**METAMORPHOSIS: A QUEER NARRATIVE**

**FEATURE-LENGTH SCREENPLAY**

**Master of Arts in Media Studies and Production**

 **Final Graduate Project & Paper**

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A thank you,

To my mother and father, for always loving and supporting me in all of my aspirations, interests, and endeavours.

To my brother and sister, for loving me unconditionally.

To my best friends, from Rochester, to Albany, to Madrid, to Brazil, to Philly.

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Thank you.

**TRIGGER WARNING: SENSITIVE SUBJECT MATTER REGARDING HOMOPHOBIA, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, & SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

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**Introduction**

In 2015, after years of concealing my truth, I had finally come forward with my identity as a gay man. While the act of disclosing my sexuality may seem rather insignificant ten years later, my journey in self-acceptance was not formed solely in the act of “coming out,” but is rather a lifelong process of self-realization molded by critical experiences. While memories of bullying intertwined with homophobia those - like me - who have endured homophobia may still leave emotional scarring, to ponder on those experiences may seem trivial given the advances in LGBTQ+ rights within the past decade. The advent of same-sex marriage, the passage of anti-discrimination laws for housing and employment, and achievements in HIV health equity almost make it unbelievable to some - including me - just how much the LGBTQ+ community has advanced in terms of social progress in the span of two decades. As I progress in life, I find myself astounded at the transformative power of enshrining rights and freedoms for queer people has had on my level of self-acceptance as a gay man.

Nonetheless, disparities in the health and wellbeing of gay men compared to the general population continue to persist (Lampe et. al., 2024). Through a literature review of academic knowledge in the fields of queer psychology, sociology, and history, I contend how negative homophobic attitudes and violence in society at large have inadvertently negatively impacted communities of gay men on both an individual level through adverse psychological and behavioral impacts, alcohol and substance abuse, and negative self-outlook, as well as on an intracommunal level within gay communities through intimate partner violence. Increasing gay representation in film and television and the issues gay men face creates an opportunity to properly address the far-reaching impacts of negative cultural attitudes towards gay men, thereby creating a pathway for healing and social progress. I also wanted to use a creative outlet, like film, to influence behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes towards marginalized groups - in my case, being gay men. Empirical research has demonstrated how different types of film can significantly impact gender and ethnic stereotypes and thus have the potential to change attitudes towards certain groups regarding different issues (Kubrak, 2020). I hope that by sharing an intimate, compelling narrative of a gay man’s struggles, I would be able to challenge implicit homophobic behaviors and instead build towards mutual respect and compassion - both from gay men and their cisgender/heterosexual counterparts.

My final paper explores various conduits of homophobia and its impact on the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ individuals, highlighting intersections of social, psychological, and behavioral outcomes. In the first section, I explore the definition of homophobia, dissecting its institutional manifestations through state and religion, as well as internalized homophobia that manifests in individuals because of societal and cultural pressures. To understand the impact of homophobia during adolescence on the psychological and behavioral development of gay men, we must first establish an understanding of the concept of homophobia itself. The term “*homophobia*” is a blend of the word ***homo****sexual*, and ***phobia***,deriving from theGreek *φόβος*, *phóbos*, meaning "fear", or "aversion." (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2025). While some scholars are divided over the use of the term for its perceived association with individual pathology (Adams et. al., 2007), academics are largely in consensus with “homophobia” referencing a wide-encompassing range of negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards people identified as being part of (or rather being perceived as part of) the LGBTQ+ community. (Ventriglio et. al., 2021).

My paper then transitions into exploring the psychological and behavioral impacts of homophobia, devoting greater attention to heterosexual socialization and adolescence. I then share how frameworks in queer psychology have evolved substantially throughout history, addressing early frameworks in queer psychology from Sigmund Freud, to more recent psychological frameworks like the minority stress model.

Additionally, my paper explores critical issues within queer communities, including the role of alcohol in building queer communities, substance abuse, and the relationship between alcohol and mental health. I also address the intersection between masculine socialization and its impact on queer health and intimate relationship building, devoting greater focus on intimate partner violence, sexual violence among gay men, and the broader consequences of masculine socialization on queer wellbeing. Finally, my research showcases recent works of queer media in the mainstream, considering how contemporary queer media provides greater visibility and representation, and how media portrayals of LGBTQ+ individuals impact societal attitudes and individual identity formation. Throughout these interconnected themes, my paper provides a comprehensive examination of the complex challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in a heteronormative society.

**Defining Homophobia**

To argue the impact of homophobia on both an individual and intracommunal level, I begin my paper by differentiating the types of homophobia – institutional and internalized. My definitions of institutional homophobia oscillate between providing historical examples of political oppression based on sexuality – whether on the extreme end through Nazi Germany, or on the milder end like post-communist Poland - as well as through religious institutions like Catholicism or Islam. While contributing concrete examples to define institutional homophobia felt more straightforward, defining internalized homophobia required abstract examples to fully convey its associated psychological and behavioral outcomes.

**Institutional Homophobia Through State and Religion**

Institutional homophobia from powerful figureheads, political/religious leaders, and/or governing bodies engenders a system of negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards LGBTQ+ individuals. The geopolitical landscape of Europe during the early twentieth century, for example, is marked by a significant backsliding in democratic participation through oppressive, persecutory policies towards LGBTQ+ communities. Nazi Germany, while primarily persecuting Jewish people during the Holocaust, also targeted gay men during the height of rampant, fascist ideology taking stronghold in Europe during World War II (Park, 2018). Branded with a pink triangle to make recognizable the crime of their “subversion,” gay men were between 5,000 and 15,000 of those imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps (Oosterhuis, 1991). Gay men were much more severely persecuted than lesbian women during the Nazi regime, as demonstrated by a significant absence of historical records on the experiences of the latter. As Nazi ideology emphasized national rejuvenation through procreation and traditional family values, homosexual men were thus incompatible in the Nazi quest of achieving a master, “Aryan” race (Oosterhuis, 1991). As Oosterhuis asserts, gay men were at greater risk for persecution than lesbian women because of nationalist and traditionalist ideologies that sought to subjugate women through the dominance of men in the name of population growth; a man who “receives” came in direct conflict with the Nazi’s policies of expansion.

Other research on the treatment of homosexual men in the years *preceding* and *during* the Nazi regime also supports the argument that incompatibility with traditional family values and national rejuvenation resulted in intense persecution towards homosexual men. Jason Crouthamel (2018) described how efforts to impose hegemonic masculine ideals – emotional discipline, self-control, national loyalty exemplified through military service – were often challenged once men accused of such “perverse” acts were caught. Through legislation like Paragraph 175, the Nazi regime prohibited “unnatural” sexual intercourse between two males, later extended to include all types of homosexual, “effeminate” behavior. However, gay World War I veterans, queer writers/activists like Adolf Brand, and even architects of the Nazi regime like Ernst Röhm (who was homosexual himself) had argued against such legislation, conversely arguing that homosexual behaviors rather *embody* hypermasculine ideals espoused by Nazism by emphasizing comradeship. (Crouthamel, 2018). In other words, homoerotic dynamics and “effeminate,” nurturing traits may be an advantage to strengthen emotional bonds and build up the military prowess of a hyper-nationalist society.

