

Sexuality and the Media: Film and Public Perception

“The third branch that I think we have to research is the effect that media has on LGBT issues. Namely, what are the obstacles to true LGBT acceptance in society and how can media break through these in ways that political advocacy, or community groups can't.

What I'm aiming to be able to show people is that if they are interested in supporting organizations that aim to expand LGBT equality under the law and acceptance in the larger society, then they should not forget the role of culture (and especially media which is the most accessible) in bringing us closer to that goal.

It's all quite a big challenge but a lot of people working on bits and pieces of this puzzle should get us there in the end.”

(working topic proposed by Sam D'Alfonso, InsideOut Fundraising Co-ordinator, spring 2005)

Film as a powerful medium of communication can effect changes in perception. It can be used to reflect society's current focus on issues and enlighten a mass audience by provoking thought. Film can also bring attention to issues with which many are not particularly comfortable, including ones that deal with sexual orientation, identity, and lifestyle and can convey society's stance on them. In his book entitled “Movies as Politics”, film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum asserts that that which makes people feel good has a profound influence on how they perceive and respond to the world around them (Rosenbaum, 1997).

For it is my belief that formal procedures—by shaping and ordering our perceptions, by determining how we engage with art as well as life—are always grounded in political decisions of one kind or another, whether we choose to recognize them or not (Rosenbaum, 1997, p.4).

The question remains, however, of whether or not film, in providing a forum for debate about sexual orientation, renders that forum unchallenging for its participants, presupposing their viewpoints and philosophies are already empathetic to those a film espouses. As a medium that can address obstacles that prevent greater acceptance for those marginalised in society, how can film achieve this end? Is it fair to expect it to provide the insights necessary for revolutionary change or is film more commonly utilised as a mirror reflecting back to society its own foibles upon which discourse is possible? This essay will review four films recently screened at the 2005 InsideOut Toronto Lesbian and Gay Film

and Video Festival, not so much for their technical and aesthetic merit but for the messages they convey about the relevance of queer films in today's society. The essay does not claim these films or films in general to have solutions to the on-going marginalization LGBT communities suffer. Indeed, much of what the research proposes is that film is only reflective of what the majority of people within a society will tolerate. However, even the most innocuous subject matter in a film may still provoke individuals to self reflection about the plight of others, gradually leading to greater understanding and acceptance of all. The importance of programming a film festival, therefore, becomes crucial to its ability to affect audience perception. This essay hopes to show that because of its ability to captivate and influence mass audiences, film becomes an important tool that can generate discourse on issues of sexual orientation that affect society as a whole.

Telling A Story

Coming Out in the Modern Day

The first film to be reviewed is from Germany. Entitled "Summer Storm (Sommersturm)", it tells the story of two best friends—Tobi and Achim—who belong to a rowing team preparing for a national competition. As with most close friendships, Tobi and Achim pledge allegiance to each other regardless of where life takes them. This simple act is reassuring to Tobi who harbours a secret love for Achim. Both have girlfriends, though Tobi consistently finds excuses to avoid seeing or touching his. He, instead, pines to be with Achim, using their friendship and all his perceived expectations of what that entails to oblige Achim to spend more time with him. As Achim's involvement with his girlfriend occupies more of his time, he becomes annoyed by Tobi's persistent complaints about the infrequency of their interaction. When Tobi, at wit's end, finally reveals his true feelings to him, Achim feels betrayed and angry that Tobi's girlfriend, Anke, was hurt by Tobi's insensitivity, attention-seeking conduct, and selfishness.

The film focuses on the familiar topics of relationship and of a young man's coming to terms with his sexual identity. In addition to struggling with who he is Tobi has to deal with added pressures including being captain of his rowing team—a position requiring leadership skills and the compliance with rules of conduct and behaviour. His coach consistently reminds him of the importance of promptness, working as part of a team, the fervent call to win at all costs, and placing one's team mates ahead of oneself. It is a theme which alludes to traditional notions of conformity, and reminds viewers of how being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered requires adherence to a heteronormative, patriarchal social construct. This has devastating results for Tobi as, in order to conform, he has to lie to initially prove that he is not gay—a lie which begets other lies and whose effects start to unravel and affect all his relationships. Obvious clichés are generously used to aid in the film's narration, including the appearance of an all-gay rowing team at the same campsite as Tobi and Achim's team, upsetting the typical, normal routine of hetero life; the presence of a highly conservative all-female Catholic team engaged in hymn singing and crocheting at the opposite end of the antagonistic spectrum; Achim's seeming indifference to gays when questioned what he thinks about them, lending him an air of ambiguity that verges on the homoerotic; their male coach's newfound romance with the female coach of the all-gay rowing team predictably paving the way to imminent reconciliation and resolution to all issues concerned; and the constant questioning of what being gay entails, which both camps wrestle with.

