draws from an intertextual frame of reference, made up of (1) lived, vicarious, and mediated experiences (Arnould and Price, 2000; Mick and Buhl, 1992; O’Donohoe, 1997), including, where applicable, those related to stigma and sub-cultural experiences, (2) prior knowledge related to the field of cultural production, such as their recollection of existing portrayals and the use of stereotypes, but also knowledge about the cultural texts’ author, be it a producer or company, as well as (3) the doxic discourses shaping the conditions within the social field within which the media text is consumed – such as discourses about morality, discourses about what constitutes deviancy, and discourses about the ideal nature of the media – based on a situational

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and contextual awareness of current affairs. Thus, while the former two remain relatively stable and evolve only slowly as more experiences are accumulated, the latter changes more rapidly depending on an individual's field movements.

Figure 11.2 Bourdieusian Meaning-Based Model of Media & Ad Experiences



As this framework indicates, my research supports those scholarly voices that call for a Bourdieusian approach combined with reflexivity (Decoteau, 2016; Elder-Vass, 2007; Moi, 1991). There are two types of reflexivity here. First, reflexivity in the sense of conscious deliberation about a portrayal's meanings that are grounded on ones embodied habitus and tastes, and thus more often than not reify existing orthodoxa. The notion of a *social progress interpretation*, for example, is a reflexive mechanism which allows individuals to overcome a pre-conscious rejection of a portrayal in a manner that supports heterosexist orthodoxa.

The second type of reflexivity challenges ones' naturalised beliefs and thus opens the door for potential social change. The latter arises mainly out of individuals' habitus

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clivé and the irreconcilable doxic discourses that this split entails. It also emerges out of the uncertainty that surfaces when a field is experiencing a social struggle between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, rendering its stigma viscosity unstable and ambiguous. Here, reflexivity manifested itself in ambivalence towards media experiences, forcing individuals to challenge their doxic attitude about the world and its social order. Only under these circumstances do individuals reflexively question their embodied tastes and thus pre-conscious reactions towards a portrayal and were ultimately able to abandon them – or not.

Future studies should further investigate how individuals' media experiences change depending on the social context in which they find themselves, for example by conducting research in different social fields and at different times. Life story interviews in conjunction with media diaries kept over a longer time span, for example, may be a fruitful approach to understand such changing experiences across fields and situations. Furthermore, additional research is necessary to appreciate the conditions under which an individual's tastes and embodied dispositions can be changed by subsequent reflexive deliberations (Elder-Vass, 2007). Lastly, there is a need for more critical studies investigating how the media might be fostering processes of individualisation that lead to symbolic violence and therefore intra-group stigmatisation.

Considering the importance of media practitioners as “cultural mediators” and their essential role in the creation of meaning (Bourdieu 1984; Hall 1980; O'Donohoe 1999; Ritson and Elliott 1999), we also need to entertain the idea that the upholding of the heteronormativity by media practitioners is not necessarily a conscious act. It

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is here again that Bourdieu's concept of habitus and field's doxa seems more appropriate than a discussion of ideologies. Rather than considering heteronormative portrayals an ideological tool used by the "ruling class" to maintain the hegemony, the process is seen as a much more symbolic and subconscious one. If a majority of LGBTQ⁺ identified individuals prefers heteronormative images due to their embodied tastes, it seems plausible that the same applies to the media practitioners who determine the content that is aired. Lien (2003, cited in Kelly et al., 2005: 508) talks about a "shared cultural repertoire" between media practitioners and consumers. In a similar vein, the habitus of both producers and consumers is likely to be influenced by similar pervasive doxic discourses that structure their habitus. Their 'heteronormative' way of representing the LGBTQ⁺ community is thus merely a reflection of the tastes embodied in their habitus. Furthermore, their use of the same stereotypes and tropes may simply be that they do not know, have no way of envisioning anything else to what they are already used to and thus adhere to the doxic discourses available to them in the field of cultural production.

This again emphasises the use of the concept of the habitus and symbolic violence over that of ideology. The use of heterosexist imagery may thus constitute symbolic violence not only against the texts' audience, but against the very media practitioners that disseminate them. They are complicit in their own domination because of their misrecognition of the arbitrariness of the doxic discourses that structure the field of cultural production. Future research could usefully be conducted to explore the naturalised doxic discourses that shape media practitioners' choices for design, storylines, and actors within LGBTQ⁺ themed media texts.

11.4.3. Contributions to Methodology

This thesis also contributes methodologically by introducing intersectionality into the study of media experiences. My use of intersectionality in this study demonstrates both its numerous benefits and important drawbacks and considerations which can inform future research seeking more nuanced understandings of informants' life worlds and experiences.

Following my research design, using intersectionality in future qualitative consumer research should entail first an identification of the types of labels individuals employ to describe their lived experiences through an analysis of the membership categorisation devices informants' employ and how they are related to each other in the narrative account (Baker, 2012; King and Cronin, 2010). Once these salient identities have been understood and their influence analysed, it is then about “asking the other question,” asking, for example, about class or race in the face of sexuality. My analysis demonstrates that, even though identity labels continue to be of significance in individuals' conceptions of the self, focusing too much on those categories that individuals claim as their own can lead to oversimplifications and tempt scholars to overlook those aspects of informants' identity that have become so naturalised in their habitus that they themselves easily dismiss their importance for their life-course. It is here again that I found a Bourdieusian approach to be immensely valuable, as it directs the researcher to look for the naturalisation and resulting misrecognition of doxic discourses and field structures.

My analysis shows that LGBTQ⁺ individuals are positioned at the intersection of a number of categories of difference, whose relative influence on their behaviour and

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perception of the world changes depending on context (see also Cronin and King, 2010). This positioning can be empowering, for example when the resilience and social capital built through one's class identification work to lower the viscosity of one's sexual stigma. It can also be disempowering, such as when one's class belonging inhibits one's movements into fields structured by lower viscosity. The latter is particularly concerning in instances when the structural effects stemming from one's belonging to a specific category are misrecognised as unimportant or non-existent, thus veiling its structural effects on an individual's dispositions. My research further indicates that researchers must be careful not to replicate former studies' limitations by regarding one's intersectional position and thus the effects of different categories of difference as static indicators of behaviour. Due to participants' contextual awareness, any one category can seem unimportant one moment but become salient the next, as a result of field movements or power situations. Intersectionality is thus a powerful concept that can help us understand how an individual's categories of difference influence individual dispositions across different social contexts.

My thesis has also, however, highlighted a number of important considerations and potential limitations around the use of intersectionality, particularly the intercategory approach (McCall, 2005). The first is the sheer volume of literature needed to provide a solid basis behind an intersectional analysis. While my study at its core focused on sexuality and gender, my literature review had to take into account a myriad of other known categories of difference to avoid remaining ignorant of potentially important existing concepts and theories. This extended not only the time spent reading the literature, but also the length of the final review and

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subsequent analysis. A further potential limitation lies in the structure of the interviews. The nature of the study certainly primed participants to reflect, maybe disproportionately, on questions of sexuality and gender. To avoid priming them on other categories of difference, I generally “asked the other question” only towards the end of the interviews, referring back to previously mentioned experiences and beliefs and asking about those categories informants had neglected to mention. This approach afforded me better insight into the misrecognition of the structural influences of different categories as well as their naturalisation in informants' habitus. It also meant, however, that answers were not provided 'in the moment', but retrospectively. While I deem it unlikely, it is possible that what I interpreted as naturalisation may simply be the outcome of the research question's focus on LGBTQ⁺ themes and participants' subsequent expectations of what was expected from them. It will be difficult to avoid this issue in future intercategory research, based on the fact that this approach is predicated on interest in one core category from which the analysis fans outwards. Nevertheless, scholars may consider framing recruiting materials and research interviews in a cone shape, starting from more general questions about individuals' experiences, then focusing on those categories that are raised without prompting, before ultimately asking the other question. Furthermore, only after conducting my analysis did it occur to me that 'asking the other question' should imply asking about it in terms of participants' life-course and whether their awareness of certain categories had shifted over the course of it. Future studies should clarify these connections. Instead of asking about categories such as race and class only in relation to their media experience and expectations, I should have asked about them with respect to their individual life-courses. While

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researchers must be mindful not to steer individual accounts through excessive prompting, I firmly believe that naturalised dispositions and doxic discourses can only be explored and reflexively considered both by participants and the researcher if the ‘other question’ is asked quite bluntly.

We must thus further consider which ‘other’ questions we may ask and how scholars may avoid reifying their own pre- and misconceptions (King and Cronin, 2010; Cronin and King, 2010; Luft and Ward, 2009; McCall, 2005). In this study, my questions focused on the most widely theorised categories of difference outside of sexuality and gender: class, race, age, disability, and body shape. I attempted to keep my questions neutral, merely asking, for example: And what about race? What about class? What is your experience of such representations? Nevertheless, I am left wondering whether I may have overlooked the influence of other important categories that have become naturalised even in my habitus. This is an important drawback of the type of strategic essentialism necessary for any intersectional study, a drawback for which, sadly, I have no solution other than to re-emphasise the importance of scholarly reflexivity to question one's propensity to focus on some categories over others. Despite these considerations, however, I believe that the approach used in this research is very promising for future studies that wish to explore a phenomenon from both the level of individual experience and structuring structures.

11.4.4. Reflexive, Critical Action

Far from leading to an acceptance of all queer people, the heteronormative images we are now getting used to seeing in the media are causing a rift within the

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community itself. While assimilationist representation may be leading to acceptance of some parts of the spectrum, it is eroding the very basis upon which the stigma placed on radical non-conformity may have been subverted. Many Foucauldian and feminist approaches call for consciousness-raising, i.e. exposing the false consciousness created by ideology, as a key tool to fight discrimination and drive the resistance (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004; Butler, 1990). My findings, however, echo Bourdieu's scepticism of such an approach. Raising consciousness is merely a small and, on its own, insufficient part of possible resistance against existing doxa. My participants displayed a clear understanding of heteronormativity, the hierarchy of respectability, and the mechanisms of discrimination, incorporating such considerations into their evaluations of media portrayals. Their "raised consciousness," however, was not enough to convince them to rally against the doxa, to pledge their allegiance to heterodoxic discourses such as Queer theory that stand in opposition to the orthodoxic beliefs internalised in their habitus. As Ovidia's media experience shows, Queer critique of heteronormative representations is a full-time job, a radical practice requiring constant presence of mind. "Mindless" enjoyment and tolerance of portrayals, on the other hand, is a doxic practice that is not easily cast aside even by those whose consciousness has been "raised." Overcoming the doxic systems we move in does not come naturally and thus can never be easy. Individuals cannot simply remove themselves from their habitus, from the dispositions learned throughout their movements over their life-course. Most informants did not want the total "subversion" of gender norms as Butler would have it. For them it was about incorporating minorities into the doxic norm, expanding its limits a little, so to speak, to reach a 'new' normal that is, however, not so different

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from the old.

How, then, can we as liberal academic researchers drive the subversion of existing gender norms and prevailing stigma? At this point, I can only provide my own subjective answer and give an insight into the steps I, as a critical researcher, have taken over the duration of this project. My research suggests, that those who have a higher *queer sensibility* are more supportive of radical, gender bending representations. This might explain why it was mostly those already actively involved in queer politics who attended the few “consciousness raising” presentations I held about my research at the University of Edinburgh. How, then, I asked myself could I foster such a queer sensibility in those who are not interested, those who want to be seen as “normal” and, of course, in heterosexual audiences?

The first step, to me, seems to be changing the types of portrayals that are being produced in an effort to make radical performances of sexuality and gender more ‘acceptable.’ To do so, I went to talk to practitioners about my research, in particular in advertising agencies, including Dentsu Aegis and Bartle Bogle Hegarty, attempting to change their naturalised dispositions for heteronormative portrayals. I showed them a video that describes the dominant LGBTQ⁺ portrayals in advertising today and illustrates intersectional symbolic annihilation based on my advertising imagery analysis (Nölke, 2018). This video can be watched on YouTube via the QR code provided in Figure 11.3. It currently has over 1500 views. While I gave these practitioners more tangible ‘rules’ about what type of portrayals to include or not, based on insights from my research (Figure 11.4), I also relayed some of the media experiences I had witnessed, in particular those of the most marginalised amongst my

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informants. I explained the hierarchy of respectability and the way advertising contributes to on-going discrimination against and within the LGBTQ⁺ community. In this way, I tried to appeal to their moral habitus and queer sensibility, involving attendants by asking about their own experiences of the media over their life-course.

Figure 11.3 QR Code LGBT Ad Video



Three of the comments I heard over and over again was: “We just don’t know how to do better” “How can we represent everyone in an ad?,” as well as “How can we sell this to our customers?” They were uncertain about how they could balance moral imperatives with the economic and

strategic ones of their clients (see e.g. Kelly et al., 2005). These are questions that cannot be answered with certainty, however, the recent move towards storytelling in advertising may be a step in the right direction. Thus, my main advice was to encourage them to make use of trailer ads that point towards Human Interest Ads online (see Nölke, 2018), which would allow them to provide more in-depth stories of real life people, particularly those whose identities are not easily made salient in 30 seconds, such as bisexuals, trans* and non-binary people. In the end, however, it is clear that one cannot get around the economic imperative: even my informants invoked discourses about economic viability in their considerations of advertisements.

Figure 11.4 Best Practices Provided to Advertising Agencies



Companies and practitioners are still afraid of alienating the majority by targeting the minority, a fear that is not abated by existing research findings. Thus, future research should take the recent societal changes as the starting point for renewed investigations into heterosexual consumers' reactions towards advertising (see e.g. Pounders and Mabry-Flynn, 2016), focusing in particular on questions of their naturalised dispositions and potentially mediating moral habitus and underlying sensibilities. Based on the lack of LGBTQ+ themed print advertising and proliferation of Human Interest ads (Nölke, 2018), such research should further focus particularly on these types of advertising imagery.

12. FINAL REFLECTIONS

As final concluding remarks, I want to briefly discuss one of the quotes that struck me most out of all of my interviews - Max's utterance in referring to his preference for heteronormative portrayals: "Maybe some people just want this, and they don't really need to explain to you why they want it. You know what I mean? And they don't owe it to any community to be a certain way." In reading and re-reading this statement I came to ask myself: in declaring that a number of my informants is symbolically violating others through their embodied preferences, am I not symbolically violating them? Am I misrecognising the arbitrariness of queer discourses? As a left-wing, liberal academic who has developed a strong queer sensibility thanks to my post-graduate studies and a multitude of conversations with people across the sexuality and gender spectrum, how are my views and my analysis infringing on those individuals who wish to see "normal" people represented? At the same time, however, as the daughter of a Spanish woman who grew up in a very traditional, religious society and is to this date uncomfortable with the idea of same-sex marriage - albeit entirely supportive of me and my partner - maybe I am

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predisposed to be more understanding of those whose habitus is structured by heterosexist doxa, less quick to judge, and more intent on changing their dispositions slowly over time? Considering recent societal occurrences and the swelling mass of populist sentiments that reject ‘experts’ and do not seem to be going away as much as we stay in our own little echo chambers, perhaps we liberal academic scholars must sit down and discuss how we contribute to the problem.

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14. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: SGNIs

SEXUAL ORIENTATION	GENDER IDENTITY
<p>agender adj. : a person with no (or very little) connection to the traditional system of gender, no personal alignment with the concepts of either man or woman, and/or someone who sees themselves as existing without gender. Sometimes called gender neutrois, gender neutral, or genderless.</p>	<p>androgyny/ous / adj. : 1 a gender expression that has elements of both masculinity and femininity; 2 occasionally used in place of "intersex" to describe a person with both female and male anatomy.</p>
<p>androsexual / androphilic adj. : being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some men, males, and/or masculinity.</p>	<p>butch noun & adj. a person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. Butch is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but is also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.</p>
<p>aromantic adj. : experiencing little or no romantic attraction to others and/or has a lack of interest in romantic relationships/behavior. Aromanticism exists on a continuum from people who experience no romantic attraction or have any desire for romantic activities, to those who experience low levels, or romantic attraction only under specific conditions).</p>	<p>cisgender adj. : a person whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth align (e.g., man and assigned male at birth). A simple way to think about it is if a person is not transgender, they are cisgender. The word cisgender can also be shortened to "cis."</p>
<p>asexual adj. : experiencing little or no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behavior. Asexuality exists on a continuum from people who experience no sexual attraction or have any desire for sex, to those who experience low levels, or sexual attraction only under specific conditions.</p>	<p>cross-dresser noun : someone who wears clothes of another gender/sex.</p>

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<p>bigender adj. : a person who fluctuates between traditionally woman and man gender-based behavior and identities, identifying with both genders (and sometimes a third gender).</p>	<p>drag king noun : someone who performs masculinity theatrically.</p>
<p>bicurious adj. : a curiosity about having attraction to people of the same gender/sex (similar to questioning).</p>	<p>drag queen noun : someone who performs femininity theatrically.</p>
<p>bisexual adj. : 1 a person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. 2 a person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people of their gender and another gender . This attraction does not have to be equally split or indicate a level of interest that is the same across the genders or sexes an individual may be attracted to.</p>	<p>femme (noun & adj) someone who identifies themselves as feminine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. Often used to refer to a feminine-presenting queer woman.</p>
<p>demioromantic adj. : little or no capacity to experience romantic attraction until a strong sexual or emotional connection is formed with another individual, often within a sexual relationship.</p>	<p>FtM / F2M; MtF / M2F abbreviation : female-to-male transgender or transsexual person; male-to-female transgender or transsexual person.</p>
<p>demisexual adj. : little or no capacity to experience sexual attraction until a strong romantic or emotional connection is formed with another individual, often within a romantic relationship.</p>	<p>gender fluid adj. : : gender fluid is a gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of boy and girl. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, but may feel more man some days, and more woman other days.</p>
<p>down low adj. : typically referring to men who identify as straight but who secretly have sex with men. Down low (or DL) originated in, and is most commonly used by communities of color.</p>	<p>gender non-conforming adj. : 1 a gender expression descriptor that indicates a non-traditional gender presentation (masculine woman or feminine man) 2 a gender identity label that indicates a person who identifies outside of the gender binary. Often abbreviated as ÒGNC.Ó</p>
<p>gay adj. : : 1 individuals who are primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex and/or gender. More commonly used when referring to men who are attracted to other men, but can be applied to women as well. 2 An umbrella term used to refer to the queer community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.</p>	<p>gender normative / gender straight adj. : someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, aligns with society's gender-based expectations.</p>
<p>gynosexual / gynephilic adj. : being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some woman, females, and/or femininity.</p>	<p>genderqueer adj. : a gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman; or as an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary identities (e.g., agender, bigender, genderfluid).</p>
<p>heterosexual adj. : a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex. Also known as straight.</p>	<p>intersex adj. : term for a combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals that differs from the two expected patterns of male or female. Formerly known as hermaphrodite (or hermaphroditic), but these terms are now outdated and derogatory.</p>
<p>homosexual adj. & noun : a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex/gender.</p>	<p>lipstick lesbian noun : Usually refers to a lesbian with a feminine gender expression. Can be used in a positive or a derogatory way. Is sometimes also used to refer to a lesbian who is assumed to be (or passes for) straight.</p>

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<p>gay adj. : : 1 individuals who are primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex and/or gender. More commonly used when referring to men who are attracted to other men, but can be applied to women as well. 2 An umbrella term used to refer to the queer community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.</p>	<p>gender normative / gender straight adj. : someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, aligns with society's gender-based expectations.</p>
<p>gynesexual / gynephilic adj. : being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some woman, females, and/or femininity.</p>	<p>genderqueer adj. : a gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman; or as an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary identities (e.g., agender, bigender, genderfluid).</p>
<p>heterosexual adj. : a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex. Also known as straight.</p>	<p>intersex adj. : term for a combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals that differs from the two expected patterns of male or female. Formerly known as hermaphrodite (or hermaphroditic), but these terms are now outdated and derogatory.</p>
<p>homosexual adj. & noun : a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex/gender.</p>	<p>lipstick lesbian noun : Usually refers to a lesbian with a feminine gender expression. Can be used in a positive or a derogatory way. Is sometimes also used to refer to a lesbian who is assumed to be (or passes for) straight.</p>
<p>lesbian noun & adj. women who have the capacity to be attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to some other women.</p>	<p>metrosexual adj. : a man with a strong aesthetic sense who spends more time, energy, or money on his appearance and grooming than is considered gender normative.</p>
<p>LGBTQ; GSM; DSG abbreviations : shorthand or umbrella terms for all folks who have a non-normative (or queer) gender or sexuality, there are many different initialisms people prefer.</p>	<p>MSM / WSW abbreviations : men who have sex with men or women who have sex with women, to distinguish sexual behaviors from sexual identities: because a man is straight, it doesn't mean he's not having sex with men. Often used in the field of HIV/Aids education, prevention, and treatment.</p>
<p>pansexual adj. : a person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions. Often shortened to pan.</p>	<p>stud noun : most commonly used to indicate a Black/African-American and/or Latina masculine lesbian/queer woman. Also known as "butch" or "aggressive".</p>
<p>polyamory / polyamorous noun, adj. refers to the practice of, desire to, or orientation towards having ethically, honest, and consensual non-monogamous relationships (i.e. relationships that may include multiple partners). This may include open relationships, polyfidelity (which involves more than two people being in romantic and/or sexual relationships which is not open to additional partners), amongst many other set-ups.</p>	<p>third gender noun : for a person who does not identify with either man or woman, but identifies with another gender. This gender category is used by societies that recognise three or more genders, both contemporary and historic, and is also a conceptual term meaning different things to different people who use it, as a way to move beyond the gender binary.</p>
<p>questioning verb, adj. an individual who or time when someone is unsure about or exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity.</p>	<p>trans* adj. : An umbrella term covering a range of identities that transgress socially defined gender norms. Trans with an asterisk is often used in written forms (not spoken) to indicate that you are referring to the larger group nature of the term, and specifically including non-binary identities, as well as transgender men (transmen) and transgender women (trans women).</p>

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<p>same gender loving (SGL) adj. : sometimes used by some members of the African-American or Black community to express an non-straight sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent.</p>	<p>transgender adj. : A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that assigned at birth based on anatomical sex.</p>
<p>skoliosexual adj. : being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to some genderqueer, transgender, transsexual, and/or non-binary people.</p>	<p>transman; transwoman noun : An identity label sometimes adopted by FtM or MtF transgender people or transsexuals to signify that they are men/women while still affirming their history as assigned female/male sex at birth</p>
<p>straight adj. : a person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people who are not their same sex/gender. A more colloquial term for the word heterosexual.</p>	<p>transsexual noun and adj. a person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth. Transsexuals often wish to transform their bodies hormonally and surgically to match their inner sense of gender/sex.</p>
	<p>transvestite noun : a person who dresses as the binary opposite gender expression (cross-dresseÓ) for any one of many reasons, including relaxation, fun, and sexual gratification.</p>
	<p>two-spirit noun : is an umbrella term traditionally used by Native American people to recognize individuals who possess qualities or fulfill roles of both genders</p>

Adapted from: USC Southern California (2018). LGBT Terminology. *LGBT Resource Centre*. Retrieved from <https://lgbtrc.usc.edu/education/terminology/>

APPENDIX 2: LGBT+ CHW Training Certificate



APPENDIX 3: Last Participant Recruitment Ad



DO YOU WANT TO CHANGE HOW WE ARE REPRESENTED IN THE MEDIA?

The media is pervasive in all of our lives and significantly influences the way we think. Despite the increase in LGBT⁺ visibility over the few past years, **the generations 50⁺ remains largely *unseen or misrepresented*.**

I am a PhD student at The University of Edinburgh who is currently trying to change that and you can help. I have already talked to quite a number of amazing people, but since I have a slight majority of participants who identify as male, **I am still looking for two people aged 50+ who do not identify as male to meet over coffee (or any other drink - my treat!).**

We would talk twice, once about your life story, and once about your views and experience of media portrayals and it is **100% anonymous**.