Despite such efforts to justify the existence of homosexuality as being able to co-exist with Nazism, the socio-cultural fabric of Nazi Germany saw the rapid oppression of homosexuals and decline of queer rights during Hitler’s reign. Homosexuals who were persecuted and caught on account of “subversive” behaviors frequently justified their “subversion” because of the hardships of the First World War that they had endured – witnessing horrors on the battlefield, being away from family and civilization, and being deprived of sexual experiences for an extended period (Crouthamel, 2018). Homosexuality therefore was seen as a “contagion” that threatened the cohesion of the military might of the Nazis. Homosexuals, construed by the state as being emotionally unstable “predators” that lacked discipline were to be monitored, removed, and in many cases, sent to concentration camps to preserve military morale (Crouthamel, 2018).

Although nowhere nearly as extreme as Nazi Germany, homophobia in post-communist Poland during the 1990s offers an additional perspective on institutional homophobia on disseminating cultural behaviors and attitudes towards gay men. Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union and neighboring communist governments in Central and Eastern Europe during the late 1980s/early 1990s, many Polish people were met with uncertainty over the imminent arrival of new styles of governance (Mole et. al., 2021). The dismantling of communist rule left many questioning how to create new frameworks not only for democratic governance, but for navigating how to create a new *cohesive*, *stable* society. In the context of post-communist Poland, *cohesion* and *stability* were synonymous with *tradition* - a return to Catholic, heterosexual cultural norms and values was embraced by the Polish seeking to make sense of the new restructuring of a country in transition (Mole et. al., 2021).

As mentioned above, religious institutions can also play an impact in disseminating homophobic norms, behaviors, and attitudes. The Catholic Church in Poland was able to establish greater hegemony in the wake of the collapse of state socialism - especially with the national need for political stability - and had actively lobbied post-communist governments in the 1990s to ensure alignment between public policies and Catholic traditions in relation to issues pertaining to sexuality (Mole et. al., 2021). The Catholic Church has been known to promulgate conservative stances towards human sexuality, espousing the sacrament of marriage as a sacred union between a man and a woman blessed by God (Petruzzello, 2018). Additionally, the Catholic Church teaches how acts to entice a sexual response to someone from the same sex violates divine and natural law (Catholic Answers, 2025). While the incumbent Pope Francis has generated media attention for his more liberal stances towards LGBTQ+ individuals, such as supporting civil unions for same-sex individuals as a form of legal protection (Catholic News Agency), the Catholic Church’s approach towards LGBTQ+ issues is one that is complex and wrought with contention even within the Church itself (United Press International, 1982). Apart from Catholic tradition, other religions, like Islam, also have enacted dogma restricting the free expression of human sexuality for LGBTQ+ communities. Ramon A. Gutiérrez (2012), for example, acknowledges that, while Islamic practices and customs vary widely across the globe, historical behaviors and attitudes have skewed more negatively towards homosexuality. Interestingly, early depictions of homoeroticism and pederasty through Islamic poetry and other literary forms emerged during the 8th century CE into the modern era - while early Islamic societies enacted moral laws and codes against homosexuality, they were infrequently invoked (Murray et. al., 1997).

Understanding how humans build social relations by assigning meaning to both material and non-material items is necessary when addressing institutional homophobia and its adverse impacts on those in the gay/queer community. Fuchs (2020) outlined how human individuals are social beings, both producing and being the product of everyday social relations. Everything in society exists as a social relation, whether that be going to work, attending school, or even eating, drinking, or bathing. To better understand our world, humans assign meanings to material things, but also non-material things - *relations, or ideologies*. Human beings, with our hedonistic tendencies, produce social relations through economic processes like work, to attain self-fulfillment and pleasure. These economic processes extend into private life, impacting political and cultural relations through social production (Fuchs, 2020).

Fuchs argues that human beings have the ability to create economic capital through processes of socialization and communication. Structures we have created in the United States derive from Western civilization rooted in Christianity, the English language, and Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage. The ability to construct social relations from our understanding of the cultural structures we have built around us allow others to succeed in a capitalist society; capitalism, according to Fuchs (2020), is a system that is “not just an economic mode of production but a type of society, a societal formation,” in which the nation-state is the “mode of governance and mode of political production, and ideologies such as individualism, racism, nationalism, etc. operate as a mode of legitimation and mode of cultural production” (p. 346). The identity and existence of gay men goes against the cultural relations Western societies have fostered, forcing space in a society that specifically caters to heteronormative cultural relations. Gay men’s potential inability to have children may also result in cultural clashes that go against the structures we have created to bring meaning and understanding to our world. To succeed in a capitalistic system, human labor and capital both assign and create meaning through our socio-cultural relations. Interestingly, the impact of building meaning with both material and non-material items and resulting clashes of homosexuality’s incompatibility with Western cultural values has also inadvertently contributed to internalized homophobia. Understanding our surrounding world relies on creating and assigning meaning, whether through religious, cultural, or political institutions. By enshrining the prohibition of male-male relationships and love in religion, and policing homosexual behaviors through legislation, constant subliminal messaging that subjugates homosexual men as second-class citizens can lead them to view themselves as such on a personal level – leading to internalized homophobia.

**Internalized Homophobia: Homophobia of the Self**

While the previous section establishes the origins and framework of institutional homophobia through state and religious hegemony, internalized homophobia is another category of homophobia that often manifests among those in gay communities globally. While institutional homophobia involves external forces - disseminating widespread, negative cultural attitudes towards gay communities, often through political or religious authorities - internalized homophobia differs in the sense that homosexual individuals *themselves* are the ones espousing negative attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors regarding homosexuality (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). In other words, an “intrapsychic conflict” occurs (Frost & Meyer, 2009). However, external factors play a role in both institutional and internalized homophobia. As previously demonstrated, external factors in institutional homophobia involve the agency of societal structures through laws, policies, and influential figures to perpetuate homophobic norms and practices; external factors in internalized homophobia, in contrast, result in homosexual individuals to ascribe to such norms and practices, often resulting in negative self-esteem, low self-regard, and other related issues (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). In later sections, I will go in greater depth regarding various issues stemming from internalized homophobia on the health and well-being of gay men, including psychological and behavioral development, alcohol/substance use and abuse, as well as intimate partner relationship development.

Research on internalized homophobia is not without its limitations. As Newcomb and Mustanski (2010) highlighted, current scholarship on internalized homophobia is significantly lacking in evaluating impact of variables related to demographics (age, race, ethnicity, gender), contextual differences (e.g., changing cultural attitudes and perceptions over time), and the types of methodology used per study (e.g., measuring and quantifying internalized homophobia along different psychological impacts). As one would imagine, scholarship on internalized homophobia that took place in the late 1990s or early 2000s may differ significantly from contemporary scholarship, as policies like same-sex marriage and the relaxation of restrictions from gay and bisexual blood donors have expanded LGBTQ+ civil rights and liberties, and thus contribute to a climate of greater cultural acceptance towards homosexual individuals. A study published in JAMA Pediatrics, for example, found a correlation between reduced rates of suicide attempts among adolescents who are sexual minorities living among state with same-sex marriage policies (Raifman et. al., 2017).

**The Impact of Homophobia on Psychological and Behavioral Development**

After distinguishing between institutional and internalized homophobia, I elaborate on the latter by expanding on the psychological impacts of homophobia on the individual. By providing an example of an ethnographic study on preschool-aged children to describe how heterosexual socialization during adolescence, whether intentional or not, has resulted in gendered norms and expectations, proposing how divergence from these prescribed norms and expectations (i.e., being homosexual, effeminate as a man) results in social stigmatization and adverse mental health outcomes. Upon establishing a brief synopsis of the history of queer psychology and its evolution from homosexuality being seen as pathological, I share statistical evidence related to queer mental health that supports the arguments set forth by minority stress model theories of psychology.