The film is also rife with metaphors, symbolic of the turmoil each character undergoes: Tobi jumping in the lake and allowing himself to sink alluding to the experience of losing control, being overwhelmed, and dying; the stormy night, indicative of conflict and isolation that dawns into a sunny day of new beginnings when all is resolved and hurt feelings dissipate. Even irony is used for levity, such as when Schorshi, one of Tobi's homophobic team mates who, when competition day arrives, is obliged to row with the all-gay rowing team when one of its original members is injured, but who wins the competition with them, prompting him to reconcile with one of that team's members with whom he

had had some bitter conflicts. Such mechanisms aid to depict a story where no one truly suffers and all of life's travails are quickly and easily resolved. Indeed, even as his life seemingly crashes around him, Tobi is courted by a member of the all-gay rowing team, mitigating his pain and loneliness so that when it comes time for him to disclose his sexual orientation to his team mates, he does not have to do so alone. Of note is how the female characters in the film play a minor, often subservient role, requiring them to be understanding, compassionate, and forgiving despite being consistently deceived, misled, and betrayed by the male characters. It leads one to question why the director would choose to elevate the cause of one marginalised group to the disparagement of another.

Throughout the film beautiful cinematography; strong, subtle performances; and attractive youth portray a tender friendship that succeeds in overcoming the turmoil of life. Audience response seemed favourable and attendance was high, leading one to presume that it is films such as this that have universal appeal. And yet, without the challenges that provoke audiences to think more critically, do films such as "Summer Storm (Sommersturm)" serve any purpose other than to lightly entertain? Some would argue no, that indeed, much of what this movie represents is a highly sterilised version of real life, that the film maker relied heavily on cliché and obvious metaphor to re-tell an oft-told story. Yet, there is still a distinction between being critical and dismissing a work outright because of a few shortcomings. It may be true that much of this film's appeal lies in being aesthetically pleasing.

To dismiss this film as irrelevant because of its seemingly superficial nature, however, would deny much of the film that is liberatory. Despite the film's weaknesses, it still serves to affirm the experiences of those dealing with their sexual identity, and who do so alone. Taking a more critical stance in reviewing the film illustrates how Tobi is subject to the whims of a society bent on imposing its will at all costs, pressured to conform to conventional notions of what it means to be male, yet inevitably succumbing to his true orientation. Despite initial challenges Tobi is, in the end, acknowledged, affirmed, and accepted by his peers. A film such as this conveys the message that despite the loosening of repression's grip the modern age must strive further to extricate itself from

self-imposed restrictions if true acceptance of sexuality in all its varied expressions is the goal: a necessary radical change that only transgression from past molds can achieve.