Eventually I will use my findings in cooperation with groups such as Stonewall to promote accurate representations of our community in the media.

Who am I? A 27-year-old who identifies as a lesbian and is very passionate about what can be done with this research!

If you are interested in making a change you can reach me via: a.noelke@sms.ed.ac.uk or 07851/488 017

BT Media Research
ail: a.noelke@sms.ed.ac.uk
: 07851/488 017

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APPENDIX 4: Participant Information Leaflet



Hi there!

Thank you so much for agreeing to take part in today's interview. Your help will go a long way in helping me to do my PhD!

I wanted to give you some information on what we are doing today and what will happen with what has been said afterwards. So please read the information below carefully and make sure you are ok with everything.

Thanks again! I look forward to it!
Anabel

Why am I holding this interview?

This interview is part of my PhD research at the University of Edinburgh.

What are we going to talk about?

You will talk about your life story in general and about important moments and people in your life. I have seven sections and will guide you every step of the way. In our second interview, we will talk about your experience of the media and I will show you a few videos to talk about.

Who will see what you share today?

Everything that is said today is confidential. Some sentences or phrases will be used for illustration in my PhD research, which will be publicly available. The full data might go into an archive so that other researchers can use it. I will write up your life story but will change your name everywhere so that your identity is protected at all times. I will not talk about you or our interview today with anyone else.

Can anyone reading my report or the transcript recognise you?

No, because I will change your name. If you want to choose one let me know. Please remember that you do not have to give me any of this information and it is completely up to what you share. All data will be handled according to the University of Edinburgh's Data Protection procedures.

Do I have to take part even if I decide I don't want to?

It is completely your choice! You can decide to take part or not and I sincerely will not mind if you feel uncomfortable and would like to stop. If you change your mind, just let me know.

How much time is this going to take?

Depending on how much you talk this can take anything from an hour up to three hours. Again, if you want to leave earlier just let me know. You are free to leave whenever you want.

Would you like to see a transcript or my report?

Please let me know whether you would like to see a transcript of the interview or the final analysis. You can reach me at any time via a.noelke@sms.ed.ac.uk

APPENDIX 5: Life Story Interview Guide

SECTION 1:

I would like you to begin by thinking about your life as if it were a book. Each part of your life composes a chapter in the book. Certainly, the book is unfinished at this point; still, it probably already contains a few interesting and well-defined chapters.

Please divide your life into its major chapters and briefly describe each chapter.

You may have as many or as few chapters as you like, but I would suggest dividing it into at least two or three chapters and at most about seven or eight.

Think of it as a general table of contents for your book. Give each chapter a name and describe the overall contents of each chapter.

Discuss briefly what makes for a transition from one chapter to the next.

You don't want to tell me "the whole story" here. Just give me a sense of the story's outline – the major chapters in your life.

SECTION 2: Key Events

I am going to ask you about eight key events. A key event should be a specific happening, a critical incident, a significant episode in your past set in a particular time and place. It is helpful to think of such an event as constituting a specific moment in your life that stands out for some reason.

Thus, a particular conversation you had with your mother when you were twelve years old or a particular decision you made one afternoon last summer might qualify as a key event in your life story. These are particular moments in a particular time and place, complete with particular characters, actions, thoughts, and feelings.

An entire summer vacation – be it very happy or very sad or very important in some way – or a very difficult year in high school, on the other hand, would not qualify as key events, because these take place over an extended period of time. (They are more like life chapters.)

For each event describe in detail what happened, where you were, who was involved, what you did, and what you were thinking and feeling in the event.

Also, try to convey the impact this key event has had on your life story and what this event says about who you are or were as a person. Did this event change you in any way? If so, in what way. Please be very specific here.

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The eight key events are:

Peak experience: A high point in the life story; the most wonderful moment in your life

Nadir experience: A low point in the life story; the worst moment in your life

Turning point: An episode wherein you underwent a significant change in your understanding of yourself. It is not necessary that you comprehend the turning point as a turning point when it in fact happened. What is important is that now, in retrospect, you see the event as a turning point, or at minimum as symbolizing a significant change in your life.

Earliest memory: one of the earliest memories you have of an event that is complete with setting, scene, characters, feelings, and thoughts. This does not have seem like an especially important memory. Its one virtue is that it is early.

An important childhood memory: Any memory from your childhood, positive or negative, that stands out today.

An important adolescent memory: Any memory from your teenage years that stands out today. Again, it can be either positive or negative.

An important adult memory: A memory, positive or negative, that stands out from age twenty-one onwards.

Other important memory: One other particular event from your past that stands out. It may be from long ago or recent times. It may be positive or negative

SECTION 3: Significant People

Every person's life story is populated by a few significant people who have a major impact on the narrative. These may include, but not be limited to, parents, children, siblings, spouses, lovers, friends, teachers, co-workers, and mentors. I want you to describe four of the most important people in your life story. At least one of them should be a person to whom you are not related. Please specify the kind of relationship you had or have with each person and the specific way he or she has had an impact on your life story.

After describing each of these, tell me about any particular heroes or heroines you have in your life. You need to ask yourself why you chose the person you chose and why you choose to remember them in the way you have.

SECTION 4: Future Script

Now that you have told me a little bit about your past and present, I would like you to consider the future. As your life story extends into the future, what might be the script or plan for what is to happen next in your life?

I would like you to describe your overall plans, outline, or dream for your own future. Most of us have plans or dreams that concern what we would like to get out of life and what we would like to put into it in the future. These dreams or plans provide our lives with goals, interests, hopes, aspirations, and wishes. Furthermore, our dreams or plans may change over time, reflecting growth and changing experiences.

Describe your present dream, plan, or outline for the future. Also tell me how, if at all, your dream, plan or outline enables you (1) to be creative in the future and (2) to make a contribution to others.

SECTION 5: Stresses and Problems

All life stories include significant conflicts, unresolved issues, problems to be solved, and periods of great stress. I would like you to consider some of these now.

Please describe the two areas in your life where at present you are experiencing at least one of the following: significant stress, a major conflict, or a difficult problem or challenge that must be addressed.

For each of the two, describe the nature of the stress, problem, or conflict in some detail, outlining the source of the concern, a brief history of its development, and your plan, if you have one, for dealing with it in the future.

SECTION 6: personal ideology

Now I will ask you a few questions about your fundamental beliefs and values. Please give some thought to each of them, and answer with as much detail as you can.

(1) Do you believe in the existence of some kind of God, deity, or force that reigns over or in some way influences or organizes the universe? Explain.

(2) Please describe in a nutshell your religious beliefs.

(3) In what ways, if any, are your beliefs different from those held by most of the people you know?

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(4) Please describe how your religious beliefs have changed over time. Have you experienced any periods of rapid change in your religious beliefs? Explain.

(5) Do you have any particular political orientation? Explain.

(6) What is the most important value in human living? Explain.

(7) What else can you tell me that would help me understand you most fundamental beliefs and values about life and the world?

LAST SECTION: life theme

Looking back at your entire life story as a book with chapters, episodes, and characters, can you discern a central theme, message or idea that runs through the text? What is the major theme of your life? Explain.

APPENDIX 6: Life Stories

This Appendix introduces my informants' life stories by giving a short overview of each life-course, pervasive life themes and projects. These stories are told using participants' own words to provide an insight into how they perceive their lives and the socio-historic structures that have shaped their identity. The stories are arranged first by generational belonging, then by age and, where necessary, alphabetically.

Boomer's Life Stories

Adam (50)

Adam is a working-class, bisexual man who has had a difficult life due to various factors that rendered his sexuality almost insignificant. As such, he has no noteworthy experiences with stigma. Adam grew up being moved between different care homes and foster families, in some of which he was sexually abused. Positive memories of his childhood are scarce and he believes that it is due to this constant change that he cannot maintain many friendships. He struggled in school with undiagnosed dyslexia and never finished his A-Levels. At 16, he left the care system and moved to a mining village where he got married at 18 and fathered two children. Tragically, his daughter was killed in an accident at only 12 years old. This took its toll on Adam's marriage and relationship with his son, and he left his family ten years later to start a new life. Through his involvement with a bisexual girl he started exploring his own sexuality, initially identifying as gay, but later as bisexual. After becoming interested in his past, he searched and found his blood-sister and moved back to Scotland, where he spent years immersed in the gay community. Eventually, he met a woman and they fell in love, marrying two years later. Since then, he has had very limited ties to the LGBTQ⁺ community. Today he is trying to excel in his job as a carer and hopes to travel with his wife. He has close to no contact to his son.

He believes that the most important value in human living is being oneself and being considerate of others. Throughout his life, he has moved around following his head and heart, refusing to let problems bring him down. Consistent with this, he describes his life theme as 'Be yourself, end of story'. This very much reflects the need to survive many negative experiences in his life. His current life projects relate to his marriage and plans for the future. The first is "being a good husband" and the second "climbing the employment ladder," both of which are highly personal.

Alice (50)

Alice is a trans-woman, born on an island off the coast of England, who decided to transition when she was 49, after the death of her wife. Still in her pre-coming out phase, she has very limited experiences of stigma and strong anti-capitalist convictions. As an only child with slightly feminine qualities, her childhood was torn

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between her happiness at home and the bullying she sustained at school. She retreated into her studies and went on to study physics, where she became more sociable and started cross-dressing. Out of university, she started a job as a computer programmer and met Cathy, whom she would marry less than a year later. They settled down and had a daughter who was diagnosed with epilepsy and a son who suffers from Asperger's syndrome. Their children's conditions awakened a deep cynicism regarding the government and media in both Alice and Cathy. At 46, Cathy died of breast cancer. Having become a spiritual person believing in reincarnation, Alice overcame her grief, and started seeing this tragic event as an opportunity to free her feminine side and be herself - Alice rather than John. Today she still mostly presents as John and has two Facebook accounts, but has a set date for her coming-out in two months. Alice has not experienced any negative reactions aside from her children, who still have problems accepting their father's transition.

She describes her life theme as "putting things right" - from her bullying, her children's conditions, her wife's death, to her own transition. Her first life project is "fully transitioning," an on-going personal project that she is planning meticulously. A second life project that is hindering the first is - "being a good parent." Alice is very aware of her children's apprehensions and is thus waiting for them to complete their education before transitioning fully. A third life project that has recently arisen from the first is "being an advocate for women's and trans rights."

Pádrúig (52)

Pádrúig is not religious, but would describe himself as a humanist who enjoys sitting back and observing the world rather than actively joining in. His life consists of his work and he is most comfortable being alone. He was born in 1964 as the youngest of four boys in a lower-middle-class, Scottish family. He was a slightly effeminate, geeky child, who adored *Doctor Who* and preferred to be on his own. When he was only seven, his father died of kidney disease. Due to this tragic event, he was given a scholarship for an upper-class private school, and ultimately for University. He felt out of place at his "posh" school and took to observing rather than participating. When he was 18, he slowly started noticing his attraction to men but kept this part of himself hidden for many years before coming out. He never experienced a bad reaction towards his sexual orientation, although this topic is not discussed in his family. He never felt the need to frequent gay spaces, feeling comfortable with his mix of gay and straight friends. He started working as a tax accountant but quickly moved into the publishing world, writing and editing for a disability magazine and later a magazine on people who had left the armed forces. Since childhood he had been interested in journalism, always being more of an observer than active participant. When he was made redundant after nearly 20 years, he decided to try freelance journalism, which he has been doing since. As a self-described "loner", he

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was never able to maintain a long-term relationship and is not actively looking for one.

Pádraig describes his pervasive life theme as “being an observer,” which is reflected in his work, but which he also blames for his lack of relationships. His main life project is “making his business a success” - his work is the most important part of his life and the one he identifies with the most, always thinking of new stories or clients to approach. At this point in time his life consists of little else.

Sage (53)

Sage is best described as a gender-fluid, rock-and-roll and punk-loving free-spirit who lives in the moment and has moved through his whole life not caring about other people’s opinions thanks to the social groups he builds. He was born in a Scottish city and describes his childhood as easy, despite his father’s alcoholism and disapproval of his identity expression. From a young age, he had been flamboyant and always attracted attention, but remained oblivious to any negative attitude towards him. When he started being bullied in school at 13, he befriended older girls who protected him and got him involved with the punk sub-culture. It was this sub-culture that cemented his undeniable belief in freedom of expression. He admired gender-fluid musicians and artists, and to him the 1970s were all about this until the AIDS crisis. Even during this time, however, he felt safe in the environments he moved in. At 18 he met and started an affair with Robert, an older man who introduced him to the world of drugs, because of whom he went to jail for six weeks. When Robert went to jail for a year, 21-year-old Sage was left to take care of Robert’s 6-year-old daughter. This was a turning point in Sage’s life, teaching him to be less self-obsessed, and ultimately causing him to end the relationship shortly after Robert’s release. Sage started a job in a kitchen, while working on his music and studying English literature. Since graduating, he has been a freelance writer who does not have any plans for the future. He has different circles of friends for different activities and never really went into the gay scene which he finds to be too over the top and stereotypical.

His life theme, according to himself, is “not stagnating” – constantly ‘flitting about from one interest to another’ to avoid feeling bored. His current life project is the punk/rock band he joined a few months back as a singer-song writer. Other than that, his life project is simply living the day – Carpe Diem, an extension of his life theme. He likes to be in control of his own life, never giving too much away to anybody.

Emma (56)

For Emma, justice and equality are the most important values in human living, which drives her involvement with LGBTQ⁺ charities. Still, she does not move much in

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LGBTQ⁺ circles and does not remember encountering any form of prejudice due to her sexuality. Her life revolves around finding stability and maintaining a comfortable routine. She was born in 1963 in southern England. She grew up in a care home after her mother abandoned the family and her grandparents were only able to take in her three older siblings. Growing up in an institutionalized environment, she came to need the routine and structure this afforded. Her mother returned with two young children and a husband when Emma was eight, and three years later Emma re-joined the family. They were poor and lived in a rough neighbourhood, and Emma's adolescence was troubled and difficult, leading her to leave the day she turned 16. After turning to drugs and alcohol for solace, she searched for help in a women's half-way house, where she started a relationship with an older woman who encouraged her to finish her A-levels. She then joined the Territorial Army for three years in search of more routine. On returning, she moved north and started working as an insolvency consultant for the government and then the private sector. Since then, her life has been balanced and fulfilling, with a number of long-term relationships, the last of which ended recently after 15 years. Emma strongly believes that life is about one's attitude and she refuses to give in to negativity.

Emma describes her life theme as "the need for stability." This is visible throughout her life in her work and long-term relationships. Her main life project at this point is "fulfilling her dreams," which is related to her travel plans and wish to see the world. A smaller life project would be "doing good," reflected in the several volunteer positions she has taken on throughout her life and her wish to continue doing so abroad.

Peter (56)

Peter was born in a Welsh mining village as the second youngest of six children in a working-class family. His family was poor in material terms, but rich in the close bonds they shared even with their extended family. To this day relationships, his family and husband are the most important parts of his life. He remembers a happy childhood, despite his father's drinking and progressive distance from them. At 16, he started his first job in a factory, where he worked for 14 years. He came of age in the 80s, the time of Margaret Thatcher and the AIDS crisis. He had always known he was gay, but did not dare come out for fear of not being accepted. In his 20s, however, he secretly started to frequent gay spaces and read gay-themed publications. At 27, he met Ian. They soon fell in love and have been together since. After initial apprehension, Peter's family came to accept their relationship. Ian encouraged him to leave the factory to study politics, despite the financial strain this would place on them. During this time, they experienced a number of homophobic incidents, but were never harmed, although friends of theirs were not as lucky. After

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finishing his course, Peter worked in a local government job in Wales. Shortly after his mother's death, the worst moment of his life, they moved up to Scotland, where Peter started an administrative job at the NHS. They have now settled down happily and recently got married.

His pervasive life theme is "do the best you can. If you fail, don't worry." He appreciates the little things in life, his health, family and relationship. One of his life projects is "building a stable life" with his husband after paying off their mortgage. His second life project is "getting ready for retirement." With Ian being more than 10 years younger, Peter seeks a balance between letting Ian take care of him, and creating his own independent life outside of work.

Joy (60)

Joy can be described as a self-made woman who worked her way up to her own business from her working-class roots. She was born in Glasgow, the first of nine children in a working-class family. As a child, she received a scholarship for a private school where she felt out of place but happy amongst her books. At 14, her strict and chauvinistic father made her leave school to earn her keep. She accepted a position as a trainee cook in a large kitchen, later attending evening college despite her father's disagreement. She left town at 21 to work in a neighbouring city, where she lived for over a decade with a friend, whom she helped first through alcohol problems and later to raise a child after the father left. At 41 she knew something had to change. At a party, she struck up a friendship with a gay woman who introduced her to her friends, including Eleanor. Joy and Eleanor developed an ever-closer friendship and slowly Joy started to realize the attraction she felt. They have been together since and after an initial bad reaction from her closest friend, Joy has never experienced further discrimination. Tired of being a chef herself, she built her own employment agency hiring out chefs, cooks, and cleaners. Since their retirement, Joy was diagnosed with breast cancer, as well as contracting severe arthritis that has hindered her mobility, but never her spirit. She has become more interested in politics and joined the Scottish National Party, besides taking up photography and going on occasional cruises.

She considers her life theme to be "giving," a theme that is clearly visible in the way she always puts others before herself. Throughout her life Joy has often felt out of control, fighting to get out of a life she knew she did not want. An important life project for her is thus "keep going and it will get better." The next life project is "being a good friend and partner," which is intimately linked to her life theme and inherent need to put others first.

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George (63)

While George has no lived experiences of stigma, his life revolves around his sexuality, due to his fear of coming out to a world he believes would never accept him. He grew up in a small Presbyterian community in the Scottish Highlands, where family was of utmost importance and everybody was expected to follow a strict social and moral code. Homosexuality was not to be talked about. As a wee boy, George was rather effeminate, which he links to his budding gayness. He was a very quiet boy and had few friends throughout adolescence. At 18 he moved away to an arts school where he finally felt free to be his own person. He accepted his attraction to men, but still considered physical contact perverted behaviour. During a brief year as a cabaret actor in Berlin he finally let his gay alter ego live, but quickly distanced himself from it when he returned home. At 24 he married a woman and shortly after became a father. Years passed and in the 80s the changing music landscape started suggesting homosexuality was acceptable. This gave George the strength to leave his wife and start a new life, but he quickly realized that it would not be easy. He started cruising the gay scene looking for romance and love and instead found a hyper-sexualised scene. Since he had not come out to anybody, he grew more and more socially isolated. As he got older he moved on to gay dating sites on the internet, but found it riddled with married men looking for quick sex.

George feels that due to the societal rules he grew up with he has missed out on his own life. He thus describes his life theme as “Missed Opportunities.” One life project is thus ‘becoming more adventurous,’ which includes meeting new people, dating younger men, as well as visiting new places, being more open. His main life project, however, is ‘being a good father’, which he finds difficult firstly due to the physical distance from his daughter and secondly due to the secret he is keeping from her.

Millennial’s Life Stories

Corinne-Chris (CC, 20)

CC’s life is best described as a constant pull between conformity and non-conformity, both in terms of her gender identity and her life path. CC was born in Canada in a loving, conservative, upper-middle-class, Catholic household. When she was 9, the family moved and CC started to struggle with her gender identity. Even though her parents never put any limitations on her, she experienced anxiety due to the gendered expectations she felt were set by a conservative environment. When the family moved to ‘suburbia’, CC attended a local Catholic school, where she struggled to make friends and started dressing “like a girl” despite not feeling comfortable. During this time, she begun listening to artists such as David Bowie who bent gender norms, and remain her heroes to this day. When she left to study philosophy, her life changed drastically. Previously a moody outsider, she made

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friends instantly, but also experienced anxiety about her sexuality which she only allowed herself to explore in her second semester. She started developing feelings for a female friend, and started dating shortly after. That summer, CC came out to her parents, who surprised her with their positive reactions. Since dating her girlfriend, her life has become happier though she still struggles to make sense of the concept of gender in relation to herself.

CC describes her life theme as ‘living deliberately’, constantly making her own informed decisions. Her first life project can be seen as ‘deciding on a life path,’ which reflects the constant tension she feels between a philosophical, academic career and the non-conforming life she would like to lead. ‘Defining her gender identity’ is a second project, due to which she is reading feminist literature and watching trans YouTube videos. Currently she believes she would have been equally happy in whichever body she had been born in and considers herself gender neutral.

Bill (23)

Having been brought up in a conservative country, Bill’s life is marked by a striking pessimism and harsh self-critique that drives his anxiety and distance from the LGBTQ⁺ community. Bill’s parents were very young when they had him and split up when he was still a toddler. His father did not keep in touch and his mother continued her studies while his grandparents cared for him. As a result, she became less of an authority figure and more of a best friend to him. Living in Northern Ireland, Bill’s childhood was shaped strongly by religion and he noticed early on that he did not fit in. Experiences of being bullied physically and verbally with gay slurs have shaped him and led to the development of OCD type ‘quirks’. He lost his faith as a teenager when he started realizing his attraction for men. He joined Amnesty International Youth and changed his peer group, leaving Northern Ireland as soon as he could to study mathematics in Scotland. It took him a further year to come out, which was taken well by his friends and his mother, but not by but not by the rest of his family. He tried joining an LGBTQ⁺ society, but did not like the way it shut itself off from the world. Thus, the majority of his friends are straight and he never felt the urge to define himself as a “gay man.” On graduating, he started work in a management consultancy firm, which is causing him a lot of stress.

Bill describes his own life theme as “self-searching,” due to his constant striving to improve himself. Despite his intelligence, his experience is governed by his own feelings of inadequacy. His life projects are thus geared towards his career and personal development. The first one, overshadowing the others, is “becoming a certified accountant,” progressing his career to fulfil his dream to “get a job that helps others” in a charity, leaving the corporate, capitalistic world that he despises. His last life project is “becoming more optimistic” - especially in respect to his relationships.

Jamie (23)

Jamie is a self-described maths and sci-fi nerd whose life revolves around his studies and being accepted as 100% male after his transition. At the age of one, Jamie and his brother were placed into care by his parents who suffered from severe learning disabilities. As toddlers, he and his brother were adopted into the same family and he has good memories of his childhood, although he admits to being a very emotional child. His adoptive parents were very religious and the church community became a firm part of his social life. He always felt like a boy, but did not know of the concept or possibility of being trans until he was 16. He remembers hearing anti-gay remarks at church and his mother being very controlling about the way he dressed and behaved. At 18 he left home to study maths where he felt freer to present as male, cutting his hair and binding his chest. It took two more years for him to come-out at home and start transitioning in earnest and his parents an even longer time to become more accepting. He has tried joining an LGBTQ⁺ society, but bad experiences of transphobia kept him from returning. While he identifies as pansexual, he does not consider sexuality to be important in his life. Currently, Jamie is in his final year of an MSc in Mathematics, simultaneously studying for a physics higher at college and eagerly awaiting his chest surgery.

He describes his life theme as ‘Acceptance,’ in line with his gender identity struggle and his left-wing, liberal political views. His life projects currently are based around his transition and academic career. In talking about his identity, he does not place importance on being trans but on ‘becoming a man’ - his first project. He thus struggles with body image as he tries to align his whole identity with his perception of what this entails. His second life project is ‘finishing his studies’ which may include being accepted for a PhD.