**Heterosexual Socialization During Adolescence**

According to Musediq (2022), the most formative, developmental years of a child’s life takes place between 0 and 8 years old. However, a 2024 Gallup Panel poll found that while most LGBTQ+ self-identifying adults knew they were LGBTQ+ when they were young, most LGBTQ+ adults - around 57% - come out by the age of 22 (McCarthy & Yi, 2024). Coming to full acceptance with one’s sexuality at 22, after perhaps spending more than a decade concealing one’s identity, leaves a rather wide window of time for adolescents to grapple and struggle with their sexual orientation.

As discussed in the previous section, institutions disseminate negative cultural norms, behaviors, and attitudes towards homosexuality, oftentimes resulting in internalized homophobia. Negative self-esteem is exacerbated when one considers the various factors by which children are socialized - family, friends, school, religion, mass media - that can perpetuate heterosexual norms and values, potentially resulting in feelings of displacement in society. Sociologists and psychologists have coined the term “heteronormativity” where such socialization factors dictate what “normal” sexual behavior is and embed binary gendered roles in human relationships (APA, 2023). We are constantly exposed to heteronormative messaging and behavioral expectations through these agents of socialization. Gansen (2017) examined what she called “gender sexual socialization” by conducting ethnographic data from preschools - during one of the most crucial years of development for a child’s life as previously mentioned. Gansen (2017) found that through interactions between peers and teachers, children were both *learning* and *reproducing* heteronormative cultural norms, attitudes, and behaviors. Young boys at the schools, for example, were questioned about any crushes on girls in school they might have and were seldom scolded for showing their private parts. While girls were also playfully engaged in “crush” talks that reinforced heteronormative societal expectations of relationships, girls were often reprimanded and disciplined for showing their private parts. During play time, girls are given dolls, while boys are given action figures or toy trucks - the results of cognitive socialization of how we expect girls versus boys to play and act.

Additionally, teachers - through facilitative, restrictive, disruptive, and passive approaches - inadvertently prescribe a gendered social structure/hierarchy, in which boys and girls not only construct and perform their own identities of what is “masculine” and “feminine,” but also mold their *own* meanings and values we place on male versus female sexuality, and how such performances of behaviors may be status rewarding or status lowering depending on not only if gendered performances fell within heteronormative social norms and expectations, but depending on the approaches teachers took to set expectations of socially acceptable versus unacceptable behaviors. Gansen (2017) underlines the importance of including conversations and lessons on consent and fostering relationships based on safety and respect in early adolescent classroom settings. Lamentably, Gansen’s work additionally accentuates the complications that arise with mandating prescribed gender norms and roles on children who are already endowed with heightened impressionability in such a developmental stage in their lives. Although progress has been made in homosexual civil rights and liberties, school districts across the country continue to be contested on how to teach sensitive subjects on gender and sexuality appropriately to children. While school topics discussing topics like African American or women’s history have been taught in curriculum for a longer time, LGBTQ+ history and subject matter has only recently entered the public sphere, at times with harsh resistance in the form of both parents and state legislation (Najarro, 2021). Additionally, the United States is home to a vast wealth of ethnic and religious diversity, whose customs and beliefs on queerness may come into conflict with districts wishing to implement LGBTQ+-related curriculum points to foster understanding and empathy for questioning children. Ethnographic research comparing school environments and acceptance towards LGBTQ+ individuals – between school districts that have versus have not implemented LGBTQ+-related curriculum – should be conducted to understand the potential differences stemming from pedagogical tactics. This may also serve the added benefit of understanding – among districts that did implement such curriculum that reported higher levels of LGBTQ+ acceptance, of what types of curriculum content was taught that may be replicated among other districts. Developing an understanding of LGBTQ+ history and psychology - how homosexuality evolved from being seen as a pathology to the development of psychological theories addressing the negative mental health outcomes associated with homophobia – will be crucial when creating an empathy-centered approach for adolescent educational curriculum.

**Evolutions in the Field of Queer Psychology: From Freud to the Minority Stress Model**

Only in recent decades has further research been dedicated to understanding the psychology of those identifying as members of the LGBTQ+ community. As mentioned previously, institutional and internalized homophobia generates negative cultural norms, behaviors, and attitudes towards gay men; such negative cultural attitudes have also impacted the field of mental health care for such communities. The Stonewall riots of 1969 accelerated the gay rights movement, resulting in greater attention and diversion of resources and support to the LGBTQ+ community (Landers & Kapadia, 2019). Mental health resources for LGBTQ+ communities were limited because queerness was historically perceived as a psychopathology; it was in 1973 that American Psychology Association members voted in favor of the APA Board of Trustees’ decision to remove the diagnosis of “homosexuality” as a pathology in its second edition of its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) (Drescher, 2015). Prior to the removal of homosexuality as a mental illness or disorder, limited research challenging the psychoanalytic definitions of “pathological” homosexuality existed.

It should be noted that, while it is true that there were gaps in research that challenged perceptions of homosexuality being a pathology, there were academics and scientists that nonetheless attempted to transform human understanding of sexuality. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, is credited for developing alternative theories to homosexuality through numerous published works. In an article that explores Freud’s writings, Flanders et. al. (2016) assess Freud’s evolution in his approach towards homosexuality. In contrast to previous research that connected homosexuality to pathology, Flanders et. al. (2016) highlighted how Freud’s hypothesis differed drastically from the precedents set at the time, arguing that humans are born with innate bisexual tendencies, purporting that bisexuality is intrinsic to the development of the sexual identity of the individual. While Freud claims that the development of homosexuality is attributed to “arrested” psychosexual development, Flanders et. al. (2016) noted how Freud’s psychoanalysis of homosexuality was remarkably progressive considering at the time psychological research into homosexuality was lacking, stating that homosexuality is not intrinsically shameful, vice-filled, degrading, and cannot be classified as a pathology.

To explain homosexual behavior, Freud introduced the concepts of misplaced desires and identifications on objects; according to Freud, homosexuality derives from various factors including (but not limited to) attachment and identification with the mother and narcissistic self-obsession by choosing an object that resembles the homosexual individual (Crockatt, 2006). While Sigmund Freud established significant foundations in the field of psychoanalysis, current understandings of homosexual psychology have evolved significantly in a way that the theories that Freud had postulated have become incompatible with our current understandings of LGBTQ+ psychology. Freud’s theories broadly assumed in part that homosexual behavior from men derive from sexual desires towards their mother, a generalization that is false and may potentially serve to demonize homosexual individuals. To further elaborate, Freud’s assumptions portray gay men as sexually “deviant” may risk the safety and livelihood of individuals identifying as such considering the rise of homophobic conspiracies like the groomer theory that posits LGBTQ+ people as “pedophiles” that “groom” children to abuse them (Cassisa, 2023). Additionally, while contemporary definitions of narcissism have evolved significantly from those proposed by Freud, understanding narcissism as a potential manifestation of homophobia, rather than as a contributing factor to homosexuality, may be useful in establishing a paradigm for homosexual psychological analysis.