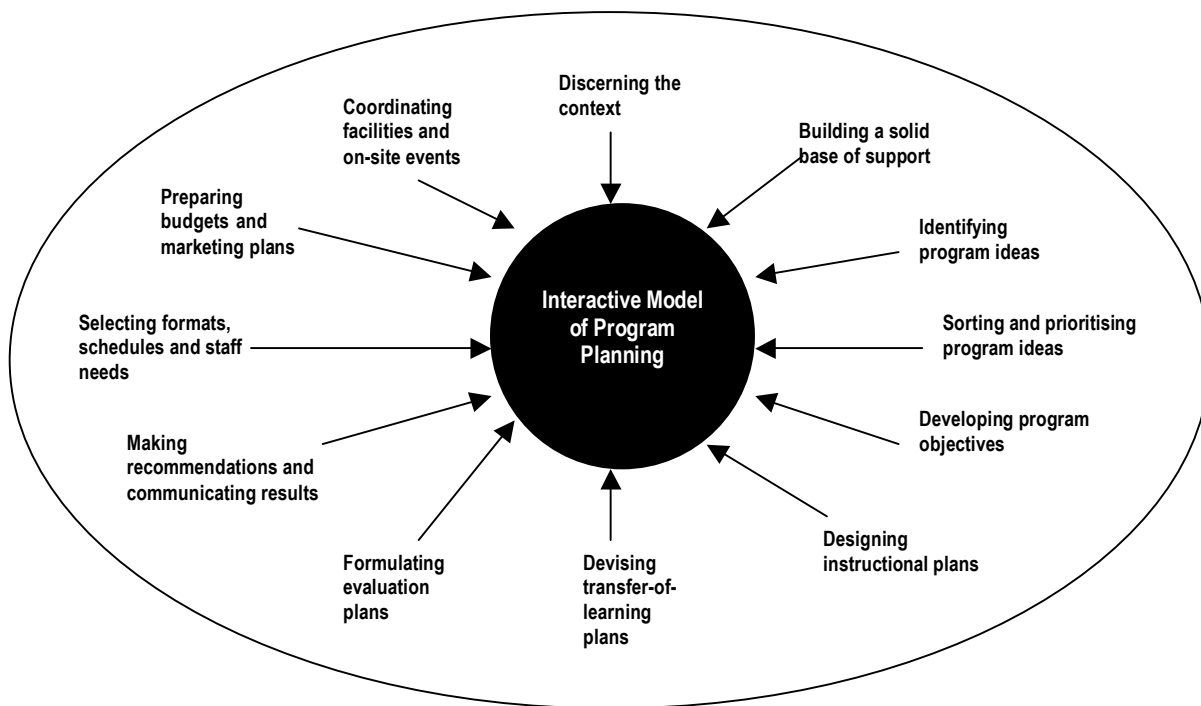
Programming: Essential Elements

As parameters dissolve and society becomes more receptive, film as a far-reaching medium allows diverse voices a way to express themselves as creativity knows no bounds. It is remarkable, therefore, how audiences on whom LGBT film festivals rely for financial support are not as receptive to new, more dissenting voices. Perhaps it is because they have already attained a status, a sense of belonging, and are, therefore, no longer spurred to pro-action. As a result, individuals may not be as receptive to alternative ways of thinking about the plight of others. The collective bias of preferring one film genre over another has a great impact on the programming of a film festival, as generous donors wield great influence on what will be screened at them. Film festival planners and organisers, therefore, are often at the mercy of these vocal supporters.

The act of programming itself is worthy of analysis as how it is effected is crucial to what an audience is exposed to. Education researchers Ronald M. Cervero and Arthur L. Wilson (1994) believe that planning, in its contingent nature, requires context as part of its consideration. Context may include “the values and interests of others involved, organizational and interpersonal power relationships, available resources, and a knowledge of history of planning efforts in the given situation” (Cervero and Wilson, 1994, p.6). Film festivals also have finance as another factor, so a fine balance between goals and costs involved must be maintained. Indeed, the process of film programming, like those in other sectors, requires negotiation underscoring the notion that it is a social, not a scientific process (Cervero & Wilson, 1994). What is most crucial, however, is to integrate the practical with the critical. Indeed the existence of social inequalities and the constant changes within power structures (Cervero & Wilson, 1994) necessitates the clear identification of factors that focus on “emancipation that is guided by the values of ‘equity, sharing, personal dignity, security, freedom, and caring’ (Beyer and Apple,

1988, p.7)” (Cervero & Wilson, 1994, p. 21). Only by recognising such factors can programming help to counter the hegemonic effects of dominant cultural norms that inadvertently exclude and marginalise.

Practically, presuming it has not already been tried, an interactive model of program planning—such as the one below by educator Rosemary Caffarella (2002)—is one option. Its circular format precludes the need for beginnings or endings, allowing planners to choose a component of interest to them and to work concurrently with others doing the same (Caffarella, 2002). Another advantage of this approach is that it facilitates the diverse cultures and viewpoints that comprise many film festival groups, allowing all a voice in the process.