Titus (23)

Titus’ life is characterised by distinct Queer de-essentialisation. He is in a constant state of flux, moving through identities, religions and relationships, always on the lookout for something new. He was born as Timothy in a small UK town. His whole family were Star Trek fans, which he believes shaped his morals and drove his acceptance of his and others’ difference. As a shy, ginger child with a tendency to lie, he had trouble finding friends in primary school. When the internet arrived, it became one of his main social and creative outlets. At 14, his grandmother and best friend died, sparking a spiritual journey that started with Buddhism. He started exploring his sexuality with all genders but was ‘outed’ by a friend, leading to social isolation and bullying that drove him to the ‘Emo’ subculture and witchery. At 17 he joined an LGBTQ⁺ youth group where he found a new peer group and started exploring his sexuality in earnest. In college, he became part of a charity and order of Queer people whose aim it is to help others and drive acceptance in society. For this

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purpose, he created a drag alter ego. After graduation, he worked in an administrative job while doing charity work and helping to organise Pride events, before deciding to study Events Management. After a fall-out with his first-year flatmates, he joined a pagan arts performance charity where he was given the name Titus and finally felt like he belonged. Throughout this time, he adopted the label of Queer and pansexual, but also polyamorous.

He himself describes his life theme as ‘Acceptance,’ which speaks to his flamboyant, multi-faceted personality, but also to his work in various charities. His current life projects revolve around ‘earning money,’ ‘finding a stable partner,’ and ‘challenging conventions’ to reach true equality. Despite his involvement in charities and championing of equality, there is a distinct impression that he looks down upon others who are not as free and open in their identity expression.

Lea (26)

Having been raised in a southern U.S., religious household, Lea strives to be perfect, constantly working to be accepted and to create a harmonious balance between her sexuality and her family’s beliefs. Until she was 5, she was raised by her mother and aunt while her father was at war. The family then moved to California, but moved back when Lea was 10. While she talks of a happy childhood, her adolescence is framed by a strong resentment against leaving California. Always wanting to return, she decided not to make any close friends. While she attended church with her parents and has a strong faith of her own, she did not connect with others in the church and disagreed with organised religion. After two years in community college, she was accepted on a very competitive Zoology program. Here she started questioning her sexuality, but kept it hidden due to her extremely Christian friendship group, causing feelings of self-doubt. Once the course ended, Lea enrolled for a degree in anthropology to increase her employability. This period of time was marked by severe health problems, causing her to live with her parents and finally came to terms with her sexuality. After graduation she moved to Seattle, where briefly explored the LGBTQ+ scene although it was not to her liking. After two years she moved to Scotland to undertake an MSc in Anthropology. Here she met her current partner Jo.

Lea’s main life theme is ‘change and harmony’. Change, not only in her environment but personal change due to constant self-doubt, has caused her to always search for harmony in her environment. This influences her critical stance towards the LGBTQ+ community, which she feels ostracises itself from the world. Her first life project is ‘finding a vocation that fulfils her’ and her perfectionism in education seems to adversely affect her social relations. The second is a family project, as she strives to ‘be a good daughter’, to be true to her faith and to achieve full acceptance from her family.

Ovidia (26)

While Ovidia was also born in conservative, religious Northern Ireland, as opposed to others, she developed a highly political, Queer persona as a result. She remembers a happy childhood, but her story is overshadowed by a traumatic teenage experience that has stayed with her into adulthood, affecting her ability to form intimate relationships despite the great value she places on them. She values her family and friends above all else. As a teenager, she became interested in an underground, feminist, hard-core punk movement. This budding feminism, complemented by her politicized national identity, drives her identity. Her political network included many Queer individuals, leading her to question her own identity. After high school, she moved to study Sociology and Politics in Scotland, deepening her political identity in an exchange year in the US. It was only when she came back that she started to come out to friends and family. In her fourth year, she and her best friend, a Colombian, Queer woman of colour, went to Palestine on a political trip to the West Bank. After graduation, however, the vast majority of her peers, including her then girlfriend, moved away, leaving her alone in her PhD studies. This proved to be very difficult, worsening mental health problems and culminating in an emotional break down. She describes the past three years as a slow, but steady process of recovering from this.

Her life theme is best described as ‘finding a home in herself.’ Throughout her life story she constantly refers to periods of becoming more independent and accepting of herself. This illustrates the tension between her political identity and her deep-rooted insecurities. These are reflected in two life projects: ‘learning to be confident in and true to herself’ and ‘becoming an academic’ despite her ‘imposter syndrome’. Despite her wish to be more independent, her last project ‘finding romantic love’ illustrates her desire for secure, stable, relationships.

Max (27)

Max was born in a middle-class family, six years after his older sister and after a miscarriage, which he believes explains his mother’s over-protectiveness towards him, that led her to work first in his playgroup and then his school. While his childhood was very happy, he describes his attachment to his parents as unhealthy. At school, he started being bullied due to his height, which affected his self-confidence and made him turn progressively shyer, ‘dumbing himself down’, and making friends only with a few other ‘outcasts’. He started developing crushes on his male teachers when he was 14, but considered it mere admiration. His interest in his biology teacher caused him to develop an interest in the sciences and after graduation he left to study biology. While at University, he developed obsessive-compulsive disorders and started visiting a therapist. By this time, he had admitted his gayness to himself, and, while remaining closeted, secretly started seeing a man in his 50s who would become his first boyfriend. The anxiety he felt about the constant lying led

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him to confide in his mother, but not his father, whom he told four years later. Both were accepting but neither knows of his preference for older men, which he himself is still struggling with. When he moved again to pursue a PhD, he finally started to embrace his sexuality. He joined a LGBTQ⁺ society and, for a year, immersed himself fully in it before distancing himself again, having developed a group of mostly gay friends.

Max defines his life theme as “being apologetic for who I am,” which is visible in his struggle with his sexuality, in his desire to push away his OCD diagnosis, and in his fear of rejection by others. His first life project is thus “overcoming his fears”. His second life project is “Finishing his PhD and being creative.” The PhD is currently taking over his entire life and the thoughts about what to do in his future weigh heavy on him.

Jason (29)

Jason’s life is guided by a distinct value-set predicated on taking responsibility for ones’ actions, instilled in him through his family’s business. He does not consider his sexuality to be an overly important part of his identity and does not engage much with the LGBTQ⁺ scene. He was born an only child in a small city in Germany. His parents divorced when he was three and he has had only limited contact with his father. Since his mother was running the family business he spent much of his time with his grandmother to whom he developed a close connection. Jason had difficulties getting along with his step-father, whom he describes as a drunk who was frequently offensive to his mother. This culminated in a series of confrontations in his late teens until his mother finally left her husband. His mother’s failure to act sooner, however, caused him to lose his respect for her, and their relationship deteriorated and did not improve until he moved away years later. He describes himself as a grey mouse at school who generally followed others. It was only after leaving school that he felt he could take control over his own life. At the age of 19, he started exploring his sexuality and had his first intimate encounters with men. When he moved to study biology, he remained closeted, not out of fear, but because his grandparents had taught him that intimate details should be kept private. Thus, when he finally had his first boyfriend, he had no problem telling his friends and parents who were fully accepting. He is highly focused on his career, moving to the UK after his studies, where he is currently in the fourth year of his PhD.

Jason does not believe in any motive that guides his life. I felt, however, that “taking responsibility” - for his life and choices - is an idea that runs through his life. His belief in his own agency is illustrated by his struggle to identify four people who influenced his life decisively. His only life project at this time is “finding a well-paid job” after the PhD, which will allow him to lead the life he wants to lead.

Elena (32)

Elena was born in the south of Spain as the youngest of four children. Her parents' marriage was very traditional, the woman caring for the children, the man working and remaining more distant. When she was 12, her mother died of cancer and her father fell into depression from which he did not recover. This greatly influenced Elena's adolescence as her three elder siblings moved away shortly after the tragedy. After high-school, she moved to a different city to study translation studies, after which she worked odd jobs to avoid having to return home, before becoming a freelance translator. Her long-term relationship with a man at the time fell apart when she first started experiencing attraction towards women. When it finally ended, she moved to Italy to work and improve her language skills. Upon her return, she reconnected with a childhood friend which soon turned into a relationship. Together, they decided to move to Scotland where they are currently living. Elena does not have any personal experiences of stigmatization due to her sexuality, although she knows of many people who do. Her family and friends have all been supportive, but she is still too scared to tell her conservative father.

She describes her pervasive life theme as "having to reinvent myself every once in a while, to evolve." She has always been very insecure and is constantly searching for something to fulfil her. Her career affords her the stability to do so without the usual uncertainties. She is not a thrill seeker, but rather seeks stability and communal relationships. Despite enjoying her current work, her first life project is thus 'developing her career'. She is not satisfied unless she is learning, changing. Her second life project is 'building a life with her girlfriend'. Again, linked to her life theme, this includes thinking about where they will go next, but also becoming more confident in her LGBTQ⁺ identity.

Jo (32)

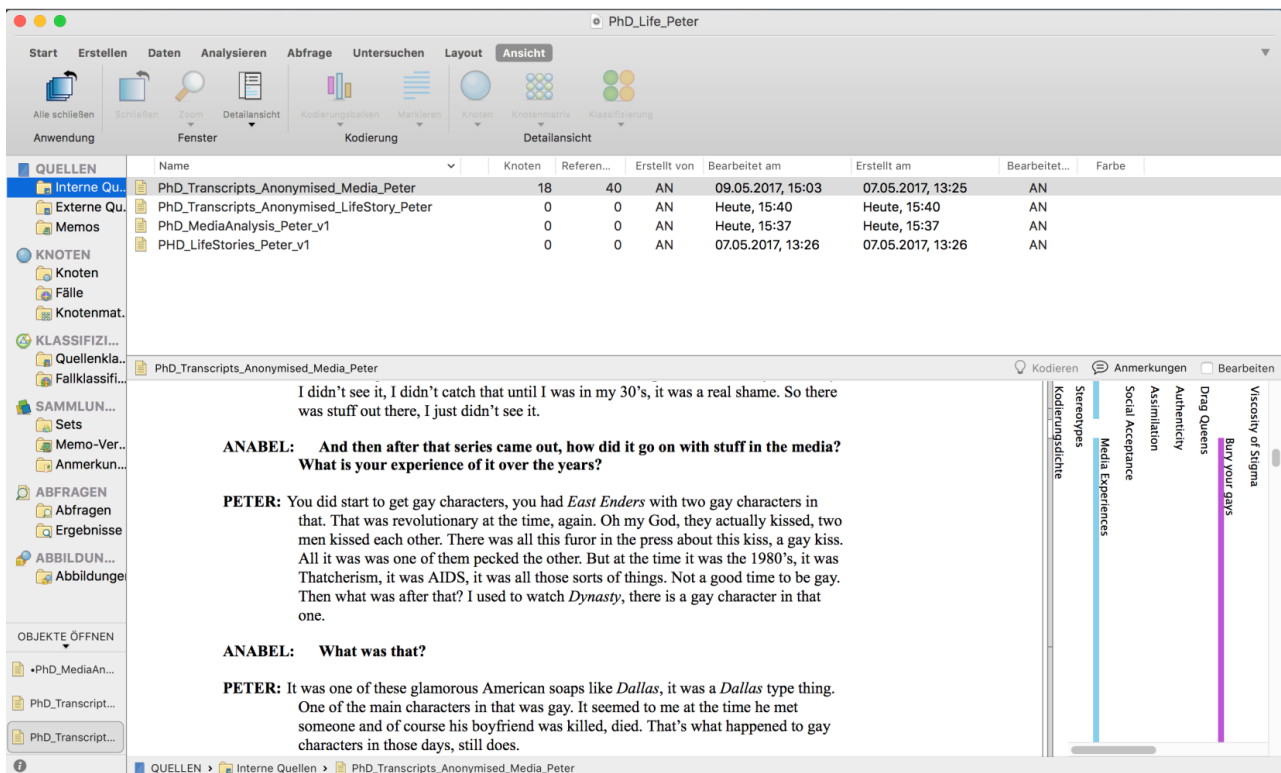
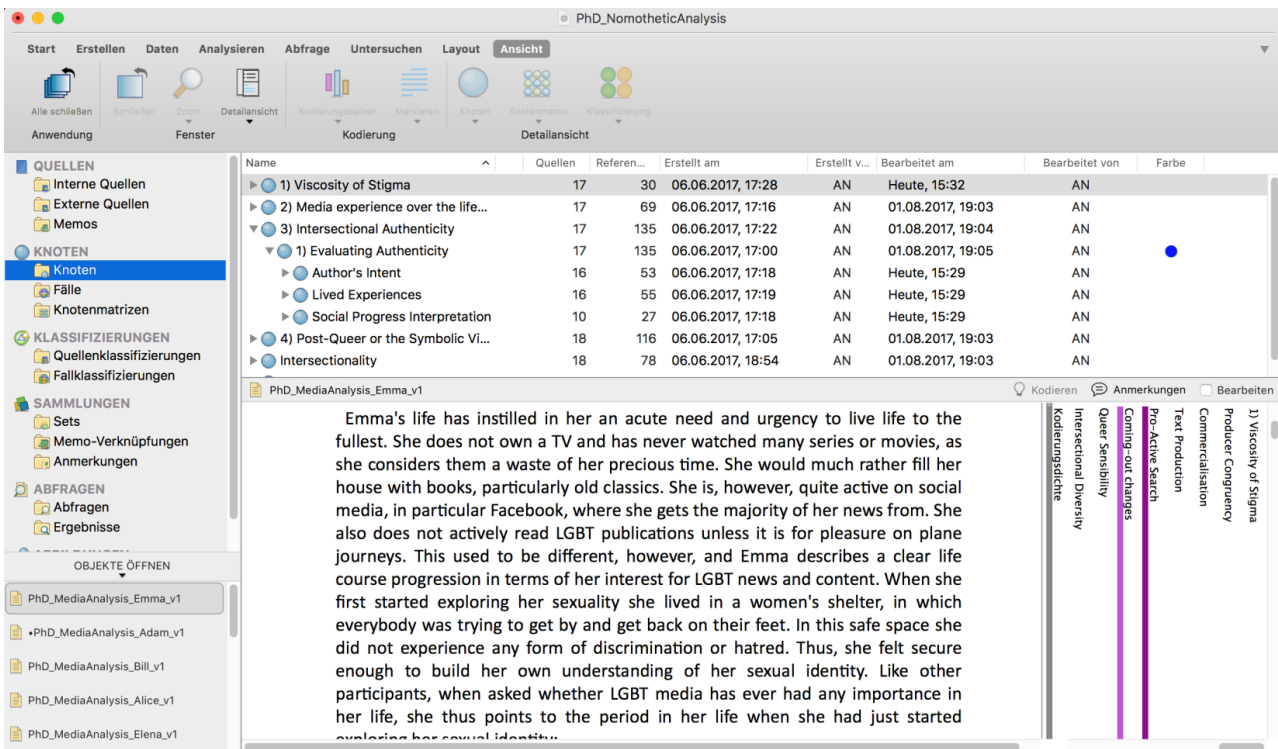
Jo is a gay, gender-questioning British person who uses female pronouns and has struggled all her life with internalised homophobia. She grew up in a working-class family in southern England, happy, until her parents started experiencing problems that led to their divorce and she started questioning her sexuality and gender identity. Her coming-out was not taken well by her family or peers and negative experiences abounded. She moved in with her girlfriend before finishing high school and together they moved away after graduation, at which point she changed her appearance to a more boyish look, which led to continued discrimination. She worked as a police community officer and later a bouncer in nightclubs until she was diagnosed with cancer at 27 years-old. This proved to be a turning point in her life - for herself and her family, changing her parent's attitude to her entirely. When she finally went into remission, she decided to study Psychology and became an ambassador for a cancer charity. Her relationship, however, never recovered from her illness and ended two

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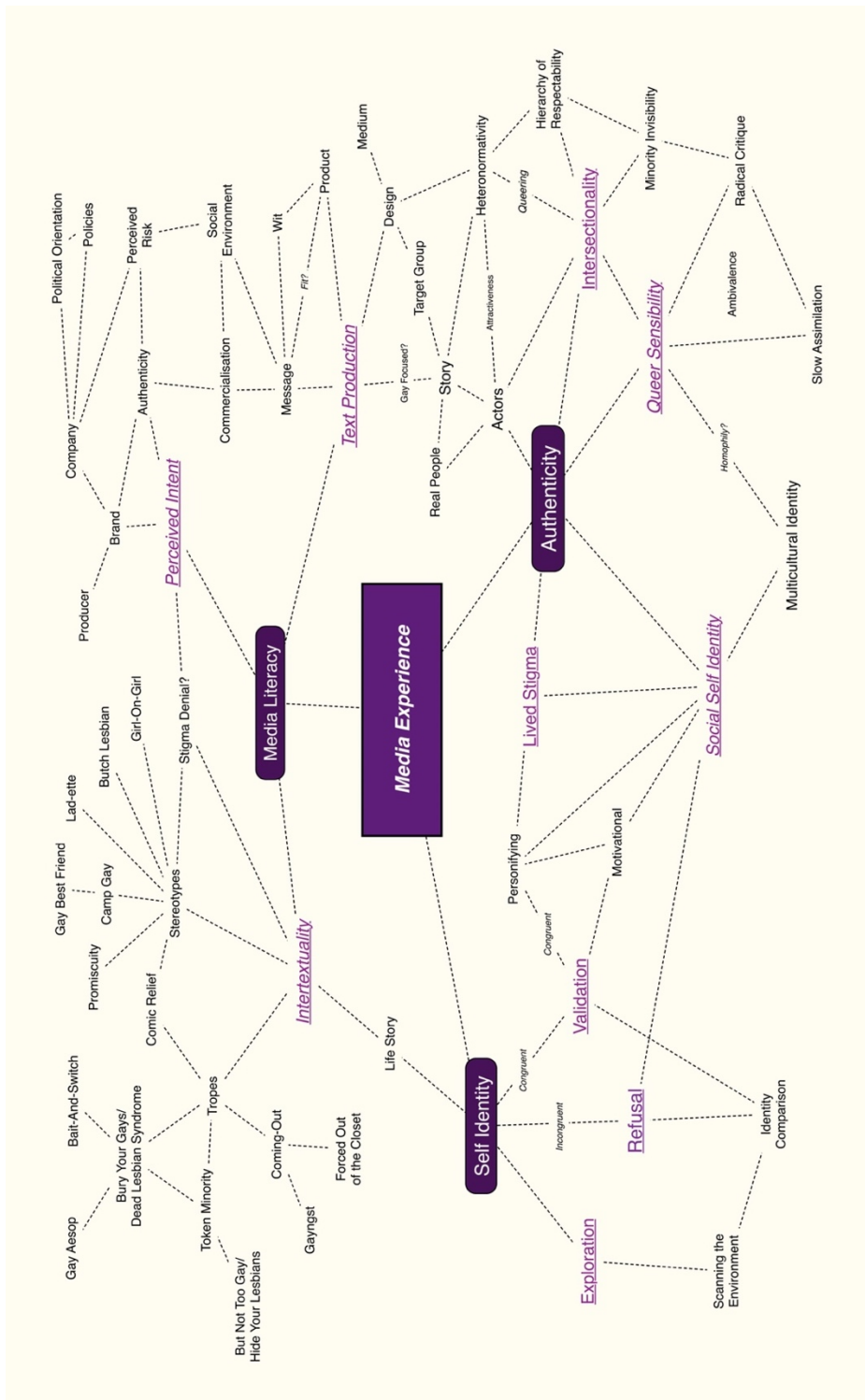
years later. At this point she had still kept her sexuality hidden from nearly everyone. After the breakup, however, she finally came out via Facebook and received overwhelmingly positive reactions. Following this, she decided to join the local LGBTQ⁺ society, which she did not like, but where she met her current partner Lea. At the time of the interview she was finishing her degree and still struggling with internalised homophobia.

Jo' identified her life theme as "Striving for More", reflecting a need for both independence and control, as well as her innate wish to do good. Her main life project is 'proving herself', constantly having to prove to herself and to her family that she can finish things and be better at what she does. Her second strongest life project is 'to make the world a better place,' which reflects the virtues of honesty, morality and equality and drives her career path and the volunteering positions she has taken up.

APPENDIX 7: Screenshots of NVivo™ Analysis Process



APPENDIX 8: Mind-Map Throughout the Coding Process



APPENDIX 9: Nölke and O'Donohoe (2016)

Nölke, A. and O'Donohoe, S. (2016) Using Intersectionality in Media Effects Research: An Intersectional Meaning-Based Approach. *Paper presented at the 13th ACR conference on Gender Marketing and Consumer Behaviour, ESCP Europe Paris, FR.*

This paper has been incorporated in Chapters 6 as well as the findings sections (Chapters 7 to 10) of this thesis.

Abstract

Today, consumers in developed countries can choose from a myriad of gender and sexual identities and increasingly form complex, fragmented identities that transcend spatial boundaries and intersect with various categories of difference. Despite the acknowledgement of the dimensionality of gender and sexuality in the social sciences, consumer research continues to depict the LGBT+ consumers, as well as other stigmatised groups, as homogenous communities whose behaviour is determined by their minority consciousness. Thus, scholars have largely ignored the effect of life-course differences on the media experiences of consumers whose gender and sexual identities fall outside of heteronormative norms. This paper presents a meaning-based model of multicultural media experiences that expanding Mick and Buhl's (1992) seminal methodology. It argues that this approach fosters an understanding of the media experiences of stigmatised consumers, as it accounts for the development of their multicultural and intersectional identities as well as their intertextual media experiences. Through the illustrative case of a self-identified gender-questioning lesbian, this analysis highlights how a changing societal landscape and multicultural identity development add complexity and ambivalence to LGBT+ consumers' experience of LGBT+ media portrayals, and challenges the assumptions of a unitary identity and standpoint prevalent in the literature.

Introduction

Stigmatised consumers are generally depicted as homogeneous groups, defined by their otherness from the social majority (Schwalbe et al., 2000; Tsai, 2012), whose consumption experience is influenced decisively by their minority consciousness. To date, questions of how individual experiences over the life course influence such consumers' media experiences have been overlooked entirely. The dearth of research in this area is noticeable in particular when considering LGBT⁺ consumers, who are increasingly able to form multi-cultural identities apart from the traditional LGBT⁺ sub-culture and who are increasingly represented in mainstream media. The past decade has seen rising appreciation of the dimensionality of both gender and sexuality in line with contemporary Queer studies (e.g. Butler, 1990). Moreover, scholars in the social sciences have started to investigate the complex intersection of categories of differences in relation to individuals' identity formation. The notions of multiculturalism and intersectionality have, however, remained conspicuously absent in marketing thought (e.g. Gopaldas & DeRoy, 2015).

This paper presents a meaning-based approach to understanding multicultural media experience, building on Mick and Buhl's (1992) meaning-based model of advertising experiences. It argues that this approach fosters understanding of the media experiences of stigmatised consumers, as it accounts for the development of their multicultural identities and intertextual media experiences.

The paper first conceptualises LGBT⁺ consumers as multicultural, before considering the benefits of a life course approach to explore stigmatised consumers' media experiences. It then provides an outline of the proposed methodology, with findings illustrated through the case of a self-identified, gender-questioning lesbian. The analysis highlights how a changing societal landscape and multicultural identity development add complexity to LGBT⁺ consumers' experience of LGBT⁺ media portrayals, and challenges the assumptions of a unitary identity and standpoint prevalent in the literature.

The Multicultural Queer Consumer

As Kipnis, Broderick, and Demangeot (2013) assert, "in a multi-cultural marketplace, mainstream consumers' identities may evolve over time to internalize multiple diverse cultures." Looking at migrant consumers, they develop the consumer multicultural orientations matrix to account for consumers' changing cultural identifications with global, local, and foreign cultures. Their matrix conceptualises multicultural identity as a complex construct that can result in the adoption of multiple cultures, two cultures, one culture, or a

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complete alienation of culture. These different identities are likely to affect individual consumption experiences, media interpretations, and brand perceptions (ibid). Similarly, Harrison, Thomas and Cross (2015) demonstrate that existing theories are “ineffectual at fully capturing the lived experience connected to the consumer acculturation and socialization processes for those with two distinctly constructed racial backgrounds” (p.24).