With the advent of gay rights movements spurred by the Stonewall riots, and the evolution of psychological approaches towards queer health, new theories began to develop to not pathologize homosexuality but understand the impact of homosexuality on an individual level because of homophobic cultural attitudes and behaviors. In 2003, an American psychiatric epidemiologist named Ilan H. Meyer advanced the field of LGBTQ+ health by offering a model to understand how LGBTQ+ health is impacted through environmental/social stressors or pressures: the minority stress model. Stress, in this context, differs from general stresses that individuals may experience in life due to varying circumstances (i.e. running late to an appointment, studying for an incoming exam). Minority stress specifically relates to the experience of stress rooted in prejudice and stigma (Frost & Meyer, 2023). Prejudice and stigma, in the context of gender identity and/or sexual orientation, may take the form of discriminatory policies/laws, falling victim to gender-based violence rooted in prejudice, experiencing workplace harassment, or even facing minor microaggressions that take place on a frequent basis. While some LGBTQ+ individuals may choose to conceal their identity to prevent or limit such instances of discrimination and stigma, this decision may also prevent these individuals from connecting with and receiving support from those with similar experiences and circumstances.

Contemporary statistics further support the theory Meyer had developed over two decades prior. A 2023 United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) report demonstrated how sexual minority males were at least twice as likely as straight males to have had any mental illness in the past year. Additionally, serious mental illnesses were twice as prevalent among gay men versus straight men, while being three times more prevalent among bisexual men. Statistics that demonstrate disparities along lines of mental health in MSM (males who have sex with males) communities provide evidence of the impact outside environmental stressors play on internalizing stigmatization from being perceived as homosexual; in another finding, sexual minority men were found to be two to three times more likely to experience a major depressive episode than straight males (SAMHSA, 2023). Experiencing mental health concerns from negative cultural attitudes on homosexuality can severely impact one’s self-esteem and self-worth, which can eventually develop into internalized homophobia. Additionally, mental health concerns can negatively impact one’s performance in academic or work settings, and additionally impact interpersonal relationships with family, friends, and romantic interests (SAMHSA, 2023).

Although LGBTQ+ psychoanalysis has gained advancements since Sigmund Freud’s theories concerning homosexuality deriving from narcissistic self-obsession, recent research has alluded to a relationship between young male homosexuals and personality disorders that include narcissistic personality disorder. Narcissistic personality disorder belongs to a broader group of personality disorders known as group or cluster B personality disorders, characterized by consistent, dysfunctional patterns marked by dramatic, overly emotional, or erratic thought processes, behaviors, and/or actions (Mayo Clinic, 2023). In a 2022 cross-sectional study with 133 participants, Amir M. Rahnejat et. al. found that among young homosexual men, 39.1% had cluster B personality type disorders - the most common being histrionic followed by narcissistic. Although the research did not find any significant differences within the cluster B personality group along various factors (e.g., age, frequency of sexual encounters, history of sexual abuse, sex position, education, employment, etc.), the authors alluded to being the first to report the prevalence of cluster B personality disorders among a population of young gay men. Therefore, Sigmund Freud’s theories related to homosexuality and narcissism may be reconstructed to better fit modern understandings of human sexuality. In this case, developing narcissistic personality traits is a *potential result* of homophobic culture creating social stresses on sexual minorities, not *a cause* of homosexuality itself as Freud had suggested. To strengthen the study findings to support the theory that minority stress in homosexual men can lead to long-term psychological/behavioral problems - in this case, cluster B personality disorders - multiple studies should be conducted that uses larger sample sizes and controlling for factors like age, educational level, and ethnicity. Finding intricacies among these factors may help foster an understanding of cultural levels of acceptance towards queerness across different demographic groups, allowing to develop tailored responses through advocacy and education. This may also serve the purpose of drawing connections between certain risk factors for cluster B personality disorders among young gay men, providing an opportunity to develop proper treatment and care.

**LGBTQ+ People and Substance Abuse**

From the research established in previous sections regarding the different forms of homophobia (institutional, internalized), it is apparent that institutional homophobia through political, educational, and religious institutions have inadvertently resulted in negative self-perceptions among gay individuals: internalized homophobia. Although significant advancements have been made in the field of queer psychology and mental health care, gay communities continue to suffer from negative mental and behavioral health due to stigma, discrimination, and other factors stemming from institutional and internalized homophobia. In this section, I expand on resulting issue of substance abuse (i.e., alcoholism, methamphetamine use) due to homophobia, arguing how substances have both emerged as a force to unify gay men by creating safe, reserved spaces for visibility (i.e., gay bars), while also harming individuals by means of addition and adverse physical/psychological impacts.

**Building Queer Spaces: Gay Bars and Villages**

To discuss the impact of homophobia on the prevalence of alcohol among gay communities, one must take into consideration the ways in which LGBTQ+ communities create community and perpetuate culture amongst themselves - a major factor being through incorporating gay bars into community structures. Gay bars and nightclubs have taken part in creating a social ecosystem for LGBTQ+ communities, often existing within (or nearby) gay neighborhoods/villages where LGBTQ+ have collected (Hanhardt, 2020). By serving various functions outside of entertainment/nightlife - including making friends, gathering for social/networking events, political activism, and dating - gay bars and nightclubs have demonstrated their historic value in strengthening the meaning LGBTQ+ communities place among the gay enclaves. Apart from the opportunities for creating social relationships, gay bars are recognized for providing a continuous safe space for those fleeing from ostracization and bigotry (Branton, 2021).

However, much of the scholarship available has critiqued both gay bars and gay enclaves for reasons related to social stratification. Social researchers have challenged the discriminatory attitudes and behaviors some have observed in gay establishments, specifically in terms of racism and elitism (Israelstam & Lambert, 1989). In terms of sexism, men have historically and continue to possess greater dominance over the public sphere, given the prevalence of gay entertainment spaces over establishments that specifically cater to lesbians, femmes, and other women-identifying community members (Hanhardt et. al., 2020). Male-dominance over queer spaces may also be attributed to the fact that men have had greater financial access to the public sphere through their labor, as well as independence from domestic obligations that were socially assigned to women.

By extension, gay enclaves (i.e., “gayborhoods,” gay villages) have also received similar critiques regarding social stratification - albeit on a wider, geographical level. Some authors have flagged gay enclaves, alleging that “gayborhoods” and gay villages accelerate processes of gentrification that displace economically and racially marginalized communities across different cities (Moskowitz, 2017). The subject of gay spaces (including gay bars) and their impact on pre-existing communities is one wrought with contention and debate. Although gayborhoods and gay bars may represent safety, community, and positive associations that generate affirming existences for a community that is marginalized, residents are often left with frustration and dismay for the future of their communities. More studies should be conducted on the possible correlation with expressions of homophobic attitudes and behaviors as they relate to evolving demographic landscapes such as the queer gentrification of neighborhoods/establishments and subsequent feelings of resentment from displaced community members.