Interactive Model of Program Planning (Caffarella, 2002, p.21)

Right and Wrong in Other Lands

Social progress in sexuality issues is a relative notion. In Asia, for instance, where the film industry is strictly driven by commerce, not social activism, the goal of most film makers is to appeal to mainstream culture. In an article, postdoctoral fellow in Asian studies Helen Hok-sze Leung lends

insight to the differences in audience reaction, perception, and expectation between Hong Kong and the West. This is particularly true when it comes to queer issues and how sexuality is generally portrayed in Asian and Western films. Leung contends that unlike in the West, where a healthy independent film industry thrives, Hong Kong alternative film makers need to appeal to mainstream culture in order to survive despite their personal preference to create work that is more provocative and challenging. Since sex between men was only de-criminalized in 1991, the general public support of gay communities in Hong Kong remains limited even within gay communities themselves (Leung, 2001).

In addition, there is the strong filial bonds that often result in adult children still living with their parents (or vice versa), and where notions of privacy are privileges more than the norm. The result is anything but favourable of same-sex unions, a stance that results in the public denial of one's true sexual identity and the opting for a fence-sitting middle ground. Such circumstances present some interesting dichotomies which Hong Kong film makers interested in creating queer-based projects must work within. For instance, when filming movies that have as their protagonists gay characters, they are often not identified as openly gay but those who play a secondary, supportive role to the heterosexual ones, a clear deference to mainstream Hong Kong society, which refuses to acknowledge itself (Leung, 2001). Much of the themes explored in recent films made by Hong Kong and other Asian directors are ones which exemplify loss and discovery: nostalgia for bygone times and hope for a better future. As a result characters must call on exceptional strength and battle enormous odds to triumph over adversity, often to their own detriment and demise (Leung, 2001). This is a revelation because it confirms the power of film-making as a medium to convey a message to its viewers. Even within cultures where film makers are not at liberty to create work that invokes thought to the extent that those in the West can, they can still effect changes through the subtle layering of character development, context, and historical narrative.

In the Thai film “Beautiful Boxer” the protagonist, Toom, who from an early age aspires to be a woman, trains to be a kick boxer in order to earn enough money to pay for gender reassignment. As Toom proves to be a gifted athlete, thereby earning the praise and respect of his team mates and coach, he pursues his dream of buying and wearing makeup buoyed by his new-found self-confidence. Fearful of his coach and team mates’ reaction, he initially pursues this interest clandestinely with the aid of female friends aware of his proclivities. When his experiments with cosmetics are discovered by a team mate, Toom fears repercussions, though his coach has more opportunistic ideas. He allows Toom his interest as a publicity stunt, drawing audiences to matches where the star attraction is in virtual drag. This boosts the reputation of the team, garnering not only fame and notoriety but bookings throughout the country and abroad. Throughout this film, much is made of Toom’s obsession with women’s makeup, dress, and graceful movements; much is made of his prodigious talent as a kick boxer. Brilliant cinematography captures endless clips of bare-chested, virile young men practicing in the woods in the early morning hours surrounded by ethereal fog. Success is measured in winning as many matches as possible, and with each win, Toom endears himself to an ever-growing fan base eager to see the latest look and moves from the powerful athlete.

As with most stories predicated on material success, however, the protagonist continues to find himself alone unable to realise his true desire to become a woman. Wanting desperately to fit in, he finds himself torn between the divergent expectations conferred on him by his community exploited by those who care not so much that he looks like a woman so long as he can fight like a man and his dream of being a woman. When interviewed on Japanese television about whether his cross-dressing routine is indicative of a true desire to be a woman or a publicity stunt, Toom fully admits to the latter. He also thwarts the advances of a female fan, disclosing to her his desire for gender reassignment. These proclamations, however, are not touched on until closer to the end of the film, by which time it is too late for any extensive exploration of the subject. Even scenes in which Toom’s parents, who

reconcile with him over his decision to undergo gender reassignment, are treated in a brief, formulaic manner with little explanation as to how the characters arrived at that resolution.

For those interested in more than Toom's life as a kickboxer, "Beautiful Boxer" lacks substantive evidence that his life as a man awaiting gender reassignment is a legitimate choice. Too much emphasis is placed on the glamorous world of kickboxing with its titillating shots of nearly naked young men, fragile egos, and the need to win at all costs for the film to draw attention to Toom's true quest. Even the death of his coach toward the end of the film that compels Toom to fight for his memory deflects the responsibility of care and compassion that should have been accorded to Toom. As the film is based on a true story, one may wonder what difference it would make had the narrative focused on the more personal aspects of Toom's life: a focus on his relationship with Pi Nid, his mentor (the first transgendered female to have befriended and affirmed Toom); with his best friend; with his mother; his father; and his younger brother (whose relationship to Toom was hardly touched on in the film despite being in the same kick boxing club) would perhaps have been more revealing. As most of the support he received was from female characters, conveying the story from their perspective may have been more enlightening.