The present study echoes this claim for LGBT⁺ consumers, and suggests that they should be considered as multicultural consumers who, in times of increased acceptance, move in both mainstream and LGBT⁺ cultures. Extant marketing research into this community is based on a Goffmanian definition of stigma as an enduring, “deeply discrediting” (1963, p. 3) attribute of an individual. It cultivates a positivist view of sexuality as a stable variable that accounts for behavioural differences (Oakenfull, 2012; Tsai, 2012; Visconti, 2008). Thereby, the gay community is characterized as an interpretive community whose minority consciousness has a strong impact on its members’ consumption experience (Hooten, Noeva, & Hammonds, 2009; Kates, 2002). Some studies found, for example, that gay consumers accept even stereotypical media depictions as positive and translate these feelings into brand loyalty and purchase intention (Tsai, 2011; Tuten, 2005). Such research has, however, been accused of being epistemologically flawed (Heaphy, 2007) and of disregarding the inherent heterogeneity of this group. Its positivistic assumptions are one reason for the dearth of interpretive research looking at the media experience of stigmatized communities (Tsai, 2011).

Research across the social sciences has moved towards a social process definition that sees stigma as dynamic (Link & Phelan, 2001). It can be actively managed and affects people differently (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). Moreover, the majority of social sciences now recognize sexuality and gender as social constructs (Seidman, 2002). In a postmodern world, LGBT⁺ consumers can develop identities that are disconnected from the gay sub-culture. Younger consumers are referred to as the “post-gay” generation. They often lack lived experiences of stigmatization and move away from the traditional LGBT⁺ sub-culture (Lea, de Wit, & Reynolds, 2015). Extant research has shown that gender (Fischer...), social class (Yannopoulou & Elliott, 2008) and race (Schwalbe, 2004) all provide distinct interpretive frames for media experiences. These distinctions are even more pronounced for young people who can choose from a plethora of different sexualities and gender identities and are able to transcend spatial boundaries to live in different parts of the world (Plummer, 2015). For them, ethnicity or class might prove to be of greater importance as cultural identifiers than sexuality or gender. This suggests, that previous findings on LGBT⁺ consumers’ marketplace behaviours

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and media interpretations might be out-dated, and existing methodologies ineffectual at capturing their experiences (e.g. Visconti, 2008).

Understanding Multicultural Identities Via Life Course Theory

LGBT⁺ consumers' identity formation is thus based on individual experiences over the life course and the negotiation of a variety of cultures, such as mainstream and LGBT⁺. Life course theory sees aging as an on-going process. A person's life is shaped not only by categories of difference, but by dominant institutions, social roles and norms in specific socio-historic contexts (Elder, 1999; Gee, Pavalko, & Long, 2007). One of its primary interests thus lies in the life-stage principle, or the belief that socio-historic events have a collective effect in later life stages (Elder, 1999).

A methodological approach based on life course theory allows us to understand the influence of different cultures on an individual and the implications for consumption and media experiences. According to Dan McAdams, "identity is a life story" (1993, p. 81). The stories we tell of our life can point to the ideologies at the heart of our identity. Ideologies are built over the life course and shaped by the myths we hear (ibid). Life stories can thus help us understand the primary frameworks individuals and groups use to make sense of their surroundings (Goffman, 1974), as well as the processes and socio-historic context behind how these frames came to be (Plummer, 2001).

Furthermore, an investigation of the life course of consumers as multicultural individuals allows for an application of an intersectional lens, based on an individual's affiliation to not only stigmatised sub-cultures, but also, for example, ethnic and class cultures. Intersectionality is not a static study of multiple jeopardy; it is a process that focuses on how relevant classifications are established, experienced and rejected in daily life (Luft & Ward, 2009; McCall, 2005, p. 1783). It is a complex concept that calls for the use of narrative analysis to understand the life-long processes that form an individual's view of a category (King & Cronin, 2010; McCall, 2005). To date, an intersectional analysis that studies the multiplicative nature of oppression is largely non-existent in the marketing literature (Gopaldas & Fischer, 2012). Whilst some consumer culture theorists have investigated the effect of specific social identity structures on consumer culture, mostly focusing on class and gender, they fail to engage with the challenges of intersectionality (ibid)

A Meaning-Based Model of Multicultural Media Experience

The use of phenomenology to gain an appreciation of consumer behaviour is a widely recognized approach (Thompson, Pollio, & Locander, 1994). Mick and Buhl (1992) introduced the merits of life story interviews to the field with their meaning-based model of advertising experience, exploring three brothers' enduring life themes and life projects (national, community, family or private self projects), and iteratively analysing subsequent advertising interviews in relation to these. Their work was, however, focused entirely on advertising experience, disregarding intertextuality from prior media experiences. Moreover, their research did not take into consideration the complexities of multicultural identities.

Building on Mick and Buhl's work, this paper thus suggests a meaning-based model of multicultural media experience (MME) as a way to investigate stigmatised consumers' media experiences. In conceptualizing LGBT⁺ persons as multicultural consumers and considering all categories of difference as ideological constructs, this methodology engages with the cultural ambiguities shaping these consumers' identities, marketplace practices and media interpretations. It paves the way for an intersectional approach to understanding Queer media meaning making, challenging the assumption of a unitary identity prevalent in the literature. It also explores the ideologies underpinning media experiences and how they interrelate. Most importantly, it addresses the question of how a changing socio-cultural landscape and multicultural identity add complexity to LGBT⁺ consumers' media experience.

As in the original paper, a MME is based on a life story- and media interview. In this case, the life story interview is conducted first, allowing individuals to define their identity themselves to avoid the imposition of pre-existing classifications. Categories and cultural affiliations are subsequently teased out of the narrative using membership categorization analysis (MCA) (King & Cronin, 2010), to reveal how individuals cluster categories into groups - membership categorisation devices (MCDs)- that are united by specific actions and characteristics (Stokoe, 2012). This allows researchers to understand "culture-in-action" (Baker, 2000, p. 112): how an individual came to identify with distinct categories and cultures, and what their meaning is to them. As Plummer (2015) states, "sexual stories provide one of the key pathways into cosmopolitan sexualities, creating ways of appreciating cultural complexities and making sense of conflict." (p.161)

In contrast to Mick and Buhl's approach, which used only ad interviews, the life story interview is here followed by a media interview, asking the participant to first talk about their media experience, and then using ads as stimulus material to gain insight into immediate

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responses. When investigating specific stigmatised cultures, stimuli that use overt images of said culture can be used, such as explicit LGBT⁺ imagery. This facilitates an exploration of an individual's life story, as well as media memories. It is thus an examination of consumers' advertising experience, contextualised in the frame of their overall media experience. Analysis of both interviews offers insights into how individuals use and resist hegemonic ideologies, "producing complex representations of themselves and their life course" (King & Cronin, 2010, p. 17) and how these affect an individual's media experience.

The following sections present an example of such an analysis; based on the life of Jo, a 32-year-old, gender questioning lesbian. Interviewing her was expected to offer insights into the construction and lived experience of 'post-gay' Queer Millennials, but it emerged that Jo has had considerable experience of stigmatisation.

Jo's life story interview took three hours, based on an interview schedule set out by McAdams (1993) (see Appendix 1). The subsequent media interview was semi-structured and took an hour and a half. Jo was first asked to talk about her media habits and experience in general and then about her experience of LGBT⁺ representations in the media. Five LGBT⁺-inclusive ads were then shown as stimulus material (Table 1). These ads were representative of characters used in LGBT⁺-inclusive ads, based on an analysis of 178 ads in the Commercial Closet Database from 2009 to 2015.

Both interviews were transcribed into 31 and 18 pages respectively. Jo's life-story was then compiled and written up with a focus on key events, life themes and life projects. An abridged version is provided below. Transcripts were read and reread in an iterative process moving back and forth between the life-story and media interview, with emergent and recurrent themes identified and explored individually and in discussion between authors. Thus, the analysis moved constantly between interpretations of Jo's individually expressed meanings of respondents and her socio-cultural background, in an effort to pinpoint a system of cultural meanings that build the foundation for her interpretations' (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Thompson et al., 1994).

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Table 1: Ads Used as Stimulus Material

Ad Title	Brand	Year	Category	Characters	Description
This is Wholesome	Honey Maid	2014	Packaged Foods	- Gay couple with children - White - Middle-Aged - Middle-Class	This commercial features a series of families, including a gay male couple feeding an infant, a tattooed and bearded rock drummer dad, a single dad, and a multiracial family. The narration: "No matter how things change, what makes us wholesome never will. Honey Maid, everyday wholesome snacks for every wholesome family. This is wholesome."
First Love	Aetna	2015	Financial Services	- Gay- and Lesbian Couples - White - Middle-Aged - Middle-Class	The ad features an interview of two people, a man and a women, taking about their first love. At the end, it is revealed that they are not talking about each other, but about their same-sex partners of nine and 18 years respectively. Each couple is then shown celebrating with their friends and family. The campaign's tagline is "Be Strong. Be Well."
The Story of Jacob	Google Inc.	2015	Dot Com	- Trans Male - White - Young-Adult (YA) - Middle-Class	The video tells the story of YouTube FTM Trans blogger Jacob Wanderling. It recounts his story of transitioning, his surgeries and how he is now building the body he always wanted at City Gym in Kansas City, Missouri. The Gym owner then says she uses Google Business to ensure people know that her gym is open to all and that she runs a dedicated class for transgender men.
Coffee Frenemies	Starbucks	2014	Retail	- Drag queens - White and African-American - Middle-Aged - Middle-Class	Drag star Adore Delano gets in line at Starbucks, but then decides to keep cutting forward. The friendly customers all say yes until she reaches Drag Star Bianca Del Rio who starts a catty discussion with her, until the barista then serves up two skinny lattes, one for each of them, with a smile. The text then reads "Saving friendships since 1971. Expect more than great coffee."
#hostwithpride	AirBnB	2015	Travel	Diverse Couples: - Gay, Lesbian & Trans - White and African-American - YA, Middle-Aged & Mature - All Middle-Class	This ad features a great variety of LGBT couples, including a young trans couple, a middle aged lesbian family with their son, a young, interracial lesbian couple, a bear couple (bearded, hirsute gay men), and an older, interracial gay couple. They all talk about the concerns LGBT people face when travelling and the ad ends with the tagline: "We look forward to a world were all love is welcome. #hostwithpride. AirBnB."

Jo's Life Story

Jo grew up with in a working-class family in a village in southern England. She had a happy childhood, which was marred in her teenage years, first by her parent's divorce, and then by the overwhelmingly negative reception of her coming-out. Her teenage years and young adulthood are marked by constant marginalisation, even after moving away to Brighton to work as a police community officer, which severely eroded her self-esteem: *"I didn't really have much confidence after that I guess. (...) I'm really socially anxious."* This led her to hiding her sexuality again for over ten years, causing tensions between her need for individuality and social relations: *"I do know that I have internalised homophobia, and I do think, because of when I initially came out, how badly it went, I feel like no one is just going to be fine about it."*

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At 27, Jo was diagnosed with cancer. Despite being the lowest point in her life, her illness proved to be a turning point. Her parents finally started accepting her sexuality and she gained a new sense of self-confidence: *“I felt like I had a right to stand up for myself.”* After going into remission, she decided to study psychology, became an ambassador for a cancer charity and volunteered for others. Still, it would take her another four years before she came out to her extended family after breaking-up with her long-term girlfriend: *“it was really toxic. (...) I was starting to loathe myself really.”* Despite her fears, her coming-out was received very positively. Her immediate and extended family is very precious to her, loyalty being of outmost importance in every aspect of her life.

Shortly after, she visited a local LGBT⁺ society for the first time, but did not like its culture. Her social circles are thus made up of mostly heterosexual peers and some LGBT⁺ friends. Currently, she is in a loving relationship with a woman, but is still struggling with internalised homophobia, and increasingly with her gender identity:

“I just have such a cognitive dissonance about who I even am, or who I think I even am, or who my family has told me who I am. (...) [W]hen I see myself in the mirror, like, getting out of the shower or something, I think: ‘Oh my god!’ and I hate my body, but then other days I don’t. And I don’t know what it is. Am I non-binary or am I, like, really masculine? Yet, I don’t want to face that.”

Due to her experience of marginalisation, the intersections of sexuality and gender seem to be the most salient in Jo’s life story. Her working class background is only implicitly mentioned as a basis for working hard and making something of herself.

Jo’ identified her pervasive life theme as *‘Striving for More:’* *“I always try to do better at what I do, and do more for other people, and I think, the more that you do, the better you feel about yourself.”* She claims that this is strongly based on her father from whom she has inherited her *‘strong morals’* and regard for honesty and whom she is *“always striving to please.”* This theme runs on an agentic, personal level, but also on a communal, generative one, as it reflects both her need for independence and control, as well as her desire to do good for others.

This is reflected also in her life projects. *‘Proving herself’* is both a personal and a family project. She constantly wants to prove to herself and her family that she overcome her anxiety and be better at what she does. This project is fuelled by the ambition and drive she sees

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embodied in the most important people in her life, and is also mirrored in the short-term goals she sets for herself.

A second life project is *'treating everyone equally.'* This is both a national and community project and mirrors the virtues of honesty and equality: “[M]y values are pretty much the human rights act (...). I really believe we should treat people humanely, including prisoners, and poor people, and black people. You know everyone should be treated the same, with the same level of respect that you would want to be treated with yourself.” This ‘golden rule’ runs through her life - in her work as well as social relations.

A derivative of both these is the life project of *'accepting herself and being accepted.'* This is above all a personal project, but also spans all other domains, as Jo constantly works to overcome her internalised homophobia and lack of acceptance from both the wider society and her family. She does so, for instance, through working hard and ‘proving’ her worth, but also through her volunteer work.

Jo's Media Experience

Stigma as a lens for critique: negative media expectations

Taking a life course perspective clearly shows the influence both Jo's life story and her prior experiences of LGBT⁺ portrayals have on her media experience. In the interview it became rapidly apparent that Jo blames the media for her internalised homophobia and problematic gender identification:

*“[W]hen I first came out - I was 19, so like 13 years ago - So what the media was like then and previous to that in my upbringing and stuff, I think before I realised I was gay I was genuinely homophobic, because of my surroundings, and I think I just can't remove it from myself. (...) [bitter laugh] And the whole gender thing is just down to the f***** media in the first place, it's insane. Well, not the whole gender thing, but like the extreme need to identify with one or another is down to, like, an obsession with the media and advertising.”*

Her media memory of LGBT⁺ characters throughout her life is mostly negative; she sees representations as characterized by *hypersexualisation, über-dramatisation* and a *lack of intelligence*. For gay women *“It's always portrayed as some kind of drama going on (...) or that they are a bit stupid. I don't know. Like, there's never any consistence to them (...). It's all about sexual relations. Mostly. On TV. That I have seen.”* Gay men, on the other hand, are

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depicted *“as being so ridiculously camp and feminine. And there’s no spectrum [of personalities] whatsoever.”*

She does admit to paying less attention to gay men, in the media and in the stimulus materials: *“I was way more interested in the women, because I can identify more with them, I guess?”* This preference is consistent with previous studies that assert that gay women significantly prefer lesbian imagery to gay imagery in advertising (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2004) and suggests that the same is true for media imagery in general. Despite her questioning gender-identity, Jo seemed to self-identify more with the gender assigned to her at birth – as a woman with ‘masculine taste’ in fashion – likely due to the pressure she feels from her family and wider society to ‘choose a side.’

This also seemed to colour her reaction to gender stereotypes. Based on her negative media experiences and sensitivity towards gender performance, it is not surprising that her first reaction towards stimulus ads was to search for stereotypical qualities in relation to gender:

Honey Maid:

“My initial thought was, (...) he was in a pink checked shirt. Something like that, it wasn’t pink, but it was pink-y, and I was like: “Oh, ok...” [rolls eyes].”

Aetna:

“I instantly, as soon as I saw the guy, I thought he’s going to be gay (...), [he] had a gay quality. [laughing] I don’t know how to put my finger on it, because I was going to say he looked a bit camp, but he didn’t really...”

“I thought: ‘Oh, they’ve chosen a woman who is wearing a suit.’ You know like, people can make a clear distinction in their head of who’s the male, who’s the female, because people seem to be obsessed with doing that.”

Notably, neither ad uses overly stereotypical characters - the men in both ads wear a smart shirt and jumper, while the woman wears white dress trousers and a black cardigan, which Jo interprets as a suit. Despite conceding that that the characters did not necessarily look effeminate, Jo’s reading of the ads is primed by her prior negative media experiences and reservation about the gender binary. As opposed to previous studies where participants asserted that stereotypical inclusion constituted a necessary “cultural norm rather than a discriminatory injustice“ (Tsai, 2012, p. 91), Jo was not prepared to tolerate stereotypical representations as necessary to further social inclusion.

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In addition to these negative preconceptions, her lived experience of stigma further complicates her media experience, as it stands at odds with more positive portrayals. In the following excerpt she recounts how in the TV show *Modern Family* everyone accepts the gay couple unconditionally, despite their stereotypical camp-ness:

“They just come out and everyone is like: “Oh, that’s great!” It makes me just a bit sad really, because it makes me think: “Oh, it would be so nice if people actually reacted that way.” But I really don’t think they do (...), because I don’t think anyone, ever, other than a gay person, has ever responded normally towards me being gay.”

Here she uses self-referential processes to determine the authenticity of the portrayal (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008). Hirschman and Thompson (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997) label readings based on personal experiences *personalizing interpretations* (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997). In their work, however, these interpretations are generally positive, whereas for Jo they reflect the negative experience of stigmatisation. Her lived experience causes an emotional response that makes her sceptical of the idealised coming-out portrayal and implied media denial of stigma. Consequently, she is led to evaluate representations that show the struggles of being LGBT⁺ as more *‘realistic.’*

Simultaneously, however, she considers possible negative effects of such portrayals, again implicitly relating the story back to herself:

“[W]hen everything is like really awful, I think it’s good in that it’s more realistic, but it’s bad in that it probably terrifies the life out of some people who would be lucky enough for their family to be fine about it. (...) You know when you are really young, and you’ve just realised that you’re gay, and then you saw some kind of awful response on TV and then you think: ‘Oh my god, that’s going to happen to me!’”

She weighs the possible harmful effects of *‘realistic’* portrayals against their power to teach others about LGBT⁺ marginalisation.’ She points to the portrayal of a transgender person in the TV show *Orange is the New Black*, how their struggles normalize them and *“really gets you thinking about the issues a transgender person has to go through just to be who they are*

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on a day to day basis.” The same argument is used later in her positive interpretation of the Google ad that shows the story of a trans man. As will be seen, this contrast between her own preferences and what is best for others is an important driver of her media experience stemming from her life project of *‘treating everyone equally.’*

The Role of Emotional Identification with Media Characters

A big part of Jo’s media experience is thus her emotional identification with characters. This identification is either personalizing, reflecting her current identity and lived experience of stigma, or motivational, representing an ideal self, and the aspirational goal of being accepted in society (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997). This could also be translated into identification (Cohen, 2001) and wishful identification (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Media interpretations are continually pulled into Jo’s subjective life world:

“If I had just seen it on TV (...) I think I would like it, because there are so few gay women on TV and because I feel the way I do about myself, these kind of things help me feel like a normal person, like I’m not some kind of freak, so yeah, I would really like it.” [Aetna]

The depiction of a loving lesbian relationship of two seemingly ‘normal’ women facilitates a motivational interpretation that speaks to her desire to be accepted and momentarily overcomes her internalised homophobia. The same is true for the ‘wholesome’ gay family unit in the Honey Maid ad. Both allow her to vicariously live out an aspirational future:

“I find things that make me think: ‘Oh, I can have children!’ just make me feel really happy, because you know... Definitely, even after I came out, I remember there was this TV program, which was awful: ‘Making babies the gay way’ or something, and it was just ridiculous. It made gay people look so bad and stupid and, like this was some really sick thing they were doing. So anything that portrays a normal family union I like, because there’s none of it anywhere.” [Honey Maid]

Her reading is both intertextual and motivating, as her interpretation is based on both the contrast of the positive ad to a previous negative media portrayal, as well as her own aspirations for her future. This form of media intertextuality and its implications were not accounted for in Mick and Buhl’s (1992) analysis.

Jo invoked this emotional reasoning in conjunction with her ad literacy to evaluate the use of

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stereotypes. She described it as normal for advertising to use extremes. She felt that the Honey Maid ad applied stereotypes to other characters as well, thus making it, in fact, normal: *“they showed extremes for the other couples as well, so it’s not like a specific discrimination. They are doing it for everyone.”* Because overall the characters were portrayed as ‘normal’ and caused positive feelings, she could dismiss stereotypes as a *“minor thing.”* Her ultimate verdict of the Starbucks ad is negative, as it is too exaggerated and *“a piss-take in general.”*

This type of emotional identification, however, makes Jo’s positive evaluations precarious, easily eroded by perceptions of commercialization (e.g. Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2002). This is exemplified in her reaction to the AirBnB ad. While she was watching, her reactions were very positive, voicing her identification with character’s statements openly. However, when the ad ended with the AirBnB logo and its tag line (Table 1), her opinion quickly changed to a decidedly negative one: *“I think you form a really emotional attachment to the advert, because you really relate to it and stuff, and then it just really feels like: ‘Oh, you are just using me to buy...’”*

She read the AirBnB ad as claiming to provide a safe space for LGBT⁺ travellers, which, in her experience, is not possible: *“I just feel like: a) they can’t guarantee that [safety] and b) it’s actually dangerous to imply that you could guarantee that.”* Thus, as before, her lived experience stands at odds with the positive message conveyed in the ad, leading to mistrust at the genuineness of the claim that she or others will be safe by using AirBnB. At this point, she also voices concern for the ‘dream consumer,’ who is easily duped into accepting such claims, distancing herself from it: *“I felt like it was: we’re going to use gay people to sell this, cause they travel a lot, cause they’ve got more money, cause a lot of them don’t have kids.”* After the interview, she immediately investigated AirBnB’s policies.

It is likely that the Jo’s extreme reaction was caused by ‘threshold effect.’ Beverland et al. (2008) suggest that ads that “scream too loudly” (p.14) are less likely to be assessed as authentic. The AirBnB ad was the most diverse ad shown. In the end, the stark juxtaposition of her strong emotional identification while viewing with her lived experience in conjunction with its commercial affiliation might be a contributing factor to a negative interpretation, because it *“trivialises what they’ve just portrayed.”* Her experience is thus decidedly different to that of participants in a study by Tsai (2012), where “exploitation, objectification, and the commercialization of gay subculture were normalized, discursively incorporated, and transformed as tokens of social inclusion” (p.91).

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Multiculturalism as Source for Ambivalence

It is clear that positive media representations elicit both aspirational and personalising identifications. Generally, however, Jo's prior media experience is decidedly negative. Consequently, she talks extensively about the problems of stereotypical LGBT⁺-inclusion. She believes media portrayals need to help "*people see us like normal human beings.*" Chiming with previous work (e.g. Peñaloza, 1996; Tsai, 2012), for her the best representations are those that enable assimilation as normal citizens no different from anyone else:

"[S]ome gay people want to live with the rest of the world and not just be sectioned into going to gay bars and hanging out with gay people. I mean, I like to hang out with gay people, but I also like to hang out with straight people."