**Alcohol Abuse in Gay Communities: The Correlation of Substance Use and Mental Health**

Mark Gaspar et. al. (2022) explores the intersection of substance use and mental health among sexual minority men, providing anecdotes of the experiences and perspectives of these men to shed light on the biopolitical factors that contribute to their substance use and subsequent mental health challenges. The authors argued that societal norms and expectations placed on gay men play a significant role in shaping their substance use patterns. Additionally, lifestyle choices and the desire to engage in party culture, often involving alcohol and drug use, may significantly impact gay men’s decision making with substances. The authors also explored how substances may offer alternatives when dealing with intense emotions, such as stress or even comfortably dealing with exploring their sexual desires. As a result, this behavior becomes normalized within the community and may lead to increased substance dependence and subsequent mental health issues. The Alcohol Rehab Guide (2024) points to how gay bars were the only places where LGBTQ+ individuals could openly discuss their sexualities in a safe setting for decades, normalizing settings for alcohol abuse. As a result, up to 25% of the general LGBTQ+ community has moderate alcohol dependency, compared to 5-10% of the general population.

Further scholarship has highlighted the cultural aspects behind drinking in heterosexual cultures versus homosexual cultures. As LGBTQ+ individuals are less likely to become parents and therefore may have more time with less parental responsibilities to immerse themselves in gay bar culture (Emslie et. al., 2017). Gay cultures may place an emphasis on using drinking as an integral part of social events, thus exacerbating alcohol-related issues for those impacted in the community. Unique stresses experienced in homosexual relationships due to mainstream cultural norms have additionally resulted in excessive alcohol use, such as concerns with age and appearance, and the stresses navigating provider-provider relationship dynamics as opposed to provider-nurturer dynamics in heterosexual relationships (Israelstam & Lambert, 1989).

**Meth in the Gay Community**

 In a similar vein, methamphetamine has also drawn influence over gay communities, often becoming a significant health issue intersecting with other health concerns like HIV/AIDS, STIs/STDs, and adverse mental and physical health impacts. Methamphetamine - also known as meth, “T,” and “tina” - is a synthetic stimulant that is highly addictive; its short-term effects typically encompass feelings of euphoria, increased alertness and energy, paranoia, and irregular heart rates, while long-term use may result in insomnia, memory loss, and the development of substance use disorder (NIDA, 2024). Studies have reported how meth is often used in social circumstances - i.e., through bars, clubs, social settings at home - at times unbeknownst to individuals trying the substance under the belief that it was another substance (such as cocaine) (Parsons et. al., 2007). Some gay men have also reported enhanced productivity or confidence while under the influence of the drug, contrasting with aftereffects like fatigue, or an “intense comedown.” Moreso, however, gay men have also reported using meth to enhance sexual encounters. This can potentially result in increased risk behavior due to the lowering of inhibitions and awareness; as a result, problematic meth usage may exacerbate concerns such as increased risk of HIV/STDs from risky sexual behaviors, as well as intensifying already existing mental health conditions like depression. result in other health issues such as increased risk of HIV (Saltman et. al., 2008). Community intervention methods incorporating multifaceted, empathetic approaches must be incorporated when addressing the growing issue of meth within the gay community.

**Masculine Socialization of Gay Men and Resulting Intimate Partner Violence**

The previous sections of my paper discussed the impact of homophobia primarily on an individual level through negative psychological and behavioral manifestations, as well as the through the resulting consequences of substance abuse by means of alcohol and meth addictions. While I had previously introduced the concept of how establishing social conduct for gendered norms and behaviors through adolescent heterosexualization often results in negative behavioral outputs and low self-worth/esteem, the following discussions evaluate how the promulgation of masculinity in societal norms, values, and behaviors can also impact queer health on an *interpersonal* level, primarily discussing the disparity of sexual violence among gay, intimate relationships.

**Masculine Socialization and its Adverse Impacts on Queer Health**

As previous sections of my paper established, various factors contribute to negative health outcomes in gay men. Religious institutions may promulgate conservative and traditionalist societal norms placing emphasis on heterosexual relationships, with the family serving as the foundation. Political institutions may enact policies and laws curtailing civil rights and liberties for gay men. In turn, the combination of institutionalized homophobia results in negative cultural attitudes towards gay men that can produce internalized homophobia, its ramification expressed through negative health behaviors (i.e., substance/alcohol abuse) indicating minority stress. While I had discussed how heterosexualization in early adolescence through schooling cultivates implicit beliefs and attitudes about how gender and sexuality should be *performed*, in addition to prescribing a gendered social hierarchy, further considerations should be given to how masculine ideals and associations can impact how gay men perceive gender roles within their communities.

 One qualitative research study explores how traditional masculinity resulted in adverse outcomes for gay males in terms of self-image and romantic relationship building. Sánchez et. al. (2009) collected online written responses from 547 self-identified gay men, revealing pressures to conform to traditional masculine ideals. The study highlighted how traditional masculine tenets that engrain attributes such as success, power, status, and competition into masculinity. While some participants of the study did relay certain benefits to adhering to masculine ideals, such as promoting physical fitness and athleticism (Sánchez et. al., 2009), several negative impacts were highlighted. Emotional suppression was accentuated as a major negative impact; not only did gay men express concerns with emotional restriction to achieve a “masculine” image of fitness, resulting in low self-image at times, emotional suppression also impacted gay men's relationships with romantic partners. This underlines how restricting emotions resulted in challenges with open expression and communication (Sánchez et. al., 2009).

Furthermore, masculine ideals of being physically attractive and exerting sexual dominance/aggression have resulted in negative ramifications on relationship building among gay men - gay men are often left feeling distressed or with lowered self-worth due to greater emphasis being placed on being attractive or using sex in exchange for intimacy with romantic partners (Sánchez et. al., 2009). By socializing men to believe that masculinity is incompatible with emotional vulnerability, gay men can find it increasingly difficult to build concrete relationships built on trust and intimacy. This can also negatively impact perceptions towards gay men; while progress in LGBTQ+ rights and liberties have gained significant momentum since the study by Sánchez et. al. (2009), traditionalist cultural values placing emphasis on the family and monogamous forms of love still permeate cultural institutions and therefore can create negative perceptions towards gay men who are unable to build intimate relationships with a partner. Homophobia both impedes and *is a result of* the way gay men build romantic relationships.

**Sexual Violence Among Gay Men**

Gay men experience higher rates of some form of sexual violence when compared to heterosexual men - a harrowing statistic reveals how four in ten gay men have experienced sexual violence other than rape in their lifetime (CDC, 2010). McGregor (2023) outlines how domestic violence/abuse (DVA) patterns manifests in LGBTQ+ communities, the current body of research surrounding DVA in both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ communities, the various manifestations of DVA in LGBTQ+ relationships, the wide range of impacts resulting from DVA in LGBTQ+ communities (such as social, psychological, and economic), risk and protective factors, as well as the implications for further research.

McGregor (2023) addresses a body of knowledge from feminist qualitative researchers conceding that DVA is based on a power dynamic of conflict, rather than control, manifested through patterns of behavior rather than isolated occurrences. However, McGregor highlights that current research on DVA is based on frameworks applied to cisgender, heterosexual couples, and thus does not accurately represent DVA within LGBTQ+ relationship dynamics, often resulting in various myths on the subject. These misconceptions and myths, as McGregor explains, have harmful implications and consequences for the LGBTQ+ community. When forcing instances of DVA into a heteronormative binary and generalizing situational instances of DVA, LGBTQ+ individuals may find it increasingly difficult to seek help in addressing their own instances of DVA. Attempting to meticulously describe their instances as DVA may be difficult, as heteronormative bodies of research and media depictions of DVA may create a rigid depiction of *what* and *how* DVA should look like, thereby discouraging LGBTQ+ individuals from reporting DVA or seeking help on the basis that their own lived experiences may not fit the standard description of DVA (McGregor, 2023).