Other, equally legitimate questions left unanswered include the issue of Toom's fate had he not been born with a natural athletic ability. Would he still have been acknowledged to the same extent by those around him, or would he have simply languished, living a lie that would never provide him the opportunity to pursue the one goal that would have validated him? The commodification of his physical prowess only confirms the exploitative nature of a society hungry for material wealth, physical appearance, and social status at whatever cost. For the film to celebrate this as evidence of Toom's triumph over adversity only corroborates this claim whilst denigrating his humanity.

In many ways "Beautiful Boxer" attests to the ironies and paradoxes of life. The film opens, for instance with a scene at a musical revue, showcasing an all-male cast playing both male and female roles, combining the lithe, graceful movements of traditional Thai theatre with those of the martial arts.

Indeed, the film illustrates the co-existence of both kickboxing and traditional dance as inherent of Thai culture, though not looking too kindly on those who desire to do, and are certainly capable of, both. As a child studying to be a monk, Toom is exposed to a rigorous regimen, which insists on self-renunciation and the incurrance of bad karma should this be breached, a hard lesson to learn for a young boy keen on experimenting with lip gloss and floral headpieces. Yet, on a nation-wide pilgrimage with his mentor, Toom is also taught about following the path he was intended to take, affirming him at least for a time. As a kick boxer encouraged to exploit his interests in cosmetics to draw attention to his club, however, he is initially uncomfortable with wearing makeup during a match, aware of the seeming incongruous effect the pairing of the artifice with the aggressive produces. Indeed the juxtaposition and overlapping of conventional notions of masculinity and femininity throughout the film prefigures much of the disparagement that society asserts over that very act: an insightful reflection of the conflicted, angst-filled soul-searching Toom himself undergoes. Indeed, these contradictory messages that insist on the delineation of masculine and feminine traits to uphold notions of propriety and civility whilst conflating them at other times to uphold other agendas, serve only to confuse and perplex.

“Beautiful Boxer” confirms Leung’s claims that most Asian film directors appeal to mainstream audiences when recounting a story. Of note is how this film only refers to the notion of sexual orientation briefly, when Toom, having just made the acquaintance of his mentor, Pi Nid, remarks on her wall plastered with photos of beauty pageant queens to whose beauty Pi Nid aspires and for no other reason than to win the heart of her boyfriend. Interestingly the only time in the film a man can refer to another man as his boyfriend is when one of them is a woman, conforming to the convention that a couple should consist of one male and one female. This corroborates Leung’s claim that the Asian film industry is careful about overstepping the boundaries of social acceptability, particularly in issues of sexuality.

Because the industry depends entirely on the market, any experimentation must straddle what [Maria] Pramaggiore called the “industrial fence” that is, the inroads into minority markets must be made without alienating mainstream consumers....even the most artistic Hong Kong films aspire first and foremost to be marketable commodities. (Leung, 2001, p.426)

This said the film “Beautiful Boxer” presents ideas of identity and clearly illustrates the struggle one person has in ascertaining his. Toom is constantly misunderstood, maligned, and pressured to acquiesce to societal expectations of what a man should be, for a time resulting in his own complicity with the patriarchal system from which he longs to liberate himself. Though careful about overstepping social conventions of appropriateness, this film speaks volumes about society’s need for tolerance and acceptance of those considered by many to be unacceptable, justifying its creation and promotion in the global market.

Fundamental Question: Do We Want To Or Not?

If the goal of the LGBT is to be accepted by the mainstream and vice versa, then it must be prepared to relinquish itself to the mainstream, in essence to become assimilated. Whether or not it wants to do so is the central question. If so, can film effectively advocate tolerance and acceptance on the part of the mainstream culture? The answer is probably yes, and yet, considering the venue for particular films—LGBT film festivals, for instance—the question may not be whether but to whom these films reflect the need for tolerance and acceptance. Given that the majority of those attending these film festivals are those who hardly need convincing of the importance of showcasing such films to a wider more mainstream audience becomes evident. How can this be effected? In marketing LGBT film festivals, are mainstream audiences sufficiently targeted? Would doing so even be desirable?