Hence, Jo explains her dislike of portrayals that show LGBT⁺ individuals as different by limiting her ties to this sub-culture and thereby to marginalization as 'Other.' She does not use media portrayals to construct herself as a 'self-recognizing gay subject' as asserted by previous studies of American gay and lesbian consumers (Tsai, 2011). She sees 'radical' LGBT⁺ portrayals as harmful, as they further an image of 'gay people' who ostracize themselves from society - a group she does not want to be associated with. This appears to reflect less anxiety about being exposed, as theorised by Tsai (2011), and more the fear of losing the fragile acceptance she has won if she is associated with more 'out-there' LGBT⁺ identities. Chiming with assertions that the post-gay generation is moving away from the traditional sub-culture (Savin-Williams, 2005), she emphasizes that she lives in the 'normal' world and wishes to be represented accordingly.

Unsurprisingly, the two celebrities whom she considers the best role models reflect the type of 'normal' LGBT⁺ person she wants to see. Laverne Cox, a transgender actress of colour: "*is (...) a very strong woman who is going to stand up for what she believes.*" Claire Boulding, commentator of the 2014 Olympics, on the other hand, is:

"in a committed relationship and she is quite academic, she's an intelligent person, and she was also doing sports stuff as well. (...) She is portrayed as a normal human being. It's really good, because it is never portrayed that way."

Both women reflect someone whom she can relate to and aspires to be, providing a positive affirmation of the life path she is taking (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011).

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This need to feel accepted, to be seen as ‘normal’ is the dominant driver behind Jo’s media experience. It stems to a great extent from her own lived experiences, her life theme of ‘striving for more’ and her life project of ‘accepting herself.’

Despite her efforts to distance herself from the LGBT⁺ sub-culture, her identity remains influenced by an affiliation to it - if an uneasy one. The MCDs she uses show that she still draws clear lines between ‘*gay people*,’ ‘*people like us*’ or ‘*like me*’ and ‘*straight-*’ or ‘*heterosexual people*.’ While she does not pro-actively search for LGBT⁺ content, she admits that when, LGBT⁺ news come to her attention, she will read others’ comments looking for acceptance: “*I’ll start reading the comments and think: ‘Oh my god, why do so many people hate me?’ Even though they are not specifically talking about me, but about people like.*” In her mind, the media is a direct reflection of other people’s opinions about her.

The Ambivalence of Personal Protection versus Collective Morality

The multi-cultural identity Jo has built is a fragile one. Her need to protect herself against marginalisation by distancing herself from stereotypical portrayals is juxtaposed by a feeling of connection and responsibility towards others’ in the community who have similar experiences to hers. This is reflective of her struggle to reconcile her life projects of ‘*being accepted*’ and ‘*treating everyone equally*.’

While she can live in both worlds, she is acutely aware of others who are not able to avoid stigma by ‘passing’ (Goffman, 1963). This feeling of responsibility is experienced as a collective imperative, and leads to further ambivalence as shown in the following excerpt:

“I don’t know about you, but how many times I’ve been asked: who’s the male, who’s the female? It’s ridiculous, and it’s rude, and I don’t think people realise how offensive it is. (...) But then again they were portrayed quite nicely, and there are people who, you know, they have a more male or female role in their relationship, so it’s not that I think that it’s wrong.”

The statement illustrates how she pulls the portrayal into her subjective life world to assess the women’s clothing in the ad, deeming it to be potentially stereotypical. However, she immediately adds a qualifier to concede that others might be in a gender-defined relationship, thus the portrayal cannot be regarded as ‘wrong’ per se.

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Her lived experience of stigmatisation drives her empathy, her ability to see the world through others' eyes, and her feelings of compassion and sympathy towards those who fall outside of what is considered normal in society and who need her protection. This empathy combined with her strong sense of justice and belief that every person should be treated with dignity form the cornerstones of her morality. This causes ambivalence in her ad experience and doubts about the morality of her critical interpretation.

These thoughts do not, however, translate into a wish for more radical portrayals that challenge heteronormative assumptions. Jo adds them almost as an afterthought, as a qualifier that assuages her critical interpretation and appeases her moral conscience. Her reading of the Drag Queens in the Starbucks ad illustrates this point further. She finds Drag Queens to be a *“tricky subject,”* seeing them as entertainers who have the potential to be harmful by ridiculing gender and being confused as transgender women by *“heterosexual people.”* She herself confuses one of the Drag Queens in the ad for an exaggerated, hyper-feminine trans woman. This reading paves the way for her critical interpretation of the ad as *“really offensive to the entire gay community:”*

“I take issue with it because I feel like it's a minority, it's a stereotype and it's damaging to people trying to be (...) like their friends.”

Thus, here she critiques the media's selectivity of only certain parts of the spectrum and its power to amplify social stigmata. Again, she immediately adds a qualifier:

“[H]ow can you say really? Because you could say: Yes it's a bad representation of a transgender person, but if there are transgender people like that and they're genuinely like that, then, how can we say that's a bad representation?”

Thus, the ambivalence arises from her preferred assimilationist portrayal, juxtaposed with her strong sense of equality and recognition that more radical portrayals are needed to assimilate those that do not fall into heteronormative ideals.

Discussion

This paper has sought to show how a meaning-based approach to media experience based on a life story and a media and advertising interview offers insights into the complexity and

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ambivalence of multicultural LGBT⁺ consumers' media experience.

The analysis illustrates how Jo's life theme and projects provide a guiding force for both her self-authentication and media experience (Arnould & Price, 2000). Taking a uses- and gratifications perspective (O'Donohoe, 1994), it is clear that she sees media representations as an indication for the degree of acceptance in society, which speaks to her life project of *'being accepted.'* She likes media representations that offer the vicarious enjoyment of a fantasy world of acceptance. Her readings are thus highly self-referential as she compares a portrayal's meaning directly to her lived experiences or an aspirational future. Her personalizing interpretations are, however, not exclusively positive (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997). Positive LGBT⁺ portrayals stand in stark contrast to the marginalization she has endured over her life course, triggering feelings of sadness. This leads to scepticism about their authenticity and frustration at the media's denial of stigma, ultimately causing ambivalence between this and her preference for these portrayals.

The addition of an interview section on Jo's prior media experiences provided rich insights into its meaning throughout her life. Thus, Mick and Buhl's (1992) approach misses out on understanding important intertextualities that shape consumers' interpretations of media texts (e.g. Fairclough, 1992). Understanding these nuances can prove of particular importance in the context of stigmatised identities and often-stereotypical portrayals.

Jo's LGBT⁺ media memory is largely negative, and so are her presumptions, even towards ads that did not employ any overt stereotypes. This influences her preference of assimilationist representations. Her media memory provides the backdrop for potentially harmful beliefs about her identity, such as not being able to have children, but also leads to positive evaluations when such beliefs are discredited by newer material. Likely due to her own struggle with gender identification, she takes most offense at the need to clearly demarcate gender via stereotypical appearance. It was clear in her ad interpretations that an assessment of characters' gender appearance was the first hurdle for an ad to be evaluated as *'realistic.'*

Jo's case further illustrates the benefits of conceptualising her identity as multicultural. She was never an active member of the LGBT⁺ community, hiding this aspect of her identity for most of her life. Consequently, she does not want to be represented as part of a stigmatised sub-culture, reinforcing her preference for assimilationist portrayals. Scholars have argued that the division between assimilationist and radical perspectives demonstrates a class division within the gay movement, dividing it into first and second-class citizens (Shepard, 2001).

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Many have voiced concerns over LGBT⁺ consumers' vulnerability to accepting harmful assimilating portrayals, further marginalizing those that do not adhere to heteronormative standards (e.g. Kates, 2004; Peñaloza, 1996; Sender, 2003).

Jo's readings of the stimulus material could be conducive to such thinking, as she does not critique the whitewashed, heteronormative, classist and male dominated nature of the positive ad portrayals. Nonetheless, while she does not employ an intersectional critique towards the stimulus material, she does mention the missing diversity when talking about the media in general and there being "*no spectrum whatsoever.*" She uses the dream consumer trope to describe the unrealistic way in which LGBT⁺ consumers are portrayed in the marketplace. Scholars should thus be cautious to assert an ideology's impact from media readings alone, without putting them in the context of general media experiences.

Additionally, the marginalisation Jo has endured has coloured her narrative, which is often framed into "gay people" versus "heterosexual people." Her experiences prompted empathy for other members of the community that reflect her life project of '*treating everyone equally.*' This '*Queer morality*' is socially and reflexively constructed. It stems both from her lived experience, as well as mediated experiences of marginalisation in the media and echoes the egalitarian ideology pervasive in the LGBT⁺ sub-culture. Her affiliation to both cultures stands in tension to each other, a tension between protecting herself and protecting others: "*I am just really protective over anyone I care about really.*"

This is the root for a reflexive awareness that underpins her media experience. Responding to the stimulus materials, Jo first ascertains her feelings towards each ad, based on her assimilationist preference. She then takes the wider community's perspective, accepting that stereotypes might sometimes be representative of others and should thus be judged impartially. Her *Queer morality* is directed inward at policing her own opinions, creating ambivalence and doubt around her own negative appraisals. Consistent with her life theme, she *strives for more*: to be a better person, more accepting. Finally, she also employs her advertising literacy to consider the portrayal in light of wider advertising standards. This happened independently of their brand (O'Donohoe, 1994; Ritson & Elliott, 1999), as she often failed to recall the advertised product.

Instead of considering an ad's role in context of the heteronormativity of LGBT⁺ representations in general, she critically and reflexively evaluates each individual portrayal for

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its potential harm for her and others' assimilation into society. She remains very critical of overly stereotyped and hyper-sexualized portrayals. Instead of taking representations at face value, she strives to understand and analyse them, and does thus never entirely acquiesce to heteronormative or capitalistic ideologies.

Notably, social class did not feature significantly, neither in her life story nor in the media interview. One might speculate that, due to her experience of stigmatisation, the tension between LGBT⁺ and mainstream cultures is more prominent in her life. Nonetheless, it is clear that a meaning-based model of multicultural media experience opens the door to understanding issues of intersectionality – both their presence and absence from the life and media narratives of an individual.

Conclusion

This paper has introduced a meaning-based model of multicultural media experience as a way to account for the complexity of contemporary consumer identities, in particular stigmatised ones. By expanding Mick and Buhl's model, it has shown the inextricable connection between a person's life story, multicultural identity, their media memory and interpretations.

Adding prior media experiences to interviews helps researchers understand media interpretations as contextualised within these over the entire life course. A conceptualisation of consumers as multicultural allows for an investigation of the complexity and ambivalence multiple cultural affiliations add to the meaning-making process. Furthermore, it opens the door to account for intersectional considerations in stigmatised consumers' experiences. As Plummer (2015) states: "Sexualities must now be seen in the multiple; differences are socially organized; shaped by intersecting religions, class, race, gender, etc." (p.109).

Previous studies have focused on understanding media experiences of stigmatised consumers without taking the socio-historic context of a person's life story into account. LGBT⁺ consumers seem to often be patronized as vulnerable consumers, completely subverted by their minority consciousness and thus easily "duped" by media texts - they are essentially denied any form of agentic subjectivity (Currie, 1997). Jo's case, however, clearly shows that such claims are overly simplistic.

This paper has looked at the experience of a gender-questioning lesbian. Future research should conduct similar analyses across a spectrum of LGBT⁺ individuals. This allows the researcher to compare the narratives not only at the level of sexuality, but also at other intersections, such as age, class and ethnicity, seeking possible commonalities and differences amongst a multicultural sample

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of consumers. The same methodology can then also be applied to other marginalised consumer groups to further our understanding of the complex ways in which marginalised identity interacts and intersects with other cultures and categories of difference and influences the media experience.

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APPENDIX 10: Nölke and O'Donohoe (2017)

This paper has been incorporated into Chapters 7 and 11 of this thesis.

Nölke, A. and O'Donohoe, S. (2017). *The Viscosity of Stigma. Paper presented at the Consumer Culture Theory Conference, Anaheim, CA.*

ABSTRACT

Since Goffman's (1963) seminal work, many studies of stigma have suffered from one-dimensional theorising and limited engagement with context. Most importantly, little consideration of broad societal changes and (post-)postmodern discourses in this domain has resulted in a dearth of research into structural macro dynamics and their interplay with individual micro-level factors. Building on Bauman's (2000) concept of 'liquid modernity,' and Bourdieu's (1984) theory of practice, this paper develops a theory of stigma as viscous rather than static and fixed, illustrated with data from the life stories of 20 sexuality and gender non-conforming individuals. Stigma is conceptualised as inherently ambivalent, constantly flowing within and across both individuals and contexts. This provides a richer understanding of stigma and how it is enacted in consumer culture, enabling a critical analysis of the dialectic relationship between individuals and their environment.

INTRODUCTION

This paper theorises stigma through a reflection on ethnographic data gathered through 20 life story interviews. The predominant conceptualisation of stigma as a fixed identity that governs an individual's identity did not fit the range of stigma experiences we saw reflected on the ground. Some of those we were talking to were acutely aware of their 'deviant' status, some blissfully oblivious, and yet others struggled to adapt in new environments. For all of them, however, stigma was not fixed or static – it changed, over their life course, but also within mere instances. Moreover, the intersection of their sexual- or gender-identity with other categories of difference produced no shortage of diverging experiences. All this rich detail, however, seemed lost in the existing literature which tends to obscure the complexity of the concept, the lived experience, and the factors enabling the emergence of stigmata (ibid). Despite recent interest in stigmatized consumer groups (Hamilton, 2012; Larsen, Patterson, & Markham, 2014; Sandikci & Ger, 2010); little attention has been paid to the social construction of stigma in consumer research (Ho & O'Donohoe, 2014). Most importantly, however, wider societal changes towards a post- and even post-post-modern attitude that have greatly influenced studies of consumer culture (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Cova, Maclaran, & Bradshaw, 2013; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1992), have not yet been adopted in the study of stigmatized consumption. How does stigma evolve in response to rapid societal change and (post-)postmodern conditions such as ambivalence and uncertainty?

In this paper, we thus seek to develop a richer understanding of stigma that reflects recent societal shifts and theoretical advancements. Building on Bauman's (2000) concept of 'liquid modernity,' and Bourdieu's (1984) theory of practice, we develop a theory of stigma as viscous. We argue that this theorization expands our current understanding of stigmatised individuals' practices, enabling a critique of the active vs passive subject position of consumers, both stigmatised and stigmatising, as well as the macro-structures they find themselves in (e.g. Askegaard & Linnet, 2011).

LIQUID MODERNITY AND CONSUMPTION

Bauman describes ‘liquid modernity’ as a ‘fluid world of globalization, deregulation and individualization’ (2000, p. 19). He argues that we have moved away from a ‘solid’ modernity, structured around capital-heavy institutions and fixed socio-cultural laws, into a world in which these structures that traditionally provided a sense of security are liquefied, a world of constant uncertainty and risk (Bauman, 2000). In modernity, identities were fixed and pre-determined, today they are fragmented and precarious, an open-ended work-in-progress. Each individual is put in charge of their own identity project under a ‘silent’ ideology best characterized as neoliberal. Identity formation thus becomes a constant reflexive process of asking ‘Who am I?’ (Bauman, 2000) to construct a cohesive ‘narrative of self’ (Giddens, 1991). The relationship between the reflexive project of self and social structures is dialectical; social structures are both empowering and constraining within the frame of existing categories of difference.

Bauman’s formulation has received little attention within consumer research, with Bardhi et al. (2012) a notable exception. These authors describe global nomads’ relationships with possessions as more flexible - ‘liquid’ - based on situational use-value and immateriality. This differs from previous accounts of the durable bonds with possessions that become embedded into consumers’ identity projects (Belk, 1988; Schouten, 1991; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Consumer researchers to date have failed to address how stigma evolves in response to rapid societal change and postmodern conditions. A new conceptualisation that accounts for individual heterogeneity, socio-cultural context and power relations is thus required.

STIGMA AND CONSUMPTION

In his seminal study, Goffman (1963:3) describes stigma as a “deeply discrediting” attribute of a person; a mark of difference that makes a person less desirable within certain situations. Over the years, his definition has been criticized as too deterministic, leading to a shift to a more multi-faceted, social process formulation (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). Link and

Phelan's (2001, 2013) review of stigma research found that studies focused excessively on 'deviant attributes' and 'stereotyping', with limited understanding of individual lived experiences and little analysis of the structural causes, moderating influences, or processes of stigmatisation. Their alternative conceptualization focused on stigma as a social construction, with the process of stigmatization involving labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination, as well as power situations and emotional responses that lead to negative outcomes for affected individuals. The addition of power to the definition challenged the assumption that every person within a stigmatized group experiences the same outcomes, instead allowing for different degrees of stigma (ibid).

Research attention has thus shifted towards 'moral experiences,' the lived experiences over a person's life course (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Yang et al., 2007) accepting stigma as a complex, multidimensional process (Bos et al., 2013) affected by individual psychology, social context and support structures. Table 1 describes a number of such psychological factors, but also illustrates the on-going duplication of findings and concepts in the literature.

Similar criticisms can be applied to research in the marketing domain, which generally invokes Goffman's (1963) definition but not recent theoretical developments. The liberal use of the term 'stigma' and its conflation with concepts such as minority or vulnerable consumers devalues its potential contribution. It is often used as a placeholder for any practice that is labelled and stereotyped, in the absence of discrimination or power dimensions (Link & Phelan, 2013). Furthermore, the concept been applied to groups of individuals in a highly homogenized fashion (e.g. Kates, 2002; Kozinets, 2001). It is seen as a 'master status,' (Goffman, 1963), as the most important part of study participants' identity, thus fostering a reductionist understanding thereof. Only recently have a few studies explored the processes through which stigma arises and how stigmatized practices might be transformed or even destigmatised (Ho & O'Donohoe, 2014; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013).

Societal Change, Stigma and Ambivalence

Bauman (2000) saw ambivalence as a necessary point of departure for analysing the current cultural and social order. From a sociological perspective, ambivalence that “...comes to be built into the structure of social statuses and roles. It directs us to examine the processes in the social structure that affect the probability of ambivalence turning up in particular kinds of role-relations. And finally, it directs us to the social consequences of ambivalence forth workings of social structures.” (Merton 1976:5) This is a time of increasing ambivalence as social norms are contested and rearranged, not least in terms of stigma surrounding sexuality and gender: transgender celebrities appear on the cover of global magazines, while dozens of others are murdered annually (Human Rights Campaign (HRC), 2016); Neil Patrick Harris and Ellen DeGeneres appear on *Time’s* 100 most influential people list alongside a president-elect who has made openly homophobic and racist statements (Time Inc., 2016). We are living with gender- and sexuality-related ambivalence: contradictory cultural values are held by members of the same society (Merton, 1976, p. 10), fuelled by conflicting media discussions and regulations around the world (Ghaziani et al., 2016).

THE VISCOSITY OF STIGMA

At times when LGBT individuals are not fully accepted by society, they find themselves in a precarious space full of uncertainty (Bauman, 2001). Some might consider this a liminal state, “between two worlds” (van Gennep, 1960, p. 18). The concept of liminality, however, refers to rites of passage, comprising three phases: separation, the limen and re-aggregation, with the limen defined as “a space that lies outside of recognized social structures...betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). Liminality, then, is a procedural concept that has a clear starting and end point and transforms the individual into a new being. Considering stigma in terms of ambivalence, however, there is no clear division between stigmatised, accepted, and in-

between. Stigma is a precarious state that can be described as a Hegelian dialectic, a constant striving towards moral betterment (Eyers, 2007). Once social spheres within society start doubting the logic behind a stigma, contradictory beliefs arise, leading to negotiations about what constitutes such ‘deviance’. This constant negotiation is structured both by the individual and the social context. In some circumstances one might be a fully accepted citizen, but if those circumstances change, re-stigmatization can occur. Current concerns about the status and rights of LGTB people under Presidents Obama and Trump exemplify these contingencies.

The theory of stigma presented here thus aims to account for this dialectic, for the ambivalence both within individuals as well as the socio-cultural contexts through which they move. This conceptualization uses the toolbox offered by Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984) theory of practice, which was in turn influenced by Hegel’s dialectics (Redding, 2005). According to Bourdieu, an individual’s tastes develop following processes of structuration and are thus socially rather than individually constructed. This means that practices are the result of the relationship between actors’ durable dispositions (*habitus*), an array of accrued resources (*capital*), and their current location in the social environment (*field*). One’s habitus is ‘durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions of acting in society’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54). Habitus is *structured* by one’s life circumstances and the fields one moves in, such as family and education. At the same time, it is *structuring*, as it influences the actor’s future practices, consciousness and tastes (Bourdieu, 1990). Actors can move in several social spaces - fields - at once, and these fields continually influence and co-construct each other. Each field is regulated according to a certain ‘logic of practice,’ specific truths or *doxa*, that become ‘second nature’ to players in the field as they develop a “feel for the game” (ibid, p.62). As actors move to occupy different positions within a field, they constantly vie for power and status by exchanging different forms of capital. Economic capital (financial resources), social capital (social networks), cultural capital

(knowledge, practices, language) all can be converted into symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986).

Using Bourdieu's terminology, stigmata could then be described as orthodoxa, naturalised social norms that have become accepted across fields and thus structure and are structured by field members' habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Discourses that actively seek to challenge the orthodoxy are described as heterodoxa, such as, in the present context, the gay liberation movement or feminism (Moi, 1991). It is this struggle between orthodoxy and heterodoxy that not only creates societal change, but also produces ambivalence and uncertainty.

Theorising stigma in terms of viscosity resonates with this since viscosity describes "the internal friction of a moving fluid. A fluid with large viscosity resists motion because its molecular makeup gives it a lot of internal friction. One with low viscosity flows easily because its molecular makeup results in very little friction when it is in motion" (Houghton Mifflin, 2005). Apart from a fluid's inner molecular make-up, its viscosity is determined by two other factors: external forces that act on it and, depending on their intensity and duration, might lead to 'thinning' or 'thickening' behaviours; and ambient conditions, such as temperature and pressure, an increase of which usually leads to an increase in viscosity or flow resistance (Viswanath, Ghosh, Prasad, Dutt, & Rani, 2007). Hence, under circumstances of highly viscose stigma, individuals may struggle to move through their lives as they wish, whereas, when it is nearly liquid, they find little resistance in their path. Depending on external forces and ambient conditions, however, the viscosity can change across social spheres and individuals.

The following sections explore this metaphor in depth and illustrate it with data from life story interviews with 20 sexuality and gender non-conforming individuals, aged 21-63, living in the UK. Eight participants identified as gay men, eight as gay women, two as pansexual, and two as bisexual. Out of these, one is a trans man, one a trans woman and three gender-neutral/fluid. Five described themselves as working-class, one as upper-middle, the rest as middle-class and all were Caucasian.

Bubbles of acceptance and degrees of viscosity across habitus

Researchers in sociology and gender and sexuality studies have long examined the effects of societal changes on sexuality- and gender- non-conforming individuals, proclaiming the rise of a post-gay generation: a young generation of LGBT consumers who grew up in more accepting environments and thus move in mixed social circles (Russell & Bohan, 2005). Coming-out is less transformative as they continue their lives uninterrupted (Klein, Holtby, Cook, & Travers, 2015), able to choose from a plethora of identity labels (Savin-Williams, 2005). Post-gay consumers' social relationships can thus be viewed as built in a 'bubble' - a sphere of liquid - of acceptance, an emic term used by a number of interview participants. The term 'bubble' perfectly captures the interplay between a person's habitus and field in terms of stigma. Those who move in fields where orthodoxic stigma has largely liquefied do not generally recognise their identity as stigmatised; indeed their sexuality is an "increasingly unremarkable" part of their identity (Reynolds, 2008). Lea (26), an out-lesbian American describes this perfectly:

I think for the most part gay and lesbian, we're kind of past that struggle, in society. (...) I've never had an actual negative experience, with coming out or being gay with anyone. So I feel like I am quite lucky in that respect. I think in some ways that has impacted how I view things and how comfortable I am with being out. (...) I never think about: 'Oh, is this going to make anyone nervous?'