 Additionally, reporting instances of DVA may be difficult when overlapped with pre-existing institutional stigmas rooted in homophobia, queerphobia, and transphobia. DVA may assume various forms, such as physical abuse (slapping, punching), sexual abuse (non-consensual touching, stealthing, rape), and psychological abuse (outing, closeting, manipulation and control tactics) (McGregor, 2023). Across all research McGregor explored, LGBTQ+ communities reported greater rates of DVA than their heterosexual counterparts, and therefore at greater risk. However, despite a clear explanation, discrepancies of DVA across different sub-communities within the broader LGBTQ+ community, research suggesting that older (55 years+) and younger (16–25 years) LGBTQ+ people were most likely to report victimization (McGregor, 2023). Additionally, queer respondents reported greater rates of DVA perpetration, while younger respondents reported high rates of behaviors of physically and sexually abusive nature.

Although alcohol was previously explored in my paper as it relates to often being the foundation relationships and communities in gay/queer communities through social events and drinking establishments like gay bars, the use of alcohol in sexual assault is also cause of concern. Studies have shown that alcohol can result in powerful inhibitions and even aggressive behavior, often used as an excuse for “socially unacceptable behavior,” resulting in challenges when attempts to gain justice for victims of sexual assault are made (Abbey et. al., 2001). Studies that focus among gay and bisexual men found that 67% had reported having experienced being a victim of sexual assault, with 67% of such assaults involving alcohol (Gilmore et. al., 2022). The engraining of homophobic cultural attitudes by means of religious and political institutions, the dissemination of masculine societal expectations, the concealment of one’s sexuality as means of self-protection and self-preservation, and the use of alcohol to both build and harm gay communities are all factors that contribute to a darker form of violence: the cultural promulgation of sexual violence. In other words, enshrining heteronormative attitudes and norms normalizes DVA among the broader population due to predisposed attitudes regarding gender and sexuality in what is known as rape culture (Olfman, 2009). Rape is a societal issue on a global scale, shattering boundaries along lines of language, geography, age, and ethnicity. Rape continues to plague the mental and emotional wellbeing/cohesion of those impacted by such acts across society, with significant disparities when accounting for LGBTQ+ communities. The Pennsylvania Coalition to Advance Respect, a non-profit focusing on ending sexual violence and advocating for all sexual assault victims, shares informational resources and statistics for LGBTQ+ community members who have been affected by sexual violence:

*“We know through research, through our experience, and through our work that significant percentages of people in LGBTQ communities are sexually violated at some point in their lives. Adolescents in LGBTQ communities are more likely to experience sexual harassment than their straight peers (Farris et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2014), and research finds that almost half of transgender adults are sexually abused or assaulted during their lives (James et al., 2016). Research also shows that over 29% of lesbian or bisexual girls and over 25% of gay or bisexual boys experienced rape (Lindley & Walsemann, 2015). Know that you are not alone and there are resources available to you.”*

The statistics provided above, as well as the bodies of academic research explored earlier in this section, exemplify the current gaps that exist in bridging disparities in queer-related traumas that stem from sexual violence. To properly address the concerns of homosexual men at risk of sexual violence, the cultural framework that has *resulted* in the subjugation of homosexual men must be addressed. By introducing the idea of gay men as having been conditioned to be at a heightened level of vulnerability that facilitates sexual exploitation and abuse, we can challenge the socio-cultural frameworks justifying abuse that prevent the achievement of progress in the space. Additionally, given the prevalence of sexual violence among gay men, publishing such stories at greater frequency across various media like television and film is warranted. Raising awareness for such a common, but often unspoken issue will allow for critical debate in the public sphere on the unintended consequences of homophobic cultural fabrics.

**Contemporary Queer Media, and the Impact on Queer Visibility and Representation**

The first section of my paper built an educational foundation on gay men and the resulting impacts of homophobia, first defining homophobia by its two forms (institutional versus internalized), and outlining the impacts of establishing heterosexual norms and values on lowered self-outlook and perception among homosexual adolescents. The delineation of heteronormativity and masculine socialization - and by extension homophobic attitudes towards those identifying themselves as gay - results in adversities and challenges through negative psychological health and wellbeing, alcoholism and meth use, and higher outcomes of domestic and sexual violence among same-sex male couples. As I had mentioned earlier, film can be used as a conduit to create salience for the adversities faced by homosexual men by spotlighting issues and challenges that may go unaddressed in the broader mainstream media and news environment. The latter part of my paper, therefore, highlights both representation of gay/LGBTQ+ stories in television media, as well as a reflection of my own experiences in creating queer-centered media. As there are significant disparities instances of sexual violence among gay men and especially considering the taboo towards male victims of sexual violence, I wanted to devote particular attention to such challenges.

The latter part of my paper focuses on analyzing representations of sexual violence and LGBTQ+ themes from two TV shows – *Baby Reindeer* and *Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story*. In addition to providing a content analysis, I draw parallels from the research that was previously established to justify using the media as inspiration for crafting my film. Afterwards, I discuss the processes involved with production, including defining the target audience, scriptwriting, the design strategy, the casting and filming process, developing a budget and grant application materials, and creating promotional materials. As *Baby Reindeer* and *Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story* addresses sensitive subjects related to sexual violence, **a trigger warning is provided here**.

**Combatting Sexual Violence Among Gay Men Through Storytelling**

Recently, societal attitudes and behaviors regarding rape culture have been challenged and brought up for debate in public discourse. Netflix, for example, has been on the forefront of producing content that sparks a broader public discourse in online spaces like X and Reddit. *Baby Reindeer* is one show spotlighting sexual abuse and assault among LGBTQ+ men. We become acquainted with Donny Dunn - a Scot-turned-Londoner, aspiring comedian, and bartender who gains the attention (or rather, attraction) of a customer - Martha who becomes obsessed with Donny through her everyday visits to the pub. Eventually, Martha’s engagements with Donny turn dark, beginning begins to stalk, harass, and threaten Donny. During a rant at one of his sets, we gain a rather intimate understanding of why Donny was so attached to feeding into this toxic, unhealthy relationship with Martha, the audience learning of his drug-induced assault with a TV writer/mentor Darrien O’Connor:

**CONTENT WARNING: HOMOPHOBIC LANGUAGE, SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

*“Because fame encompasses judgment, right? And I.. I feared judgment my entire life. That’s why I wanted fame, because when you’re famous, people see you as that. [est] They’re not thinking all the other things that I’m scared they’re thinking like, that guy’s a loser or a drip or a fucking faggot. They’re thinking it’s the guy from the thing. It’s the funny guy. [redacted] It’s not long before I'm round his house taking boatloads of drugs every single weekend. And isn't getting groomed magical? Before you realize you're actually getting groomed. [redacted] and you know it’s wrong, deep down, what he’s making you do. But you just keep going back. And you start to think, is my self-respect so fucking low, is my lust for success so fucking high, that I will repeatedly go back to this man’s house and let him abuse me for a little peep at fame?” (Donny, Baby Reindeer, Episode 6)*

Donny inadvertently encapsulates in 10-minute dialogue the impact of homophobia growing up as a bisexual man on self-acceptance and realization, alluding to his dreams and aspirations of being able to emerge and succeed in comedy and entertainment being hindered by fear of rejection and harassment - in which Donny’s opponents may use his sexuality as a source of ridicule. Homophobia, rooted in shame, inhibits Donny’s ability to perform to his greatest potential, inadvertently damaging his self-worth and confidence. The stress of being a minority on the sexual spectrum prompted Donny to seek out drugs and alcohol, limiting his inhibitions and creating a temporary relief from the stresses of everyday homophobic attitudes, while also serving as a gateway for success through his creative “sessions” with Darrien that ultimately led to his assault.