The last question is an important one to consider because in pondering the desire for integrating the LGBT community into the mainstream one presupposes that it does not already exist there. In a research paper, sociologist Ki Namaste claims that

[p]oststructuralist queer theory analyzes the manner in which cultural texts privilege heterosexuality over other sexual identities, as well as how this estimation requires homosexuality. Moreover, queer theory studies the dilemma implicit in this logic: the adoption of a 'homosexual' position strengthens heterosexuality itself (Namaste, 1994, p.226).

The implication of this assertion for media is significant because media—and film in particular—has the power to influence audience perceptions of changes in societal norms, regardless of how subtle their portrayal is. In an analysis of the notion of 'camp', for instance, Namaste claims that in Alfred Hitchcock's "Rope" the central characters are insinuated as homosexual. Hitchcock, in particular, was adept at conveying a 'camp' persona for most of his main characters, regardless of whether these were homosexual or not. To audience members, this ambiguity, which begs to ask whether the characters are or are not homosexual, may be highly appealing, imparting a mystique around the characters' personae (Namaste, 1994). In so doing, one may argue that Hitchcock's films subverted stereotypical characters by introducing ones who were "unspecifiable" pre-dating current notions of "queer" by at least fifty years. Traditionally "queer" was a derogatory term that was used to refer to homosexuals of both sexes. Modern-day interpretations, however, place it where, many argue, it ought to be: that which describes those who fall outside of the heteronormative sexually and socially (Namaste, 1994). Similarly, in the TV series "Laverne and Shirley" the relationship between the central characters are connoted as homosexual even though they may be portrayed as heterosexual in their pursuit of romantic relations with men (Namaste, 1994). Both examples illustrate how powerful the interplay between denotative and connotative meanings can be. Indeed, they may be used to artistically enhance the appeal of a film's character(s), or they may be used to mask the true intentions of a film depending on the perceived receptivity of an audience to radical ideas of sexuality.

"Three Dancing Slaves (Le Clan)" is a film about the relationship between three brothers as they mature and explore their identities. The transition to adulthood is tumultuous, made even more so by the brothers' close ties to one another and the apparent antagonism between them and their father.

Christophe, the eldest, is completing a jail sentence. After his release he reforms to a life of respectability taking on and excelling at a new job. The middle brother, Marc, involved in gang activity is the most impetuous of the three. His irascibility results in friction between him and his father, an antagonism compounded by Marc's reverence for his older brother who neither has the time nor inclination to attend to his needs. Finally, there is Olivier, the youngest, who desperately wants to fit in and who Marc shuns as inconsequential. His attraction to Marc's friend Hisham is augmented only by the latter's seeming ambivalence toward Olivier, but who is simultaneously nurturing and caring of him.

From the start the film portrays the complex relationships between the central characters, not only as a result of their idiosyncrasies, but also in light of their mother's recent death. In addition, there exists an emotional detachment about them, which one may argue is a reflection of a lack of self-awareness. This ambivalence towards the self coupled with the kinds of social and sporting activities they engage in—Capoeira (a traditional Brazilian martial art and dance inspired by slaves), weight training, wrestling, and drinking parties by the river—lends a strong homoerotic aura to them. Marc stereotypifies the brooding male, resentful of his father for the loss of his mother and who, in his surly, bellicose nature, is sexually compelling. Christophe is instinctively maternal. Despite his professional commitments and seeming resistance to involve himself with his family, is protective of it. Indeed, when Olivier goes missing, it is to Christophe their father turns for leadership. In taking on this role of champion Christophe portrays the traditional masculine role: attractive, heroic, and desirable in his strength and resolve. For his part, Olivier is the least confident of the three brothers. Yearning for his mother as any child would, he converses with her photos, confiding in her his brothers' antics, especially Marc's, whose erratic and violent outbursts Olivier fears is leading him down a destructive path. When Olivier finally consummates his relationship with Hisham, he discovers a new-found strength, which his family, in their own pre-occupation with self-discovery, fails to provide for him. Hisham and the brothers' father play secondary roles that, in their custodial nature, are foundational