In America, a vast national field, the stigma on sexuality has not simply dissolved. Due to the restricted fields Lea moves in, however, stigma is not central to her identity nor has it been salient in her life (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). For her, stigma has almost disappeared; it has a low viscosity, almost *liquid*, as she is able to move through her world without its negative influences. Nonetheless, homophobia remains alive in society as other actors are not disposed to adapt to new circumstances and continue to battle against the new order (Lea, de Wit, & Reynolds, 2015). Lea's partner Jo (32) is a gay, gender-questioning British person who uses female pronouns and has a distinctly different outlook:

I know that I have internalised homophobia, and I do think, because of when I initially came out, how badly it went, I feel like no one is just going to be fine about it.

Jo's personal experiences across fields, such as within her family, education and work, have led to more pronounced levels of anticipatory stigma (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009) or stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999). This affects her disposition towards other people, a fact she is painfully aware of, as illustrated by her reference to *'internalised homophobia.'* For Jo, stigma takes a near solid form that restricts and controls her day-to-day practices. As Lea recounts:

[Jo] sees everything and hears everything, or assumes. Sometimes I just think: oh, maybe I am just totally ignoring... I'm not even thinking about it, it doesn't matter to me, so I don't see any of that negative stuff or have any of those experiences.

Thus, the first property of stigma as viscous is that a particular level of viscosity is part of each individual's habitus acquired through experiences in fields. In other words, each individual develops a "*predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination*" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 2144 emphasis in original) to expect stigma, to develop stigma management techniques, or not to do so. Similarly, economic and symbolic capital affect stigma viscosity. Lea comes from a wealthy, middle-class family, and was able to leave the conservative area she grew up in, whereas Jo had for years no opportunity to leave her working-class environment, where she struggled to be accepted. Another participant, Jean, a 66 year-old Scottish gay woman, also grew up in a working-class family. As she did not consciously realise her attraction to women until her late 30s, however, it never solidified as a salient issue in her youth. Rather, her identity was structured by constant striving to work her way up the social ladder. The psychological resilience and economic independence she built in this process helped her shrug off subsequent stigmatisation, resulting in a low viscosity of her sexual stigma.

Changes in viscosity within the habitus: Lived and Mediated Experiences

It may seem that Lea and Jo constantly experience stigma at the same level of viscosity. Throughout the interviews, however, it became clear that participants' sense of themselves as stigmatized morphed and flowed based on the fields they moved in as well as their lived and mediated experiences - sometimes it appears to have evaporated or be a barely perceptible trickle, but particular situations could lead to a wave of sudden awareness carrying them to

unwanted destinations, and in some cases stigma took the form of a raging river, bursting their protective bubble. While existing, often overlapping terms, such as stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999) or felt stigma (Scambler & Hopkins, 1986) capture different degrees of stigma across people, conceptualising stigma as viscous allows researchers to further account for changing degrees of viscosity within individuals and within a field. A change in the viscosity of stigma can happen as a person moves between fields whose *doxa* dictate different attitudes. The second property of stigma as viscous is thus that a field has its own *doxa* which renders stigma more or less viscous, with the level structured by both institutional factors and the habitus of those within it. Those who are able to 'pass' (Goffman, 1963) might still be marginalized in certain social milieus or situations. Bill (23), a gay man living in Scotland was faced with such a situation when first bringing his boyfriend home to Northern Ireland:

I brought him home and my granddad didn't want to see him. This was kind of my first real...sort of insight into that. I never really experienced any outward homophobia as such, so that was completely jarring.

Here Bill comes face-to-face with near solid stigma attitudes within the field of his family, an experience that subsequently coloured his understanding of and disposition towards them. Even for people disposed to experiencing stigma as liquid, the social world remains ambivalent and unpredictable. The possibility that someone will act negatively towards one always remains. Many participants reported sudden increased awareness when walking hand-in-hand with their same-sex partner, irrespective of the field they move in. Scholars have previously suggested that a superior self-reflexivity arises from the process of coming-out and establishing a coherent identity (e.g. Foucault, 1978; Visconti, 2008). This relentless reflexivity has been associated with other groups such as migrants and women and was described by all participants including Jason (29), a German gay man with no lived experiences of stigma:

Many homosexual people no matter what gender, are more reflective than the average heterosexual. Not because they are smarter, but simply because due to society - Am I normal? How do I compare? - Many of them feel they have to look out more and think a bit about their position in society.

Such reflexivity is heightened by mobility across fields. Someone living in a bubble of acceptance, for example, may suddenly be faced with uncertainty at the prospect of moving beyond it as Ovidia (27), a Queer Irish Woman, recounts:

If you have not experienced [homophobia] than you may never have thought about that, so it's a real light bulb moment: 'Oh my god, yeah! Gay people might not be safe in other countries... I remember having that moment of realisation: Shit. There's going to be places that I can't travel to and feel safe.

As Bauman asserts, security is a precondition for freedom (Bauman, 1998). Even for individuals for whom stigma feels liquid on an everyday basis, mobility remains restricted due to different levels of viscosity across fields and this can influence consumption choices:

Bill (23): If I wasn't sure, I would always prefer anonymity over policy. I would always, for example, go for a big hotel, where the chance is that I vanish in the amount of people with my partner, then going for an AirBnB, where the host realises – 'Oh, this one couple that I have staying at the place, is gay.'

When it comes to travelling, new *doxa* apply and one's practices need to be adapted to the new field conditions. Whereas Bill describes AirBnB as a welcome and often cheaper alternative to hotels, the option falls away here due to the perceived lack of safety it affords.

The viscosity of stigma is not only influenced by lived experiences, however, but also by mediated or vicarious experiences. When Lea (26) began her relationship with Jo, she was for the first time confronted with personal stories of stigmatization:

I feel very comfortable just being myself and coming out to people. But Jo's experience is different. Like, travelling, she would think about: Oh, is this hotel good? Oh, they are known to be accepting we can stay there; we're not going to that country... I don't think about that. I mean, I wouldn't go to Russia [laughs]. But you know, little things, you don't think about (...) She is more cautious about that kind of stuff. And part of that is my experience of life being different from hers, and she's told me about what it's like living in the UK. It almost makes me nervous to live outside of [Scotland].

Lea's account shows not only the unstable viscosity of stigma: she can afford not to think about the little things because she does not live in Russia. Media accounts offering vicarious experience of oppression, as well as by Jo's stories about her lived experience have congealed her stigma, structured her habitus and problematized her practices. Most participants

highlighted the media's influence in manifesting their fears of coming out, by providing them with images of physical violence and discrimination which created a solid *anticipatory stigma* (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). If individuals have the capacity to create their own (hyper)-reality (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), they may then experience the psychological and social detriments of stigma without ever having experienced it first-hand. Over time, however, if those negative images did not resonate with their lived experiences, highly viscous stigma can liquefy. As Max, a 27-year-old, British gay male observed: "I find it funny how that effect has been diluted the more, I suppose, I have become comfortable with myself, the more I feel I need less support from external sources." Through media portrayals, however, consciousness of stigma could be revived. Max goes on to describe his reaction when watching the British TV series *Cucumber*:

It featured a really gritty bit of homophobic violence, which was absolutely disturbing, one of these things where I couldn't sleep afterwards, because it was so affecting. It was messed up. But I do think it was a clever wake-up call.

He goes on to explain that he is usually "pretty irresponsible with the way I walk around with a guy," Here, he presents sexual stigma as almost liquid, although the self-criticism implicit in his use of the word "irresponsible" suggests a degree of viscosity. He considered the show an authentic reflection of life for others within the community and saw the violence it depicted as a valuable "*wake-up call*", heightening his awareness of LGBT stigma and of his "privileged" position in not feeling personally stigmatized.

For those without direct lived experience, it seems that fear of stigmatization can still prevent coming out, even when the doxa in their fields had become more accepting. George, a 63-year-old gay man, for example, only ever experienced mediated stigma, but remains convinced of others' ill-will. He has not even told his daughter about his sexuality:

The awful thing is that it hasn't changed. Same as way back in the 60's. Fear. Gay people live in fear, no matter where they go, be it the country, be it the city, be it in home countries or abroad. We live with an inherent fear of being not accepted in some way or another. I think that is absolutely awful.

Others experiencing highly viscous stigma also tended to have very little contact with the

LGBT community. Indeed, the first author engaged with several individuals whose stigma habitus was so solid, their isolation so complete, that they did not display even basic sub-cultural capital, such as the symbolism of the rainbow flag. It may be that this lack of engagement was a form of defence. In any case, a person with a highly viscous stigma habitus who does not change in response to the liquefaction of stigma in their fields of practice might be described in terms of the “*hysteresis effect*” (Bourdieu, 1990): the person’s habitus does not match the new field conditions and they struggle to adapt accordingly. Conversely, the hysteresis effect may also account for Bill’s experiences with his family and booking travel accommodation: his nonchalant disposition to stigma was challenged by contact – or potential contact - with a highly viscous stigma field or habitus, leading to the adoption of new practices.

Individualisation and the Consumption Doxa

The following section critically appraises the consequences of the viscosity of stigma, in particular for those for whom it remains highly viscous. In liquid modernity our sense of community is eroded as individualization makes relations more fragile and consumers prefer connections that can be built and severed shortly (Bauman, 1999, 2013). Instead, society becomes increasingly regulated by market forces: citizens become consumers, and freedom is determined by the possession of resources (Bauman, 1999). This chimes with Bourdieu’s accrual of capital to get ahead in ‘the game.’ Consumers are subject to both a coercive ‘agenda of choice’ - the alternatives provided by the marketplace - and an indoctrinating ‘code of choosing’ - which stipulates the socially accepted ways in which to choose (ibid, p.74).

Scholars have asserted that gay identity and advances in gay right legislations are based on the development of the LGBT community as a viable market segment (e.g. D’Emilio, 1997). As Plummer (2015) argues, “it is only under conditions of capitalist modernity that this ‘sovereign individual’, with its ‘reflexive self’, comes into being” (p.66). The ‘post-gay’ generation has been characterised as moving away from the traditional LGBT community and

its cultural capital (Visconti, 2008; Savin-Williams, 2005). In other words, with LGBT stigma liquefying, existing sub-cultural structures, built to endure solid stigma conditions, dissolve.

This individualisation was visible amongst participants for whom stigma was least viscous; since their sexuality was seen as neither central nor stigmatized, they expressed no need for community validation. Nonetheless, their reflexive awareness of the viscosity of their stigma was evident in accounts of what allowed them to sustain their acceptance in society: “I know a lot of people who are fine with me being transgender, as long as, like, I don't ‘look trans’ or something (Jamie, 23, Trans Man, Pansexual). One might be inclined to interpret this as a way of using consumption to ‘pass’ in society (Goffman, 1963). As sexuality is concealable and as LGBT persons are increasingly accepted, their stigma is reduced to a stigma of appearance and thereby to one of consumption. However, participants did not describe it in that way. Rather, it was discursively positioned as a reflection of their own free will as described by Max here:

Some people still - this sort of hetero-normalizing of the gay community, they feel like they have been appropriated by it [laughs]. Maybe some people just want this and they don't need to explain to you why they want it, you know? And they don't owe it to any community to be a certain way. They are just human beings.

Individualisation manifested itself amongst interviewees with low stigma viscosity in a clear disdain for ‘radical’ LGBTs who challenge accepted norms. A general consensus existed that ‘radicals’ were not only endangering these participants’ acceptance within society - the low viscosity of their stigma - but also actively choosing to remain stigmatised. Stigma is discursively positioned as a choice, based on individual preference and expressed through particular modes of consumption (Bourdieu, 1984; DiMaggio, 1995). Thus, the stigmatised become the stigmatisers (see, e.g. Goffman, 1980):

Those whose stigma habitus is structured by low viscosity might be more disposed to adopting the markers of the dominant culture to draw symbolic boundaries between themselves and others for whom it is more solid. The viscosity of stigma thus seems predicated on an individual's choice to consume according to or against acceptable standards of consumer

culture. This fits into what theorists of reflexive modernization see as a move from 'living for others' to 'living a life of one's own' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 55).

Lea: I think when it comes to things like Pride parades, when you are just standing up there and being proud of who you are and want to be accepted as a normal person, they come in and kind of represent this differentness, and something that really wants to be set apart, and I don't identify with that.

Individuals for whom stigma has a greater viscosity thus not only lose the security provided by traditional structures; they risk being marginalised by others in their community. Such participants offered a pointed critique of these consumption norms: "They don't care if you are gay, they just care if you look gay... It's good to combat that, that looking gay doesn't matter either." (CC, 22, Gay, Gender-neutral, Canadian). Through the misrecognition of the consumption doxa as legitimate, those for whom stigma has a low viscosity can be seen as engaging in 'symbolic violence,' (Bourdieu, 1977) against others who are subject to LGBT stigma. Those that transgress the heteronormative rules of our consumerist society are who Queer theorists fear are forgotten in the current gay-rights movement (e.g. Butler, 1990).

Those who are close to shedding their stigmatised identity are vulnerable to being hailed by the dominant consumption doxa. The temptation to live free from stigma may be greater than the moral responsibility felt towards the wider stigmatised community. Therefore, the existence of a near liquid form of stigma may create the conditions for the reification of the existing orthodoxy, albeit under the guise of adequate consumption. Understanding stigma as viscous, then, has important implications for consumer researchers as below.

Consequences for Consumer Research

Framing stigma as viscous is a fruitful way of reflecting the changing societal landscape and addressing current criticisms of the literature. It builds on the richer conceptualization provided by Link and Phelan (2001), incorporates existing psychological and sociological concepts (Pinel, 1999; e.g. Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Thoits, 2011), and offers a research agenda concerning individual differences in stigma, life course progressions (Yang et al., 2007) and

their consequences for people's disposition and practices. Enabled by Bourdieusian theory, it further encourages exploration of stigma creation, amelioration and intensification within and across social contexts. It thus incorporates a discussion of power situations in terms of the interplay of individual and structural dynamics (Link & Phelan, 2001, 2013).

While this paper focused on one specific group, the concept appears relevant to other groups, including those with non-concealable stigma. As the foregoing discussion illustrates, the modernist notion that stigmatised individuals join a sub-culture of consumption within which they use possessions as cultural capital that signals belonging and status does not ring true in situations where stigma can become less viscous, due to changes in field conditions or over a person's life course. Further research is needed to explore the relationship of those with low stigma viscosity with 'traditional' sub-cultural capital and how possessions are used to navigate ambivalence and unstable viscosity of stigma both in habitus and field.

In addition, it seems fruitful for scholars to engage with the ways in which consumers navigate hysteresis effects when the stigma viscosity of field and habitus do not match. Deterritorialisation has been hailed as one of the main consequences of globalisation (Appadurai, 1990; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). How do those disposed to low stigma viscosity manage sudden stigma congealment or situations which require them to move into fields of high stigma viscosity? Since marginalised individuals have been found to build resilience over time (Thoits, 2011), a person new to highly viscous stigma might find it difficult to adapt, with adverse consequences for their mental health. And as traditional community structures intended to help those with solid stigma dissipate, how do those for whom stigma remains solid adapt to such changes? How may possessions be used to change the viscosity of stigma – both to liquefy (e.g. Sandikci & Ger, 2010) but also to solidify? A widely shared Vimeo video featuring American 'Mipsterz' - Muslim hipsters - wearing hijabs while skateboarding or motor biking

(Yazdi, 2016), for example, created a new community within which to jointly confront stigma, but was also subject to backlash from within and without the Muslim community.

This, and the notion of mediated stigma, also raises questions about the role the media play in changing stigma viscosity; indeed, Brumbaugh and Grier (2006) linked the media to the generation and dispersal of stigma. The current study highlights the complexity of the mechanisms by which stigma was affected. Participants identified media portrayals as a main factor in the solidification of stigma in their life course, and as sometimes leading to a congealment affecting their practices in real life. Although such portrayals could be unsettling, they were also described as authentic and necessary to jolt participants out of complacency. Previously, scholars have suggested that stigmatised consumers will look favourably upon media images featuring their 'in-group' (e.g. Borgerson, Schroeder, Blomberg, & Thorssén, 2006). This study suggests that the rejection of 'radical' individuals who challenge the new social doxa might also apply to media portrayals deemed *too* stereotypical, *too* exaggerated, or *too* 'gay'. More work is thus needed to understand the relationship between media experiences and dispositions towards different levels of stigma viscosity.

This study suggests that acceptance is not reached after passing through a liminal state - it is a slippery state, established through a constant dialectic negotiation. The data illustrate how, as a stigmatized group becomes assimilated and stigma becomes less viscous, their sense of responsibility for the stigmatized community is in danger of falling away. There is a need for critical studies investigating how the media might be fostering processes of individualisation leading to intra-group stigmatisation and therefore symbolic violence. It is the fear of being stigmatised, the misrecognition of the consumption doxa as legitimate, that may exert the strongest form of stigma power (Link, Yang, Phelan, & Collins, 2004).

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APPENDIX 11: Nölke (2018)



Making Diversity Conform? An Intersectional, Longitudinal Analysis of LGBT-Specific Mainstream Media Advertisements

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Making Diversity Conform? An Intersectional, Longitudinal Analysis of LGBT-Specific Mainstream Media Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

This study introduces an intersectional analysis of explicit LGBT portrayals in mainstream advertising between 2009 and 2015. The analysis provides insights into the (in)visibility of the LGBT community over a period of significant social change. It finds that although the number of explicit representations of LGBT characters has risen dramatically, 230 out of 240 intersections of sexuality, class, age, and race remain invisible. In using a new ad format—human interest ads—advertisers move away from hypersexualization, toward real individuals' stories of love and families. Nonetheless, the analysis highlights how the erasure of multiply marginalized groups in mainstream advertising continues to perpetuate a heteronormative, domesticized version of "gayness" and discusses the adverse effects that lie herein. It is proposed that non-LGBT consumers are the underlying target group of LGBT-explicit advertising, causing non-target market effects that alienate large parts of the LGBT community despite their overt inclusion.

KEYWORDS

Advertising; content analysis; diversity; heteronormativity; intersectionality; LGBT consumers; media studies; polysemy

Twenty years ago, several articles in a special issue on marketing to the gay and lesbian market discussed these groups' responses to marketing communications. Contributors hailed advertising as an important agent in the assimilation of this marginalized subculture (Bowes, 1996; Peñaloza, 1996) and suggested that gay consumers are likely to prefer gay ad imagery (Bhat, Leigh, & Wardlow, 1996), a finding that has since been further investigated and used to explain gay consumers' high levels of brand loyalty (Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999; Oakenfull, McCarthy, & Greenlee, 2008; Tuten, 2005). The more the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)¹ movement advances and market interest increases, however, the more important it becomes to understand the ways in which these consumers are represented in the media.

It is indisputable that the LGBT movement has taken immense strides over the past two decades. As a result, the depiction of this minority group in advertising has changed from covert targeting in print media to explicit imagery

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of LGBT characters in mainstream media, including prime-time television and national newspapers. Previous research on this topic was conducted at a time when such portrayals were essentially nonexistent in the media. Thus the literature to date has focused exclusively on gay-targeted publications or “gay-vague,” purposefully polysemic representations in mainstream media (Ginder & Byun, 2015). Recent work criticizes such studies for making sexuality the sole dimension of analysis, thereby defining LGBT communities through sexuality alone and disregarding their inherent heterogeneity (Tsai, 2011, 2012). While a number of researchers have studied media texts through the lens of different social identity categories in isolation, an intersectional understanding that considers multiple categories remains conspicuously absent (Gopaldas & DeRoy, 2015).

This study contributes to existing literature through the introduction of an intersectional lens into advertising research. It thus follows existing calls for the introduction of intersectionality into media research (e.g., Gopaldas & DeRoy, 2015; Gopaldas & Fischer, 2012). It first outlines existing studies on LGBT consumers and media representations targeted at this group. Recent advances in the LGBT social movement are then presented, leading to a discussion about the notion of intersectionality and its merits for advertising scholarship. The article then investigates how ad representations of LGBT characters in non LGBT-publications have emerged and evolved in the wake of recent social changes. Both a quantitative and qualitative intersectional analysis of LGBT-specific mainstream ad imagery between 2009 and 2015 are provided. The analysis highlights the importance of intersectionality as a tool to better understand diversity in media portrayals and raises questions about the intention and effects of LGBT-explicit advertising imagery. In targeting the “minority,” might advertisers, in fact, be alienating it further?

Background

The emergence of gay targeted advertising

The Stonewall riots in 1969 amplified marketers’ awareness of a sizeable gay and lesbian population (Peñaloza, 1996), resulting in companies employing niche marketing strategies to tap into what was perceived to be a “dream market” of early-adopters and trendsetters (Chasin, 2001; Sender, 2001). This image, however, was reserved solely for White gay men, who were regarded as profitable due to double income and lack of children (Lukenbill, 1995). It was this group that subsequently attracted interest from scholars and practitioners, spurring a narrow focus in both academic studies and media representations that prevails to this date (Ginder & Byun, 2015).

Branchik (2007) created a conceptual framework of gay marketing history and recognized three historical chapters: the “ridicule/scorn” period before 1941,

in which gay men were objects of stigmatization; the “cutting-edge” phase up to 1970, which saw their emergence as sophisticated trendsetters; and the “mainstream/respect” phase from the 1970s to 2005, which showed them in a number of diverse roles. This last label, however, is misleading. The few companies that ventured into mainstream advertising during these years were met with backlash, consumer boycotts, and even violence: a 1994 IKEA ad featuring a gay male couple was pulled after the company received bomb threats (McMains, 2014). Subsequently, marketing spending remained directed at gay publications, which thrived as a result (Peñaloza, 1996; Sender, 2003).

Accordingly, studies to date have focused on these gay publications, as exemplified by all recent content analyses of gay advertising imagery (Draper, 2012; Gill, 2009; Marshall, 2011; Saucier & Caron, 2008). Due to fear of alienating heterosexual consumers, marketers opted for an implicit, so-called *gay-window* advertising approach (Sender, 2003). Puntoni, Vanhamme, and Visscher (2011) defined gay-window advertising as characterized through “(1) the absence of explicit heterosexual cues, and (2) the presence of ambiguous cues that could be construed as depicting gay relationships or culture” (p. 27). It uses overt signifiers of gay culture, such as rainbows, as well as “purposefully polysemic” imagery or text that may be read as gay only by gay consumers (Puntoni, Schroeder, & Ritson, 2010; Tsai, 2012).

LGBT representations in the media

Both practice and consequently literature have focused on media portrayals of the gay male “dream consumer” (Ginder & Byun, 2015). Gay characters in advertising are typically Caucasian, “youthful, shirtless, hairless and muscular gay men” (Marshall, 2011, p. 4), from the upper middle class (Kates, 1999; Peñaloza, 1996), depicted as handsome trendsetters, or in a hypersexualized, overly effeminate and “sissified” way (Bergling, 2001; Tsai, 2004). This has raised concerns about the harmful body image these representations espouse within this group (Saucier & Caron, 2008).

To date, very few studies have explored lesbian portrayals in media (Capsuto, 2000; Ciasullo, 2001) or advertisements (Gill, 2009; Reichert, Maly, & Zavoina, 1999). This is attributed to their position as economically less powerful and their frequent association with feminist anti-capitalism (Clark, 1993). Ads that do depict this group tend to formulaically “straighten” lesbians to adhere to heteronormative forms of femininity (Capsuto, 2000; Ciasullo, 2001; Gill, 2009). As a result, these portrayals are characterized by the objectification of hypersexualized “lipstick lesbians” as a tool to appeal to the straight male gaze, mirroring “those women engaged in lesbian sex in mainstream heterosexual pornography” (Reichert et al., 1999, p. 124). As Ginder and Byun (2015) explained: “[T]he lack of female representation continues to propagate patriarchal dominance and a history of lesbian invisibility within the marketplace” (p. 825).