Donny’s emotional breakdown during this scene was raw and vulnerable, leaving the audience at his comedy set stunned and visibly uncomfortable. Donny encapsulated with such detail how the mental health of queer males is trivialized and diminished through the stigmatization of homosexuality. Not only does the dissemination of homophobic and hypermasculine cultural attitudes impact his ability to live authentically, Donny’s compacted trauma seemed to have resulted in his overcompensation with wanting to please others – at great personal expense of his physical, mental, and emotional health. Furthermore, the prescribing of heterosexual norms upon Donny conflicted with his attempts to shut down Martha’s romantic and sexual advances, as Donny’s coworkers seldom took the threat of Martha seriously. Donny’s vulnerability in *Baby Reindeer* has provided inspiration for my own film. I find my main character – Theo – to be like Donny in the sense that Theo also tends to overcompensate the trauma of homophobia through his desire to please others, and like Donny, sacrifices his personal boundaries and wellbeing in his personal journey of developing self-worth. The alcohol and substance abuse provided additional content inspiration for my film; alcohol and drugs in *Baby Reindeer* were used to not only lower inhibitions and make the characters more comfortable with one another but were also used as a conduit to take advantage and assume control – a power dynamic that I explore in my film.

Following *Baby Reindeer*, Netflix has continued the recent trend of highlighting stories of sexual abuse afflicting males through its recent release of *Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story*. A dramatization based on the 1989 murders of José and Kitty Menendez by their two sons Lyle and Erik, Ryan Murphy intertwines multiple perspectives leading up and following the murders by incorporating the Rashomon effect. José Menendez, originating from Cuba, built a life of power and wealth in the entertainment industry as an executive at RCA Records and as CEO at Live Entertainment, portrayed as ambitious and controlling. As the show progresses, the audience learns of the extensive physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that occurred at the hand of José, with Lyle and Erik pleading in court that they had killed their parents in an act of self-defense.

 The culture surrounding sexual violence created an extensive challenge to convince the jury to decide in the Menendez brothers’ favor. The prosecution had undermined the boys’ claims of sexual abuse, arguing that neither Erik nor Lyle mentioned ongoing sexual abuse at the hands of their father to their psychologist, Jerome Oziel, had tendencies to lie or distort the truth, and were motivated by their father’s vast wealth and unrealistic expectations for perfection to commit the act. However, the cultural perceptions towards males suffering from sexual assault had serious implications for the trial outcomes; in the second trial that took place (1995-1996), prosecutor David Conn challenged Erik’s allegations of sexual abuse, claiming that Erik at 18 had the physical and financial means to leave his parents (Pergament, 2012). This argument fails to address the psychological impacts of sexual abuse and the power dynamics between someone like José Menendez, who is portrayed on the show (and retrospectively described) as aggressive and controlling, and Erik/Lyle Menendez. Additionally, pointing to Erik’s perceived inaction at leaving his family home not only robs Erik of his agency, but simultaneously places a partial burden of the crime of abuse on him, rather than on his father.

While the audience is immersed in an intense, Los Angeles courtroom filled with high emotions, we receive an in depth look at Erik’s psyche in *Episode 5: The Hurt Man*, as he opens to his defense attorney, Leslie Abramson, on the extent of the abuse from his father. Erik shared how he perceived how José favored and loved Lyle over him, developing a distorted sense of love by which José’s acts of sexual abuse and violence appeared to be authentic expressions of love. *The Hurt Man* was particularly unique when compared to the broader season, as the entire episode features one frame focused on Erik, progressively zooming in to his face as Erik recounts the childhood abuse to his attorney. The format of an intimate, one-on-one discussion influenced my creative process and decisions for my film.

Additionally, this episode and filming style provided immense inspiration for my film because it allowed Erik to be authentic and uninhibited in his truth. Although Erik Menendez is not gay, his father would use homophobic slurs such as “faggot” to demean his son and instill a sense of submission and vulnerability. However, Erik had revealed engaging in a romantic, intimate relationship with a boy – blaming questioning his sexuality from his father’s abuse. This highlights previously established research that suggests homophobia often causes those in struggle to deflect accusations to their sexuality to evade stigmatization. Additionally, homophobia in culture and society conditions those who identify as gay to be view themselves with low self-worth; as Erik described in the episode, this often led to him overcompensate in his academic or athletic capabilities to win his father’s love and affection. As the episode progresses, Erik visually becomes increasingly inward and uncomfortable with sharing his trauma, finally shedding a singular tear at the end. This moment was particularly powerful – one may interpret the tear as the final release of years of compounded trauma. Being able to convey such powerful emotions in a subtle manner through close-up shots is something I aspire to incorporate in the filming process for my film. The themes of masculine socialization as tied to sexual violence were also reflected in *The Hurt Man*; Erik had shared how his father had justified the sexual abuse to “toughen” Erik and turn him into a “real man.” In this scenario, masculine identity is interwoven with sexual prowess, and those who are not able to meet the demands of those perpetuating the violence becoming construed as “weak” and not fulfilling cultural expectations of *what* a man is.

 While streaming platforms and film production companies continue to increase queer visibility and shine light to the issues of sexual violence among queer communities, mixed public response *Monsters* has demonstrated the need for a humanist approach when crafting and telling such delicate human-interest stories.

**Production: Applying Research and Existing Media to My**

**Queer, Feature-Length Narrative Film Script**

My Master’s project is a collection of a 60-page dramatic screenplay. Throughout the film’s duration, Theo, the main character, meets with his therapist, Dr. Rozz, in an intimate session that unveils the impact of homophobia on Theo’s life. Through intertwined dialogue between Dr. Rozz and Theo and Theo’s flashbacks, the audience comes to embrace Theo’s warm, yet delicate nature. While Theo shares at times being bullied for being gay in his childhood, he focuses much of his attention on the emotional abuse and manipulation at the hands of his boyfriend, Christian, as well as drug and alcohol addictions afflicting loved ones in his community. As Theo relays the painful memories of being raped, he grapples with coming to terms of how homophobia played a role in the theft of his bodily autonomy.

**Audience**

My target audience would primarily encompass a younger male demographic between the ages 18 and 35. Since this is an LGBTQ+ genre of film, *Metamorphosis* may attract greater numbers of gay/bisexual male filmgoers, since Theo’s experiences may be relatable to their own. In terms of race and ethnicity, while Theo is of mixed White and Hispanic/Latinx heritage and may therefore endure different struggles when compared to those in his periphery, his experiences with bullying, homophobia, and sexual violence transcend lines of race and ethnicity. As a result, the intense themes my film explores would cater to a broader audience regardless of ethnic or national origin.

 As I define my audience in greater detail and specificity, I have crafted my script to reflect my intention to properly reach my audience. The lingo, the slang, and the situational experiences might not register in non-queer spaces, but gay men who have immersed themselves in gay/queer culture, and have developed relationships in such spaces, will watch my film with not only familiarity, but with the chance to reflect on their own lived experiences.