and stabilising. Despite their antagonistic relationship, for instance, Christophe's father insists on lending him his suit for Christophe's job interview, carefully selecting colours and the appropriate accessories to co-ordinate with it. Evident of the strong bonds between the brothers, Christophe provides Marc with the support he needs as he violently lashes out his anger over his mother's death, bereft in his grief. Subsequently Marc discerns Olivier's difficulty in coping with their mother's death, accompanying him to scatter her ashes: a cathartic release for the latter. The juxtaposition of tenderness and bitter conflict in the film seemingly obviates the need for female presence, as each male character playing both seem adept at this intermingling of stereotypical feminine and masculine traits. One may question why it is the film remarkably lacks any female characters (Christophe's boss and mentor is unmarried, Marc and his friends have sex with a transvestite) until towards the end when Christophe acquires a girlfriend—whose presence, even then, is short lived and peripheral. Could the writer(s), in accentuating the homoerotic air of the film, have been purposefully targeting a gay male audience, or does doing away with women, resulting in the unstable, conflict-ridden lives the men lead underscore the need for them?

All three brothers in the film convey a raw sexuality, subsumed by the intricate familial relationships that are the crux of the story, lending levity and enticing curiosity to the moral questioning each confronts. Marc, for instance, in wanting to avenge the torture to which he and his dog were subjected, resulting in the latter's horrific death seeks, at various intervals in the film, to kill the perpetrator. Each time, however, he fails as he sabotages his own attempts, the last resulting in serious self-injuries. It is this angst in a film—the pressure each character feels to comply with traditional notions of what it means to be male—that may appeal to mainstream audiences, offering a glimpse of the inner sanctums of a non-traditional nuclear family. Its appeal may also lie in the ambiguous sexual identities, the mystique of each character. On the surface, they exhibit stereotypically male attributes and idiosyncrasies, but underlying all of these is a palpable innocence, an intuitive trait more reminiscent of their mother, indeed, characteristic of women in general. The

brothers' tenderness towards one another is evident throughout the film, when, in times of crisis, they would consistently rush to each other's aid and be physically demonstrative of their care and love for one another.

I Am Who I Am

In many ways, "Three Dancing Slaves (Le Clan)" focuses on a non-traditional family whose basis is linked to the concept of identity. Social scientists Glastra, Hake, and Schedler (2004) maintain that individuality in the present day refers to the increasing independence of individuals from social, cultural, and moral paradigms, and the necessity of resolving much of the systemic problems that arise from this phenomenon by one's self. This creates problems as individuals become insecure about the choices they make as these must be considered when trying to attain the "good life". Individuals must, therefore, be responsible for constructing their own biography and life paths according to what they truly desire and despite the normative conventions that demand compliance with it. It is, again, part of the challenge that the LGBT must take on if it is to legitimise its myriad selves. The choice of whether it wants to do this or maintain the status quo can be a life-altering one. Of note is how far (Western) society has ostensibly come in embracing the individual in light of history's fixation on the collective. These days, people who formerly fell into the category of 'other' are less apt to be arrested or persecuted. In many instances they now have a voice.

The film "That Man: Peter Berlin" is a documentary about the reclusive former porn star, artist, film maker, and photographer whose signature image captivated many in the adult film industry and alternative art scene of early 1970's New York and San Francisco. Famous for a blatant sexuality, Berlin was an anomaly because despite promoting himself as a sexual object in film and print, he only ever made two films—"That Boy" and "Knights in Black Leather"—challenging those who dared to regard him as mere object. Indeed, his talent in using film as a medium to convey an eroticism that precluded the mere sexual act is as prodigious as the body of work he has accumulated. Berlin talks

extensively about growing up in Germany during the Second World War. Despite having an aristocratic background he grew up poor and constrained by a Catholic upbringing. In time, he indulged his passion for photography and fashion by working for a celebrity magazine and making his own skin-tight clothing, which he would wear whilst cruising the streets of Berlin. It is this same brashness with which Berlin, the man, took to San Francisco where, upon relocation, he caused a sensation whenever he walked the streets. He seemed both enamoured of and oblivious to the reactions of the world around him, yet thriving on the adulation all the same. Remarkably, Berlin emphasises that the choice to live within the margins of society was entirely his own, that his was a singular vision, fully aware that behind the façade that is Peter Berlin is Armin Hagen Von Hoyningen-Huene progeny of attachés and high level military personnel on his father's side, and artists and designers on his mother's side. "I'm not from the gutter. I want to live in the gutter..." (Tushinski, 2005) he said. Fuelled by an obsessive desire to explore aspects of sexuality, his cultivation of a provocative image was not one indicative of narcissism or self-indulgence so much as it was a quest for extending the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Indeed, Berlin constantly searched for the one person who could provoke him sexually and creatively as much as he had provoked others. Sadly, he feels he has never met his match.