While gay and hyperfeminine lesbian media representations remain scarce, images of other parts of the LGBT spectrum, such as more masculine “butch” lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals are virtually invisible (Ciasullo, 2001; Serano, 2007; Tsai, 2004). This invisibility can either be absolute (i.e., no representations at all) or relative (i.e., no positive, reaffirming representations; Fryberg & Townsend, 2008). Tuchman (1979) termed this practice of excluding or trivializing minorities “symbolic annihilation.” Examining the representations of transsexuals in advertising, for example, Serano stated, “popular media tends to assume that all transsexuals are male-to-female, and that all trans women want to achieve a stereotypical feminine appearance and gender role” (2007, p. 41). Male-to-female (MtF) trans hyperfemininity is thus used as a tool to reaffirm the gender binary, serving to symbolically annihilate trans identities as it trivializes trans femininity as unreal and artificial.

The importance of the media

Scholars’ opinions on LGBT media and marketing representations are characterized by a seemingly unresolvable tension. Previous research has shown that membership of a stigmatized group can significantly influence consumer responses to ad imagery and content (Bhat et al., 1996; Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999). Peñaloza (1996) discussed the importance of market integration for the assimilation of gay consumers and asserted that: “[M]embers of social movements tend to have a heavily sensitized concern for the impact of marketing communications on group interest” (Peñaloza, 1996, p. 14). Studies suggest that gay consumers crave the feeling of social acceptance provided by their inclusion in marketing/media, rewarding companies with fervent brand loyalty (Kates, 1999; Tuten, 2005). This loyalty is supposed to emerge, even if portrayals are perceived as highly stereotypical and commercialized (Tsai, 2011). Consumers further use cultural texts, such as ads, to learn about socially accepted behaviors and to manage stigmatized identities (Levy, 1981), thereby informing their self-fulfillment and lived identities (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). Furthermore, LGBT media role models have been found to elicit feelings of pride.

Concurrently, however, this assimilationist view is strongly criticized, as it creates a hetero-normalized understanding of the LGBT community that contradicts modern queer activism (Kates, 2004; Sender, 2004). Queer theorists criticize the ways in which sexual orientation is used merely as an identifiable “descriptor” for market segmentation, thereby constructing a distorted gay and lesbian market that favors a certain, stereotypical type of gayness and negative depictions despite the diversity of those identifying as LGBT (Saucier & Caron, 2008; Tsai, 2004; Um, 2010). In 1999, Kates introduced queer theory into the advertising literature in his discussion of a Toyota ad that featured two men, a suburban house, a Toyota, and two dogs. In changing the gender of one of the characters to that of a woman, he exposed the heteronormativity of the image, or, as Kates called it, “the heterosexualisation of homosexuality” (Kates, 1999, p.

34). Many scholars have voiced their concern about the possibility of LGBT consumers internalizing such media representations into their self-concept (e.g., Peñaloza, 1996; Tsai, 2012).

Recent advances in the LGBT social movement

As Peñaloza stated, “marketing to gays/lesbians is best understood when situated within the socio-historical context of these movements” (1996, p. 20). Whereas previously brands have preferred gay-window advertising as “win-win targeting strategies” (Puntoni et al., 2011, p. 36), landmark changes in the societal landscape have led to a perceptible increase in LGBT-specific portrayals in marketing and media over the past few years (Branchik, 2007; Muller, 2015).

In 2010, Proposition 8, which prohibited same-sex marriage in California, was ruled a violation of the U.S. Constitution. This marked “a galvanizing, game-changing force for militant marriage equality activism from 2008 to the present” (Weber, 2015, p. 1149). Until 2012, visibility of gay public figures was very limited. The acceleration of marriage equality, however, led to an upsurge in openly LGBT celebrities and an influx of LGBT-specific representations in mainstream media, targeted not only at LGBT audiences, but also at the growing consumer base that is supportive of LGBT equality. We live in a time when “diversity” is hailed as a key competitive advantage: “Only by embracing diversity can marketing organisations stay relevant in today’s rapidly evolving society” (Smith & Barrat, 2015). Last year, with equal marriage legal across all U.S. states, LGBT-specific mainstream ads broke records in digital engagement and were “the most effective and engaging ad campaigns of the year by the brands conducting them” (Muller, 2015). A 2015 Wells Fargo ad of a lesbian couple, for example, garnered nearly 4 million online views at the time of writing.

Intersectionality

Despite these changes, the literature has yet to examine LGBT-specific representations in mainstream advertising and the types of portrayals used following recent societal shifts. The focus of existing content analyses on sexuality as the sole locus of identity offers simplistic representations of the LGBT community that, despite other contributions, overlooks concerns of how sexuality intersects with other social categories.

Intersectionality denotes the study of the multiplicative nature of oppression (Luft & Ward, 2009). More specifically, it refers to “the intersection between gender, race, and other categories of difference, individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Davis, 2008, p. 68). Kimberly Crenshaw (1989) coined and introduced the concept to feminist scholarship as part of Black

feminists' critique of the supremacy of White feminism. It is hailed as feminism's most important contribution and is increasingly used by scholars across social sciences. Nonetheless, it remains largely nonexistent in marketing and media studies.

Gopaldas and DeRoy (2015) recently compared a unidimensional approach to media imagery analysis, considering a single social dimension with an intersectional approach. Their article analyzed a sample of *Gentleman's Quarterly* (GQ) magazine covers to illustrate the superiority of an intersectional approach in exposing multiple points of marginalization. They expanded the previously introduced notion of symbolic annihilation with the concepts of "intersectional visibility," and "intersectional travesty" and concluded that "only an intersectional approach can expose instances of intersectional invisibility, that is, the low to zero visibility granted to intersections of historically oppressed identities (...). Only an intersectional approach can expose instances of intersectional travesty, that is, the ridicule, stereotyping, and generally inferior quality of representation granted to intersections of historically oppressed identities" (p. 25).

Although their work did not include sexuality due to a lack of instances in the sample material, it is clear that the literature can greatly benefit from an analysis that leverages the authors' approach to provide a more nuanced understanding of the diversity of LGBT representations.

Methodology

This study sought to revise and advance existing understandings of LGBT representations in advertising in several ways: first, by providing a longitudinal analysis to examine how representations are impacted by recent changes in societal attitudes; second, by focusing specifically on mainstream ads; and, third, by employing intersectionality as a concept that allows for a better appreciation of intersectional visibility within LGBT-specific ad imagery.

Data selection

In this study, 185 ads that appeared in non-LGBT publications from 2009 to 2015 were analyzed. This timeframe was selected, first, because it builds on previously undertaken content analyses, which looked at timeframes up to 2010. Second, the Web site AdRespect.com, recognized as the most complete source for LGBT ads and used in previous studies (Branchik, 2007; Gill, 2009; Marshall, 2011), recorded an unprecedented spike in LGBT ads in 2009. It was the year prior to Proposition 8 being ruled unconstitutional, an event that accelerated the LGBT movement in its wake. This year thus marks an ideal starting point to analyze the effects of changes in societal attitudes. The sample is nonrandom in that a variety of search measures were employed to identify the majority of LGBT-specific ads across the world in the timeframe

under study. First, the 570 ads submitted to AdRespect in this timeframe were assessed. AdRespect includes information on whether an ad is published in media targeted solely at an LGBT audience or whether it has a broader reach. Those published only in LGBT publications were excluded from the analysis, as were vague ads, those that did not portray people, and ads for non-governmental organizations (NGOs); 171 ads fulfilled all criteria.

Ads on AdRespect are submitted by diligent readers and the editorial team. Due to the crowd-sourced nature, some ads may, inevitably, be absent from the database. The author thus conducted an additional search of LGBT news Web sites, ad agencies, and blogs to search for ads omitted in AdRespect. Examples include PinkNews.co.uk; Queerty.com; campaignlive.co.uk; and glad.org. This search yielded 14 ads. The final data set thus included 185 ads from 22 countries—76% from the United States and 15% from the EU (Appendix 1). All ads apart from six were English-speaking or audiovisual. Retail ads accounted for 15%, fashion and packaged foods for 13% each, and travel for 11%, whereas alcohol brands accounted for only 3% (Appendix 2).

Data analysis

Following Gopaldas and DeRoy (2015), social identity dimensions that emerged from the data were first identified, resulting in a coding scheme similar to their study, including age, leanness, race, and physical ability, with the addition of class and LGBT membership. Due to negligible representations of non-lean bodies and the absence of disabled representations in the sample, these did not form a distinct category. Thus five coding dimensions remained, with a total of 16 categories among them.

(1) **LGBT:** Coded “gay male,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” “trans-men” (FtM), and “-women” (MtF) based on explicit body language (e.g., a kiss) or ad text. Trans portrayals, for example, were always explicitly labeled as such within the ad text. For celebrities, publicly available information on their preferred identity was used. Ads showing drag queens and crossdressers are included in the respective “trans” categories for reasons further discussed below.

(2) **Age:** Clustered into “teens” (13+), “young adults” (20+), “middle aged” (35+), and “mature” (50+), estimating age “to the nearest multiple of 5 based on their appearance” (Gopaldas & DeRoy, 2015, p. 10).

(3) **Race:** Characters’ ethnicity was coded as either “Caucasian,” “Afro-American,” “Asian,” or “Hispanic” based on skin color, language, and discernable accent, as well as explicit ad text.

(4) **Class:** While the meaning of social class remains contested in the social sciences, classes can be defined based on their relation to production to enable identification: the upper class owns the means of production,

while the working class manually sets them in motion, and the managerial middle class performs an administrative, supervisory role (Artz & Kamalipour, 2012). Following this distinction, portrayals were coded as “Working,” “Middle,” or “Upper Class.” Those coded as working class, for example, were depicted in occupations traditionally considered as such (e.g., butler, construction worker), whereas those coded middle class were seen in management jobs or in a suburban setting including a large family house and car.

All ads were coded by the author in addition to a secondary coder. Category reliability lay at nearly 100% (Kassarjian, 1977). In addition, the author randomly asked 20 LGBT-identified participants from a different study for their assessment of the four characteristics in up to 10 randomly selected ads each. Coding reliability again lay at 96%, the difference between middle-aged and mature providing the greatest discrepancy at ca. 92%.

Multimodal analyses

This article provides a quantitative unidimensional analysis of the data set overall and over time, as well as both quantitative and qualitative intersectional analyses. Quantitative analyses provide numerical summaries of the codes in the data set (Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4), rounding percentages to the nearest 1%. Following Gopaldas and DeRoy (2015), the qualitative analysis involved an “iterative, dialogical, and comparative interpretation” (p. 11). Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software was used to code and organize ads into the 16 categories. For the unidimensional analysis, categories within each coding dimension were compared, whereas for the intersectional analysis, differences between the 240 possible intersections were observed.

The qualitative analysis is based on a variety of characteristics such as character appearance (e.g., body language, styling and clothing), attitudes and relationships, ad environment and background, and assessment of how characters’ sexuality was made explicit. Together, this formed the basis for the resulting thematic categories.

Findings

Longitudinal analysis

Figure 1 illustrates the change in the number of LGBT-explicit imagery in mainstream ads. The graph clearly illustrates the jump in representations as marriage equality gained more traction in mainstream media. The drop in 2013 is potentially explained by the large number of companies that opted for symbolic ads in this year. Numerous brands joined the viral movement of changing Facebook profile pictures to the Human Rights Campaign’s (HRC)

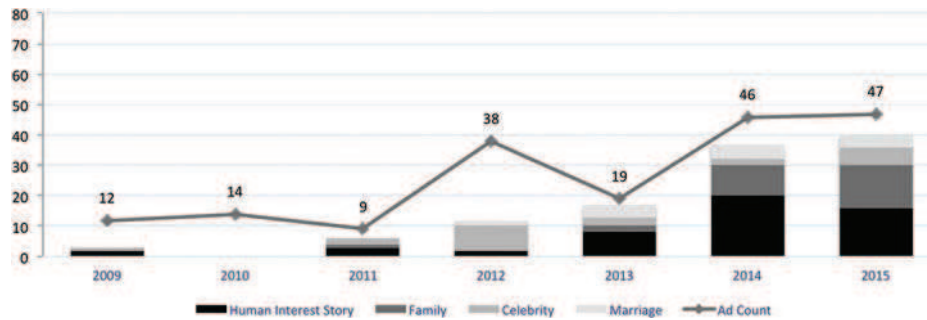


Figure 1. Number and type of representation in LGBT-explicit ads 2009 to 2015 ($N = 185$).

red equal sign, by publishing stylized versions of their logos or products in the same fashion. Hence, despite there being a drop in LGBT portrayals in this year, the number of mainstream ads that included LGBT symbolism increased year-on-year. The equal sign was subsequently voted “Symbol of the Year” in Stanford University’s Symbolic Systems Program (McCarty, 2014).

Further, Figure 1 provides an overview of the ways in which characters’ sexuality was made visible in these ads from 2011 onward. Ads started expanding the traditional “family” and increasingly used images of nontraditional families, gay wedding celebrations, and “out” LGBT celebrity endorsements. The bar chart in Figure 1 shows the number of instances in which these types of portrayals appeared. In instances where these common markers of sexuality were not used, the relationship between characters was made explicit through their body language. Moving away from the “intense gaze” and avoidance of same-sex touching previously used to create ambiguous relationships between characters in gay-window advertising (Gill, 2009; Ginder & Byun, 2015), ads increasingly used explicit kisses or intimate embraces to show LGBT affection.

One new ad style identified in this study is what may be called the *human interest* (HI) ad. HI ads break with traditional formats by telling the story of real LGBT consumers in a 2- to 4-minute-long video, as opposed to the more widely used 30-second spots. The emergence of this form of advertising may be linked to the rise of online video portals, such as YouTube and Vimeo. HI ads are increasingly found on online video platforms, often supplemented by stories of other non-LGBT consumers. They are often accompanied by print ads or television “trailer ads” that feature short cameos of the stories featured in the main ad and that invite consumers to “find out more online.”

Although HI ads started appearing only in 2011, they have since become the predominant way of LGBT inclusion (Figure 1). Notably, all HI ads in the sample fit into the generic plot of “suffering, coming-out, and surviving” described by Plummer (1995): we see the story of a father who does not want to attend his gay daughter’s wedding until finally accepting her (Expedia, 2012); learn about the perils of traveling from the experiences of a number of diverse couples (AirBnB,

2015); feel for the trans men who recount their stories of transition and road to acceptance (Google, 2015; Hallmark, 2015); and laugh with the gay African American fathers who show us just how “normal” their family routines are (Nikon, 2015). Plummer (1995) described these types of stories as “The Modernist Quest.” They champion a modernist essentialism in which sexuality lies at the core of a person’s personality. They are linear stories, used to illustrate how the characters have overcome great suffering and to prove the grand truth and underlying message of the vast majority of LGBT inclusive ads in the sample: “love is love” and same-sex love is just as normal and boring as any other. They are presented in the same “familiar *heterosexual* wholesomeness” (p. 31) that Kates (1999) noted in his queer deconstruction of the Toyota ad.

(1) Unidimensional quantitative analysis of ads’ character diversity

A unidimensional quantitative analysis of character diversity across all ads over these 6 years reveals a well-known picture: LGBT characters in ads are mainly Caucasian (82%), middle-aged (MA; 59%), and middle-class (MC; 85%) gay men (61%; Table 1). Hispanic, mature, working-class (WC), FtM trans persons and bisexuals are the least represented groups. An analysis of sexualities between 2009 and 2015 further shows that FtM trans people started appearing only in 2015. MtF trans characters were included only sporadically over the years, and also received heightened visibility in 2015 (Table 2). This may be due to increased visibility of trans role models and contemporary debates, such as the public transition of Olympic decathlete and gold-medal winner Caitlin Jenner, formerly known as Bruce Jenner.

Table 1. Unidimensional quantitative analysis of ads’ character diversity ($n = 350$).

Dimension	Percentage	Number of Representations
Age		[350]
Mature	3%	[9]
Middle Aged	59%	[205]
Young Adult	38%	[133]
Teen	1%	[3]
Class		[350]
Upper Class	13%	[46]
Middle Class	85%	[299]
Working Class	1%	[5]
Race		[350]
Caucasian	82%	[286]
African American	10%	[35]
Asian	7%	[25]
Hispanic	1%	[4]
Sexuality		[350]
Gay	61%	[215]
Lesbian	32%	[111]
Bisexual	2%	[8]
Trans MtF/Drag	3%	[12]
Trans FtM	1%	[4]

Table 2. Unidimensional quantitative analysis of ads' character diversity (N = 350).

Dimension	Percentage and Number of Representations per Sexuality over the Years						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<i>Gay</i>	47%	80%	72%	53%	28%	25%	63%
<i>Lesbian</i>	53%	13%	22%	42%	22%	17%	13%
<i>Bisexual</i>	0%	7%	0%	2%	1%	0%	3%
<i>Trans MtF</i>	0%	0%	6%	2%	1%	2%	4%
<i>Trans FtM</i>	0%	0%	0%	2%	1%	0%	3%
Total	[19]	[15]	[18]	[53]	[44]	[82]	[119]

Table 3. Intersectional quantitative analysis of ads' character diversity (n = 350).

	Upper				Middle Class				Working Class			
	Mature	Middle Aged	Young Adult	Teen	Mature	Middle Aged	Young Adult	Teen	Mature	Middle Aged	Young Adult	Teen
<i>Gay</i>												
Caucasian	1% [2]	3% [10]	1% [4]	0% [0]	1% [3]	28% [99]	18% [63]	0% [0]	0% [1]	1% [2]	1% [2]	0% [0]
African-American	0% [0]	1% [3]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [1]	1% [5]	2% [6]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Asian	0% [0]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [2]	3% [9]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Hispanic	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [2]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
<i>Lesbian</i>												
Caucasian	0% [0]	5% [17]	1% [2]	0% [0]	1% [2]	11% [38]	7% [23]	1% [2]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
African American	0% [0]	1% [3]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [5]	2% [8]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Asian	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [3]	2% [7]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Hispanic	0% [0]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
<i>Bisexual</i>												
Caucasian	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [2]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [5]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
African American	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Asian	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Hispanic	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
<i>Trans MtF</i>												
Caucasian	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [3]	0% [0]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
African American	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	1% [4]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Asian	0% [0]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [1]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Hispanic	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [1]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
<i>Trans FtM</i>												
Caucasian	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [1]	1% [3]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
African American	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Asian	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]
Hispanic	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]	0% [0]

Notes. Intersections with 0% representation are shaded in gray, those with N = 0 representation are shaded in dark gray, and those with 1% representation are in very light gray.

(2) Intersectional quantitative analysis of ads' character diversity

An intersectional analysis of all 350 characters within the ads illustrates a more nuanced picture of the lack of diversity within these ads. Out of the 240 possible intersections, 205 are absolutely invisible, a further 11 are relatively invisible (0%, $n = 1$), and nine are virtually invisible (1%, $n = 2$). Hence, 230 out of 240 intersections are invisible.

As suggested by the unidimensional analysis, middle-aged (35–50), middle class, White gay men encompass the bulk of representations at 28%. Their young-adult (YA) counterparts comprise a further 18%. Both together account for nearly 50% of all characters and 76% of all gay male characters. White, middle-aged Caucasian lesbians comprise 11%, young-adult 7%, across all portrayals. These two intersections make up 55% of all lesbian portrayals.

Interestingly, working-class representations are restricted to White gay men. Consistent with broader debates about sexism and ageism in the media, the same holds for mature portrayals, whose number remains negligible (Gill, 2009). Upper-class (UC) representations are largely female, mainly due to a number of print ads for designer brands that were identified as upper class (e.g., Alberta Ferreti, 2009). It is also important to note that the apparent racial diversity in the middle-class and middle-age MtF group stems from three ads aired more recently (Magnum, 2015; Smirnoff, 2015; Absolut, 2011). The findings therefore suggest that racial and class diversity are virtually nonexistent for the less accepted parts of the LGBT spectrum—trans and bisexual people.

In the following, a number of important sample intersections is discussed. For many of these, the sample size is small, which may raise concerns about statistical significance. Nonetheless, considering the visible trend of highly similar representations across all intersections, even a limited number of ads provides an insight into how the market is likely to portray those subgroups in the future. In addition, the fact that these identities are symbolically annihilated by the market should not be used as the reason for a comparable exclusion in academic literature.

(3) Intersectional qualitative analysis of ads' character diversity

The Dominant intersection: Caucasian, middle-class, middle-aged gay men (N = 99)

The majority of portrayals in the dominant intersection adhere to the “Neil Patrick Harris” (NPH) type ($n = 64$). Neil Patrick Harris is an openly gay actor, singer, and producer, best known for his portrayal of Barney Stinson on the television show *How I Met Your Mother*. He is represented in a 2014 London Fog ad with his husband, an ad that epitomizes the dominant representation of gay men in this intersection (64%) and across all male intersections (54%). NPH characters are stylish and successful, always dressed in a suit or smart trousers and shirt. They are well-groomed, lean, and confident “‘metrosexuals,’ a neologism combining metropolitan and

heterosexual to denote men who are meticulously groomed consumers of fashion” (Gopaldas & DeRoy, 2015, p. 18). NPHs are usually portrayed with their partners, who also always fall into the NPH category, and increasingly in more domestic family situations (e.g., The Huffington Post, 2012; MarketingUp, 2014).

In this intersection, two other representations were found: The Hipster ($n = 9$) and the Bear ($n = 13$). The Hipster is similar to the NPH: a stylish, lean, metrosexual man. However, he sports a more modern, laid-back appearance, with layered clothing such as a crisp T-shirt, flannel shirt or jumper, and skinny jeans (e.g., Banana Republic, 2014). While only sporadically making an appearance before 2014, the hipster portrayal has been gaining popularity, becoming the second-largest type of portrayal of gay men across all intersections ($n = 45$; 21%).

Bears, on the other hand, are markedly different from the previous types. They are “stocky, bearded gay [men] dressed in a traditionally masculine style, wearing perhaps a flannel or denim shirt” (Manley, Levitt, & Mosher 2014, p. 90). They are hirsute and, apart from butch lesbians, the only non-lean representation across all intersections (e.g., AirBnB, 2015). It is notable that Bears only started appearing in 2014 and only in ads showing real middle-aged LGBT characters, usually as part of a fleeting image within a greater diversity of characters. Their inclusion may have been sparked by the emergence of the so-called “lumbersexual” as the male fashion trend in 2014 that closely resembles Bears (Baxter, 2014).

Sample gay male intersections

White, middle-class, young adult gay men (N = 63)

The second most prevalent intersection shows little difference from the dominant one, with the exception of the relative invisibility of the Bear ($n = 3$) and greater balance between NPH ($n = 26$) and Hipster ($n = 27$). Perhaps younger representations are slightly more likely to be portrayed as trendy, laid-back hipsters than their older counterparts (e.g., JCrew, 2011; Matalan, 2015).

African American, middle-class gay men (N = 11)

A finding contrasting previous work (e.g., Bush, Smith, & Martin, 1999; Martinez & Sullivan, 1998) is that African American men are not portrayed as more “brutish” and hypermasculine compared to White men. While they are usually more muscular, the analysis shows that, across all ages, they are also mainly represented by the NPH type ($n = 7$; e.g., Nikon, 2015). This finding is, however, weakened by the near invisibility of African American gay men in general.