**Scriptwriting for Metamorphosis**

After purchasing Final Draft to facilitate writing my script in an easier manner, I discovered that it was all but so. Most of the film’s scenes were directly inspired – or heavily inspired – by events that had happened in my life. I found that I struggled the most with creating dialogue, not only in terms of alteration to explore creative routes with my writing but also in figuring out how to transition from one of Theo’s memories to another during his session. In some ways, scriptwriting almost felt like writing a book. I realized that writing a script also requires a lot of contextual writing to guide your actors through scenes. Scriptwriting inspired me to get more invested in reading literature for pleasure during my moments of writers’ block; by doing so, I’ve been able to discern between different writing styles, and navigate myself on how to tell a story without necessarily utilizing dialogue. On the other hand, writers’ block also provided an opportunity to reset and explore my surroundings with greater intensity. Sitting alone with my thoughts during my bouts of writers’ block allowed me to reflect in greater detail the messages I wanted to syndicate in my work; putting words in writing before fully fleshing out the idea internally may unintentionally

**Design Strategy**

 My narrative film takes place in two different settings: Theo’s session with his therapist, Dr. Rozz, and flashbacks to specific points in Theo’s life pivotal to his personal development. I decided to center my Theor’s experiences using the context of therapy for various reasons. First, I drew inspiration from my own sessions with therapy, often stumbling upon realizations as to why I was behaving in certain ways. Being able to draw connections between my actions and the trauma of homophobia that impacted my life felt liberating; being able to concretely communicate pivotal moments in my life and their consequences on my livelihood is something I attempt to replicate in my film. Therapy sessions are also seen by many, including me, as a safe space to share intense feelings and emotions, so providing this environment for the majority of the film naturally made the most sense. For the scenes between Theo and Dr. Rozz, I incorporated a light and warm office setting that is minimally decorated. Primarily using medium shots to visualize their relationship, I would use close ups in the therapy scenes for instances depicting severe emotional discomfort or pain when looking back on past events - such as a disheveled facial expression or nervous tapping motions. In relation to my therapy scenes featuring one-on-one interactions, I’ve found inspiration in films and shows like *The Patient* (2022) and *Girl, Interrupted* (1999).

*Baby Reindeer* (2024) and *Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story* (2024) also provided tremendous inspiration in creating my script, as previously described. I personally resonate heavily with Donny’s story in *Baby Reindeer*, in using comedy and entertainment to build personality and draw attention away from his existence as a bisexual man. The aspects of drug and alcohol abuse that he explored in the unhealthy relationship dynamics he endured are also themes I explore in my film. As for *Monsters*, Lyle and Erik’s testimonies of how prolonged sexual assault throughout their lives at the hands of their father introduces boundary-less relationship dynamics of trust between a trusted, authoritative figure. The establishment of boundaries, and how they are often ignored or torn down in queer relationship dynamics, is a topic in *Monsters* from which I was able to draw creativity in writing my screenplay.

**Casting & Filming with Actors**

Having taken Producing and Directing, I was already familiar with the process of casting actors using sites like Backstage and the Philadelphia Film Society’s page. As with the class project, I received requests to audition almost immediately. My actors were patient and cooperative, and both have had experience in the film/television industry. Directing scenes still feels slightly unnatural for the time being, but I hope that as I gain more experience working with short/feature films – whether as a screenwriter or as an actor – that I can observe and replicate some of the techniques and instructions directors use for my own original work.

**Film Funding: Creating a Budget and Applying for a Film Grant**

The budget process was admittedly challenging. I was not quite familiar with the process of creating line items for film budgets, but I was able to search online various film budget formats and templates that I adjusted to fit for my film. Additionally, I conducted numerous searches on average salaries and stipends for roles like directors, producers, directors of photography, makeup artists, various crew positions, as well as actors. After receiving feedback regarding budget items, I extensively consolidated the numbers to be more in-line with a micro budget film- just averaging around $170,000 for production costs. Considering this would be my first film, I lowered the average prices to reflect as such.

Understanding the challenges and limitations that come with funding a film, I also had searched for several filmmaking grant opportunities. I was able to find one specifically catering to LGBTQ+ films called the New Voices Filmmaker Grant that seemed matched my qualifications. I plan on applying for other film grants throughout the year to continue supplementing the financial needs of my film.

**Crafting Promotional Materials**

This part was fun! Seeing my project come to life on the digital space felt rewarding and fulfilling. I decided to go with a silky, white theme using the presets Wix.com offered to tie in with the theme of healing that I explored in my film. After writing the press kit, I understand its value of breaking down information in a concise manner that can be digestible to those in the business. In some ways, I viewed the press kit as something akin to the SOWs (Statement of Work) that my agency does for strategic communications contracts – organizing what the work is, how it is beneficial or useful, and a breakdown of the processes to achieve the product.

**Reflection & Analysis**

Developing a theoretical approach to explain the behaviors queer men exhibit was a difficult process - it is easy to point to bullying and homophobia as the root causes for substance and alcohol abuse, yet such an explanation undermines the various layers with which trauma compounds and impacts our self-worth. Media depictions of queer struggles must improve on storytelling methods that implicitly showcase the meanings and values we assign to homosexual versus heterosexual relationships. Self-assignment of value and worth to capital and labor must not be overlooked, but rather explored in further depth, if we are to improve not only the material conditions of queer lives, but the collective emotional and mental wellbeing of the broader LGBTQ+ community.

The placement of value and worth in labor and capital is a conflict of power not only within the LGBTQ+ community, but can draw numerous comparisons with other marginalized groups, like Black, Arab, and *children*. Much of the anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric has developed into hatred under the guise of “protecting children” from “queer groomers.” These claims, while discredited, attempt to remove the autonomy and self-determination of children to make their own decisions regarding their identity and expression. It is my hope that by including scenes reflecting attempts to remove Theo’s autonomy during his childhood in my feature film, parenting behaviors and mechanisms may develop a different approach that does not inadvertently subjugate queer people under oppressive cultural systems.

**Conclusion**

Queer liberation movements have gained substantial ground since the Stonewall riots of 1969, yet many believe the movements achieved their goals once marriage equality in the US was attained in 2015. Political polarization and extremism continue to put queer lives in danger and bolster false, harmful narratives. As I highlighted in my research, homophobic policies, rhetoric, and violence not only put queer people in physical harm, but have inadvertently resulted in greater instances of alcoholism, substance abuse, and domestic/sexual violence across the LGBTQ+ community. These behaviors are not only a result of homophobia but also serve as coping mechanisms to deal with the deep-rooted traumas that queer people suffer. To produce material improvements, our cultural institutions must rectify the relationships queer people place between worth, value, capital, and labor.

Most importantly, *we must tell our stories*. In creating my narrative script, I forget that I am telling my story, rather than just submitting my final project for my Master’s candidacy. I have spent the past four years working overtime in social analytics positions, adding business analytics tools to my skill set, and learning foreign languages in an attempt to prove my worth to the corporate world. Upon completion of this project, I am forced to ask myself -*have I inadvertently created myself as a case study for the points I brought up earlier*? *Are my experiences in childhood of being bullied for being gay, or being sexually assaulted in 2019 from someone I was intimate with, intrinsically tied to my aspirations to enhance my skills as a public relations professional, and advance my educational credentials?* One thing I know for sure, however, is that I intend to pitch my script to a production company - queer stories and the diversity of the human experience ***deserve to*** and ***should*** occupy space, and I will not back down in doing so.

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