Presently Berlin, though retired from the public eye, is guarded, preferring instead to hide behind the façade of celebrity and the mystique he has created. Unrelenting in his constant self-referencing, he lends a narcissistic air to his persona, yet paradoxically exudes a very human quality with his genuine honesty. Indeed, despite being aware of the impact of his image, Berlin maintains an integrity to his beliefs that belies the seeming self-congratulatory nature of them. He has consistently shunned the limelight refusing to pander to those who incite him to exploit his name and image to their own advantage. Interestingly, and perhaps as a result of his extensive connections with those of means, he was never in want of much. Indeed, one may question to what extent his good looks and natural sex appeal play in his fame, reputation, and survival. A strong personality alone may be propitious, but it may also be regarded by some as encroaching or obnoxious. Analysis on how much physical

attractiveness provides one with an unfair advantage over others, therefore, must be undertaken if we are to liberate ourselves from unfair treatment that prioritises those who are considered physically attractive over those who are not, regardless of whether such punitive measures are intentional or not.

The documentary is a testament to Berlin's determined and audacious exploration of his unique identity bolstered by an equally colourful cast of former lovers and friends: his own non-traditional, nuclear family. Perhaps because he never had to worry about money Berlin was able to focus on creativity and to maintain his integrity, for apart from his art he has remained resolute in his opposition to war, to all notions of celebrity, and to the subjugation of authority. Ironically, it is this integrity that has led him to be identified as sub-culture's Greta Garbo: at once elusive yet compelling to those who admire him.

Berlin's life and persona are also noteworthy in light of how the perception of sexuality from an historical context would have, at one point, relegated it to function solely as a means to propagate a nation. Indeed "[h]omosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault, 1978, p.43). Berlin's life is proof of how society has evolved to one in which the varied expressions of sexuality are not only validated but celebrated.

Implications of the Findings

In presenting a range of characters and life experiences, each of the aforementioned films underscores the obstacles that inhibit the growth, development, identification, and acceptance of those whom society deems as 'other'. Yet each film celebrates these idiosyncratic characters, regardless of whether there is a resolution to their plight by a film's end. Indeed, more questions arise than are addressed. Why then would mainstream society, presuming it is amenable to learning about new interpretations of sexuality and reality, not wish to explore such opportunities? If apprehension is the

reason why mainstream audiences are largely absent at LGBT film festivals, speculation on its causes is necessary if targeting a mainstream audience is desired. Could the very exercise of self-identification, in the way that it sets one apart from others, bringing to the fore questions of one's self be so fearsome that audiences would rather take the more popular, collective, and ultimately, safe route out? Perhaps one way to address the issue of individual malaise is by encouraging more audience participation at such festivals. This may take the form of panel discussions on individual films either before or after screenings; inviting experts in the fields of sociology, queer theory, and film studies to attend festivals as speakers; and cultivating a discursive environment during open forums and workshops to effect participation, focusing not only on film content but on audience response to it. The purpose, therefore, is not necessarily to resolve rifts between the mainstream culture and the LGBT community but rather to maintain a consistent and inclusive, discursive dialogue, with film as the context, regardless of how incendiary this may become. Indeed to believe that resolution is inevitable is unrealistic. However, for those simply interested in being provoked into new ways of thinking and perceiving, the exposure to various film genres may prove not only educational but liberating. Participation not only facilitates the exchange of ideas it also confirms the notion that it is ultimately the individual's responsibility to effect change for himself or herself. Regardless of whether he or she is aware of this fact, it is reassuring to know that, at least in Western societies, this option is the ultimate in individual strength; choice, after all, is a privilege to which only a few of the world's population are entitled. Such suggestions, perhaps logistically challenging and costly, may be necessary if reaching out across boundaries despite ever-present obstacles is truly desired.

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