Asian, middle-class gay men (N = 11)

Despite the small sample, the NPH type is still dominant among gay Asian portrayals ($n = 5$). Asian gay men are, however, portrayed as decidedly more effeminate than any other ethnicity, and the image of the gay man as fashionista or sissy appear more frequently (50%). Previous literature suggests that homophobia is more prevalent in Asian countries and that Asian gay men are stereotypically perceived as more effeminate in both straight and gay subcultures (Eguchi, 2011; Han, Proctor, & Choi, 2014). Ads published in Asian countries especially used Asian gay men as a humorous element, depicting them as either predators or sissies (e.g., Chewy, 2012). Ads played into what has been termed “sissyphobia” (Bergling, 2001). They construct gay Asian men as overly feminine in masculine power structures (e.g., Eguchi, 2011). Other characters’ outrage and phobia against them is used as a stylistic humorous device, contributing to their continued racial stigmatization. Overall, the use of the stereotype of the hyper-feminine gay man was always coupled with humorous ad content, consistent with previous findings on the occurrence of gender stereotypes only in humorous advertisements (Eisend, Plagemann, & Sollwedel, 2014).

Mature gay men (N = 7)

Across the sample, the invisibility of mature characters is striking. In this intersection, racial and sexual diversity is inexistent. Mature characters exist only in the form of upper- or lower-class, White, gay men. The upper class is represented in the dominant NPH style, conforming to the stereotype of the rich, well-groomed dream consumer. Notably, the only two lower-class mature representations portray its subjects preying on unsuspecting younger men, playing on harmful pedophile stereotypes pervasive in society (e.g., Halford, 2013).

Upper-class gay men (N = 20)

Among the few upper-class male representations there is a notable prevalence of more effeminate characters. The fashionista as a type appears only in upper-class representations and denotes more effeminate men with an interest in designer fashion, a nasal voice, and a penchant for gossip (e.g., WestPac Bank, 2010). This applies equally to the few African American portrayals (e.g., GoDaddy, 2010).

Lesbian portrayals across intersections (N = 111)

Akin to portrayals of gay men, lesbian portrayals do not vary substantially, and there is a trend away from a focus on sexuality and toward a focus of love, relationships, and “mundane normality” depicting lesbians as “just like everyone else” and lesbian love as no different from heterosexual love. They can be divided into four different types: femmes (57%), lipstick lesbians (18%), domestic femmes (10%), and soft butches (15%).

Intersectional femme (N = 62)

The femme clearly emerges as the main lesbian depiction. Femmes adhere to heteronormative ideals of femininity, but they are desexualized compared to lipsticks. They usually dress in smart, form-fitting clothes, wearing light makeup. Most are depicted with shoulder-length hair or occasionally, a pixie crop (e.g., Aetna, 2015), in a committed, loving relationship with another femme (e.g., Virgin Money, 2014), laughing and showing physical affection to each other. The femme is the only portrayal that is represented in nearly every intersection.

Upper-class, young-adult lipstick lesbians (N = 20)

Hyperfeminine, hypersexualized lipstick lesbians are not the dominant type as suggested by previous studies (e.g. Ciasullo, 2001; Gill, 2009; Jenkins, 2005; Wilkinson, 1996). Lipsticks are long-haired, long-legged women, wearing tight, revealing clothes and bold makeup. They are of the upper or middle class, portrayed as unattainable, sophisticated women, uninterested in anything but their female counterpart. They adhere to heteronormative ideals of beauty as part of storylines for the “straight male gaze” (Ciasullo, 2001; Gill, 2009): they first attract male attention to then end up with another lipstick, much to the equal dismay and enjoyment of their male onlookers (e.g., XXL All Sports United, 2012). Over the time period studied, these portrayals have become less pervasive.

Middle-aged, middle-class domestic femmes (N = 11)

Increasing LGBT family portrayals have also led to the emergence of a variation of the femme—the Domestic Femme (DF). Although feminine in appearance, she dons more relaxed, less form-fitting clothes. She is always coupled with another DF, undertaking activities typically conducted by married couples, such as being caring mothers or doing chores in the household (e.g., Tylenol, 2014; Wells Fargo, 2015). Likely due to the connection to motherhood, this type is restricted to middle-aged, middle-class women. Furthermore, they are usually White, apart from one Amtrax ad showing an African American portrayal. Thus younger, non-White, non-feminine lesbian mothers are intersectionally invisible. Compared to their male counterparts, lesbian families are only rarely depicted, suggesting that same-sex families are a White male phenomenon.

Middle-class, young-adult butch lesbians (N = 17)

The soft butch is characterized by a more masculine, dapper appearance and short hair. She usually wears dark clothes, resembling either the male hipster or a more alternative lifestyle, and always appears alongside another soft butch or femme. Soft butches originally appeared in 2013 in the first Indian ad to feature a same-sex couple, and since the end of 2014 as part of eight ads

that show a diverse amalgamation of people in brief instances (e.g., Similac, 2015).

They are described as “soft” given an inherent femininity due to the use of light makeup in all portrayals, despite more masculine clothes and hairstyles. Consequently, no butch portrayals challenged gender notions excessively. While soft butches were represented by all ethnicities apart from Hispanics, they are always depicted as young adults. The absence of older butch portrayals is an indication that “butchness” is seen as a temporary phase a woman may pass through in their youth, which is not likely to last into full adulthood.

Racial diversity among lesbian portrayals

Regarding racial diversity, it is striking that out of 27 non-White lesbian portrayals, 16 were aired in 2015, indicating a possible positive development. No notable variations in the types of portrayals across ethnicities were found.

Bisexual portrayals across intersections

Middle-class, caucasian bisexual men: Middle-aged (N = 2), young adult (N = 6)

Over the past 6 years, bisexual representations in ads have appeared biannually but represent only 2% of all 350 characters during this time. As asserted by previous research, they are solely shown as the promiscuous male, shown flirting or kissing several characters of both sexes, and often also as an adventurous daredevil (e.g., jumping out of planes; Tsai, 2004). A few ads overtly portrayed a character who is cheating on his partner, using bisexuality as a humorous twist (e.g., IKEA, 2010). The latest two ads to feature bisexuality did so in a narrative that maintained a person’s freedom to choose to love whichever gender they preferred, in accordance with the dominant “love is love” narrative in other LGBT-explicit ads (e.g., Lynx, 2015).

Trans portrayals across intersections

Young adult, middle-class, caucasian trans men (N = 4)

Trans men have only started appearing in ads mid-2015 and are restricted to young adult, middle-class, Caucasian portrayals. They were introduced in a HI ad for Hallmark that describes a trans man’s transition journey, a format picked up later by Google (2015) and Airbnb (2015). All cases adhere to the previously described dominant gay male types—NPH and hipster—and show the subjects engaged in stereotypically male activities, such as weight-lifting, fishing, and shaving. Nonetheless, it is noticeable that both Google and

Table 4. Intersectional qualitative analysis of ads' character diversity (N = 350).

	Upper Class			Middle Class			Working Class					
	Mature	Middle Aged	Young Adult	Teen	Mature	Middle Aged	Young Adult	Teen	Mature	Middle Aged	Young Adult	Teen
<i>Gay</i>												
Caucasian	NPH or Predator*	NPH, rarely Sissie or Sissie*	Fashionista or Hipster		NPH * occ. Bear* or Hipster	NPH * occ. Bear* or Hipster	NPH or Hipster*					Predator*
African American		Fashionista or Sissie*			NPH* more Muscular	NPH* more Muscular	NPH occ. Muscular or Hipster					
Asian					Predator or Hipster	Predator or Hipster	NPH occ. Sissie*					
Hispanic							NPH					
<i>Lesbian</i>												
Caucasian		Femme or Lipstick	Lipstick*		Femme* occ. Domestic Femme or Lipstick	Femme* occ. Domestic Femme or Lipstick	Femme rarely Butch or Lipstick	Femme				
African American		Femme, rarely Butch			(Domestic)* Femme	(Domestic)* Femme	Femme or Butch					
Asian					Femme	Femme	Femme occ. Butch or Lipstick (2)					
<i>Bisexual</i>												
Caucasian					Promiscuous	Promiscuous	Promiscuous; Adventurous					
<i>Trans MtF</i>												
Caucasian					Drag Queen*	Drag Queen*	Deceptive					
African American												
Asian												
Hispanic												
<i>Trans FtM</i>												
Caucasian							NPH or Muscles*					

Notes. Intersections with 0% representation are shaded in gray, those with N = 0 representation are shaded in dark gray, and those with 1% representation are in very light gray.

Airbnb included “before-transition” photos and bare-chested images that focused on the breast surgery and muscle build-up.

Middle-aged, middle-class trans women (N = 12)

With regard to trans women, with the exception of two recent ads displaying celebrities Geena Rocero (Marriot, 2014) and Jazz Jennings (CleanandclearUS, 2015), the sole form of representation was that of the drag queen. These are male characters dressed and behaving in an exaggerated female fashion. They usually wear high heels, a short dress, and a wig, alongside copious amounts of makeup. Ads usually portray them as hypersensitive, catty entertainers or pitted against each other in comical storylines (e.g., Starbucks, 2014). Trans women are thus invisible both in absolute and relative terms, due to the lack of representations, as well as their likely association with drag queens by unknowing audiences.

Discussion

Previous research identified a pattern of hypersexualization and ridicule of gay characters in advertising. The foregoing findings clearly identify a shift away from these types of portrayals, likely due to the shift in attitudes toward homosexuality. Two common, recurrent themes run through the majority of LGBT-inclusive ads in the sample: “love is love” as well as “all types of families are wholesome.” As a consequence, advertising has moved toward the depiction of committed relationships. In addition, the use of human interest ads has allowed for the inclusion of more nuanced, diverse, and multidimensional characters. The longitudinal analysis illustrates, however, that the majority of these changes did not occur until late 2014, likely in the wake of landmark changes in legalization surrounding same-sex marriage around the world.

Intersectional invisibility of age, class, and race

A clear advantage of this intersectional analysis of advertising imagery is the possibility to interrogate representations at a multidimensional level that accounts for a number of categories of difference. As Herz and Johansson (2015) emphasized, heteronormativity has yet to be discussed in an intersectional framework. By looking in detail at each individual intersection, a more nuanced picture of the ads under study emerges that allows for criticism at a deeper level.

With regard to race, the near absolute invisibility of Hispanic characters and the lack of racial diversity among minority sexual identities is a cause for concern. Non-White LGBT identities have often been associated with triple oppression: oppression by society in general, by the respective ethnic community, and by the racism of the White LGBT community. For African

Americans this includes the culture of homophobia within their communities (Bush et al., 1999; Martinez & Sullivan, 1998), while Asians face stigmatization resulting from the femininity associated with homosexual men (Han et al., 2014). This latter stereotype was visible in sissified ads from Asian countries and points to lingering homophobia that needs to be addressed.

Conversely, ads published in Western markets applied the dominant Caucasian portrayal types across every racial intersection. The relative similarity of representations used across ethnicities can thus be criticized for furthering assimilation solely into a whitewashed version of Black and Asian LGBT identity, in tune with non-sexuality-focused studies of race in the media. This is cause for concern, given that advertising and the media have been attributed greater socializing effects for ethnic minority groups (Bush et al., 1999). More empirical research into consumer responses to these ads is thus needed to make an informed judgment of whether they chime with the reality of non-White LGBT identities.

In addition, as a benefit over previous studies, the intersectional analysis demonstrates that any portrayal whose appearance and lifestyle does not adhere to the “dream consumer” image remains invisible. Throughout the sample, LGBT identities that challenge traditional notions of gender, such as butch and trans, are used only sporadically. The absence of racial, class- and age-based diversity, as well as non-lean representations, is likely to reinforce the marginalization of non-White, non-lean, working-class, and mature LGBT people.

Older generations who have grown up in less accepting environments are not as likely to be part of an LGBT community and to have dependencies (Cronin & King, 2010). While this may not apply to all, many older LGBTs have been found to be socially isolated due to an internal struggle with their sexuality or gender identity. Positive media portrayals would likely enhance their feelings of self-worth. Instead, they are presented with an apparent gerontophobia within advertising that excludes them from the sexual revolution and provides a harmful dichotomy of mature LGBTs as male, Caucasian, rich, and upper-class or as working-class predators.

For teenagers, who are passing through their formative years and therefore may turn to media representations to explore and to form their identity, advertising offers a similar dilemma (O’Donohoe, 1997). Teens are presented with an adult way of being, focused around domestic relationships and consumption that may not chime with their own experiences, as well as with a monolithic range of LGBT identities that limit the options they see for their self-development. This may cause distress to those who cannot envision a possibility to meet the standards of the appearance and lifestyle set for them. There is thus a need to better understand LGBT teens’ use of advertising and its impact on self-development and identity.

A similar picture is the case for working-class LGBTs. Previous studies have affirmed that they face both material and emotional costs due to the struggle of managing both a “deviant” sexuality and class membership (Taylor, 2009). In addition, LGBT spaces are traditionally “classed,” in terms of location and inaccessibility for those who do not possess sufficient means. The ads in this study not only fail to use representations that reflect this reality, they present a lifestyle that is defined by consumerism and thus largely unattainable for this group. It is thus likely that ads fail to engage this intersection and may even lead to feelings of insufficiency and resentment at the privileged construction of LGBT identities.

Body image and gender identity

The absolute invisibility of non-lean characters, with the exception of a handful of bear and butch characters, raises further concerns about the body image espoused in these ads. Existing studies have ascertained that mainstream gay culture upholds the lean and youthful body as a status symbol (Hutson, 2010). Due to these expectations, gay men and lesbians have been found to be at higher risk of being dissatisfied with their body, of displaying lower self-esteem, and of developing harmful eating disorders (ibid; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005). The perpetuation of only lean and beautiful NPHs, hipsters, and femmes in mainstream ads may add to pressures to conform across all intersections under study and may cause overweight LGBT people to feel doubly marginalized. The absence of non-lean femmes and the use of mostly larger butch women may fuel societal stereotypes of butch women as unattractive and chubbiness as non-feminine. In addition, the prevalence of femmes over butches in advertising might promote intragroup marginalization. While butches face higher levels of societal marginalization, femmes are often oppressed within the LGBT community. They are accused of adopting a heteronormative appearance to “pass” as straight and see their sexuality questioned constantly in both hetero- and homosexual spheres (Levitt & Hiestand, 2005). Hence, current LGBT-specific ads may promote this type of intragroup sentiments and resentment against femmes as inauthentic, capitalistic, and heteronormative, while concurrently hindering the acceptance of butches in society.

The question of inauthenticity also arises when considering existing trans portrayals. The three ads that include FtM characters clearly construct a heteronormative image of maleness, based on muscularity and traditionally male leisure activities. More importantly, however, a definite focus is placed on the transition process to obtain this image. These ads can thus be understood as normalizing trans men and aiding their assimilation into society, but might also be accused of emphasizing trans maleness as artificial.

The use of drag queens over trans women emphasizes the argument that ads espouse trans characters as artificial. In this context, drag performers were recently banned from an anti-commercialist Pride celebration in the United Kingdom, to avoid the trans community feeling offended by acts that were perceived to ridicule gender identity (Harris, 2015). There was a polarized response to this decision, which mimics an ongoing debate among academics. While some scholars assert that drag reinforces the gender binary by appropriating “traditional femininity and institutionalized heterosexuality,” queer theorists such as Butler and Halberstam see it as “a transgressive action that destabilizes gender and sexual categories by making visible the social basis of femininity and masculinity, heterosexuality and homosexuality, and presenting hybrid and minority genders and sexualities” (Taylor & Rupp, 2004, p. 115). While this article is not the place to attempt the resolution of this complex debate, it is clear that advertising not only symbolically annihilates trans women, it conflates them with an identity that represents an entirely different understanding of gender identity and is thus potentially harmful to their self-identity and acceptance within society. This divide is a classic example of the tension between assimilationist and radical viewpoints.

Heteronormativity and non-target market effects

Within the overall sample, however, gay and lesbian portrayals still far outweigh all other representations, making other parts of the LGBT spectrum intersectionally invisible. Gay identity in ads continues to infer “a monolithic identity, rather than a range of possible gay identities based on the interaction of sexual orientation with other group factors (race, class, gender, etc.)” (Martinez & Sullivan, 1998, p. 246). The findings thus further illustrate the ways in which advertising perpetuates certain types of sexualities and gender representations, while others are symbolically annihilated, thus reinforcing a hierarchy of respectability in which only a certain type of heteronormative gayness is accepted (Kates, 1999; Warner, 2000).

Such heteronormative media portrayals have been fiercely criticized and opposed by proponents of the LGBT movement, as it forces individuals to blend in, thereby creating a threat to homosexual lifestyles (Herz & Johansson, 2015). This raises the question of whether the LGBT imagery used currently in mainstream ads really appeals to the LGBT community (e.g., Bhat, Leigh, & Wardlow, 1998) or whether this multicultural advertising strategy creates involuntary non-target market effects for those LGBT consumers who do not adhere to the heteronormative standards set out in it—namely, those who fall into the intersections that remain invisible. Through these ads, advertisers might thus be alienating large parts of the minority group they are portraying, which prompts the question: Whom are advertisers actually trying to appeal to?

In recent years, a number of studies have advocated for research into “multicultural” advertising that aims to simultaneously speak to a number of different

target groups to efficiently address an increasingly multicultural audience (Johnson & Grier, 2011). Existing studies have asserted that homosexual imagery leads to negative effects on heterosexuals' attitude toward and feeling about an ad (Hooten, Noeva, & Hammonds, 2009; Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2004; Oakenfull et al., 2008). Nonetheless, this effect is mediated by individuals' general attitude toward homosexuality (Bhat et al., 1998). Due to social and legal changes in recent years, it is safe to assume that the sentiment "love is love" now reflects the values of large parts of the consumer base where these ads are being aired. In 2015, for example, the Ad Council released a campaign that reflects this ideology titled "Love Has No Labels." Using a simulated X-ray machine, passersby could watch dancing skeletons that were later revealed to be people of different backgrounds. The campaign became "the second most watched social and community activism ad of all time" (Nudd, 2015) and was followed up with a second campaign titled "Love Is Love" at New York Pride.

By using heteronormative imagery of LGBT couples and families, advertisers may thus be creating a commonality and congruency to heterosexual sympathizers' ideologies and values. This value congruency thereby creates a cultural identification intended to moderate the effect of viewers' differences to the portrayed characters (see, for example, Defever, Pandelaere, & Roe, 2011; Johnson & Grier, 2011). This suggests that heterosexuals are the underlying target group of LGBT-explicit ads and further explains the continued absence of bisexual characters who, due to the stigma of promiscuity, might challenge the value of long-term commitment. In addition, such ads might appeal to the growing number of "heteroflexible" consumers, such as straight men who sleep with other men, who, as sociologist Jane Ward (2012) argued, construct their practices not as a threat but a reinforcement of hypermasculine heterosexual ideals.

These ads could thus be interpreted as proof of the instability of the construct of heterosexuality that needs ongoing affirmation to remain in existence (Yep, 2003). In a study of African American media representations, Clark (1993) described a phase of "regulation," during which characters were portrayed in roles that sustain the social order, such as police officers and nurses. Similarly, in times when the status of LGBT individuals—and, indeed, identities in general—is ambivalent and uncertain (e.g., Bauman, 2013), these ads appear to provide a reassurance to non-LGBT audiences that LGBT families and marriages are not a threat to society.

At the same time, however, younger LGBT generations have been described as following more neoliberal politics, a *homonormativity*, in Lisa Duggan's (2003, p. 50) words, "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption." Using homonormativity as a framework thus raises the question of how the ads analyzed in this study may be read by LGBT individuals who are more accepted in society and often live in such heteronormative ways. It may be that the perpetuation of such images ultimately

leads to intragroup stigmatization as their fragile acceptance within society is threatened by those who do not adhere to the norms reflected in the media. This is further amplified by the use of human interest ads that show LGBT consumers who have adopted such a lifestyle and may serve as real-life role models for spectators. Similar to queer theorists' critique of the equal marriage movement, one could thus state that the ads in the sample create a "depoliticised assimilation to heteronormativity and the taking up of a privatised, consumerist, neoliberal "homonormativity" (Weber, 2015).

Conclusion

The study demonstrates the biased and reductionist picture of LGBT identities espoused by traditional segmentation practices. Despite positive developments in terms of the number and form of LGBT-specific mainstream ads, the intersectional analysis highlights the invisibility of the majority of identities within the queer spectrum and the subtle derision of the most vulnerable groups within it. This article thus expands concerns about the assimilationist power of media portrayals and considers its effects on a range of intersections instead of the community as a whole. Contrary to being in the mainstream/respect phase purported by Branchik (2007), we are now in a phase of "reassurance" maintained through a neoliberal homonormativity that upholds a strict hierarchy of accepted queerness under the veil of acceptance of the politically correct slogan "love is love."

Future research needs to take into account the rapidly changing societal landscape and its effect on LGBT individuals' media experience. Scholars might investigate LGBT consumers' attitudes to the types of ad portrayals identified in this study, bringing us closer to a more nuanced understanding of the effects of intersectionality on consumers' ad responses. Scholars may also be interested in researching the use of and responses to human interest ads, as well as their potential in creating deeper attachments with ads' characters. Moreover, a comparison between LGBT portrayals in advertising and general media may further deepen our understanding of LGBT (in-)visibility. Lastly, scholars may want to investigate consumers' attitudes toward portrayals of intersections that remain absolutely invisible, such as intersex or asexual characters, thereby potentially facilitating their assimilation and acceptance in the marketplace.

Note

1. Sexuality and gender identities are complex, dynamic, and contingent, based on constant processes of negotiation. The use of the proper terminology is a highly contested terrain and opinions differ across academia and in practice. In this article the term *LGBT* is used as it encompasses the four categories that ultimately appear in the

analysis. The acknowledgment that LGBT advertising does not encompass the full variety of sexual and gender subjectivities is further critiqued in the discussion section.

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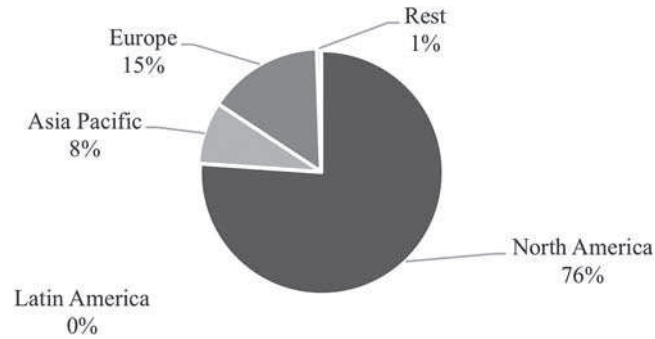
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Appendix 1: Regional Split of Ad Sample 2009 to 2015 (N = 185)



Nvivo Query Data	
US	135
Canada	4
Australia	7
<i>Austria</i>	1
<i>Brazil</i>	1
China	3
Finland	1
France	2
Italy	5
<i>India</i>	2
Malaysia	1
Netherlands	1
<i>Norway</i>	2
Portugal	1
Singapore, Vietnam	1
Spain	1
Sweden	3
<i>Thailand</i>	1
UK	9
UK (excl. Ireland)	2
US/RUSSIA	1
Worldwide	1
North America	140
Asia Pacific	15
Europe	28
Latin America	0
Rest	1
Total	184
Data for Appendix 1	
North America	76%
Asia Pacific	8%
Europe	15%
Latin America	0%
Rest	1%

Appendix 2: Spread of Categories Across Sample (*n* = 185)

Category	Percentage
Retail	15%
Fashion/Apparel	13%
Packaged Foods	13%
Travel incl. Transport	11%
Financial Services	7%
Dot-com	7%
Miscellaneous	4%
Personal Products	4%
Telecommunications	3%
Alcohol/Entertainment	3%
Non-Alcoholic Beverages	3%
Automotive	2%
Pharmaceuticals	2%
Household Products	2%
Restaurants	2%
Insurance	1%
Jewelry	1%
Technology	1%
Telecommunications	1%
Appliances	1%
Cameras/Film	1%
Health Organizations	1%
Home Decor	1%
National Politics	1%
Athletics/Fitness/Sporting Goods	1%

Based on Nvivo