

## Lesbian's Representation Evolution in Mainstream Media

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### Abstract

This article aims to show the integration of Lesbians in a western context through all types of mainstream media such as film, prime-time television shows and Internet based web series. These aims were followed by means of a research conducted on exploring Lesbians' evolution from niche margins and stereotypes into modern mainstream media, by shattering the "Butch & Femme" distribution patterns, negative and prejudice stigmas while showing the advancement of modern society with regard to this issue. Most researchers found in this area focus on the gay male media influences and not on female. Researches that do focus on the female issue focus on traditional culture in women's genre, such as: soap operas, novels, women's journals and female studies. Thus, a gap in knowledge exists regarding the evolution of lesbian character's evolution representation in the various media. The study used a mixed research methods research, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. Additionally, theoretical and media analysis were conducted, as well as anonymous questionnaires, convenience sample focus group and structured interviews. The data was collected concurrently or sequentially and later given a priority and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of the research. The findings show the shattering of stereotypes and patterns throughout the years and the evolution of the Lesbian characters within the various types of media, leaving prejudice behind and evolving into mainstream, by shattering stereotypes over time.

Thus mainstreamism is all around us and will continue to grow and perhaps expose other marginalized groups into the mainstream awareness in the future.

This research contributed to theory by closing the gap in knowledge regarding lesbian representation evolution in the media. Additionally, the research added to knowledge by creating a change in the perception of Queer theory, while portraying this theory as irrelevant when it comes to describe lesbians' representation in the media as approaching the mainstream. Thus, a change in the perception of Queer as a social phenomenon will occur, by understanding that 'queer' is no longer a sexual oriented definition. Within modern society adopting a culture that advocates for individuality and uniqueness, being queer can no longer be considered as being whatever is at odds with the normal. Since this topic has never been researched before, this is an original and an innovative research, as it developed a model of Lesbian Mainstream Representation Evolution in the Media.

**Keywords:** Lesbian mainstreamism; Stereotypes; Media; Butch & Femme; Evolution; Queer theory; LGBT

### Introduction

#### Aims and focus of the research

In this research shows the integration of Lesbians in a western context through all types of mainstream media such as film, prime-time television shows and Internet based web series. These aims were followed by means of a research conducted on exploring Lesbians' evolution from niche margins and stereotypes into modern mainstream media, by shattering the "Butch & Femme" distribution patterns, negative and prejudice stigmas while showing the advancement of modern society with regard to this issue. Combining mixed research methods through theoretical and media analysis, anonymous questionnaires, convenience sample focus group and structured interviews, in addition describing and analyzing how media representation of "Lesbians" has changed over the past eighty years, while testing the analytical potential of "Queer Theory" in front of a whole range of public and private understandings of sexual orientation

in present society; I have attempted to show that "Queer Theory" is no longer defining one's sexual orientation as the first topic on one's long list of characteristics. I have taken into consideration all the different research methods – from literature review and analysis, examination of different theories such as: gender and sexuality theories, psychology and physiology theories – focus on major biological and non-biological differences between men and women, sociology theories and deviant behavior, biblical citations, feminism and post feminism theories, the various relevant media theories such as the "Syringe Theory" and the "Queer Theory".

One must clarify the conceptual framework and various theories used in this research. According to Kama [1], Mainstreams is the transition from the comic, criminal, abstract margins, to the normal lifestyle representation monogamist partnership, career and family oriented. According to Halperin [2], Queer is whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant, an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not positivity but positionality vis-à-vis the normative. Queer Theory is a set of ideas based around the idea that identities are not fixed and do not determine who we are. It suggests that it is meaningless to talk in general about 'women' or any

other group, as identities consist of so many elements that to assume that people can be seen collectively on the basis of one shared characteristic is wrong.

This research explored how the Lesbian character has been represented in western media over the years (1930's - today): What is the Lesbian community perception of their representation in the media? Do Lesbian characters receive the appropriate amount of media exposure? Is the representation "mainstream" enough? Or is it still stereotypical? Has the representation evolved into mainstream over the years? Or has it stayed the same? And finally, are Lesbians still categorized into a 'butch and femme' distribution pattern, or are they represented as women who love women but staying normal and straight looking in order to represent the community as equals? Should Lesbian issues push forward - fight the system from the outside instead of the inside? Or perhaps, should Lesbians try to blend in but risk losing their distinction? Too "normal" and you lose your identity, too extreme and you might hit a cul-de-sac. If the goal is to actually make improvements in the lives of this minority group, "normal" is the suitable path to take.

## Context for the Research

Throughout media history, Lesbians have hardly ever been represented as mainstream straight looking. Over the past fifteen years, we have witnessed a rise in "Lesbian mainstreams awareness", especially in television shows. Not only in all gay oriented shows such as: "Ellen", "Queer as Folk", "The L Word", "Lip Service", "South of Nowhere" and web series such as: "Exes & Ohs", "Venice", "Girl Girl Scene", "Anyone But Me", "Sugar Rush", "Chica Busca Chica", "We Have to Stop Now" and "Seeking Simone"; but in every prime-time television show that considers itself mainstream, there are at least one or two gay or Lesbian characters, for example - "Friends", "Grey's Anatomy", "Flash Forward", "Glee", "Beverly Hills 90210", "L.A. Law", "Party of Five", "Ally Mcbeal", "All my Children", "Sex and the City", "The OC", "True Blood", "Buffy the Vampire Slayer", "Fast Lane", "The Wire", and "Orange is the New Black". It all started when gay men revolutionized and changed the way the world viewed gay men, when straight, well-known actors played gay characters in different films such as: River Phoenix in "My own Private Idaho" (1991, based on a William Shakespeare's play, adapted for screen and directed by - Gus Van Sant), Tom Hanks in the movie "Philadelphia" in 1993 (directed by: Jonathan Demme, Written by: Ron Nyswaner), Robin Williams in "The Birdcage" (1996, based on the play by Jean Poiret, directed by Mike Nichols), Greg Kinnear in "As Good as it Gets" (1997, written by Mark Andrews, directed by James L. Brooks), Hillary Swank in "Boys Don't Cry" (1999, written and directed by Kimberly Pierce), Charlize Theron and Christina Ricci in "Monster" (2003, written and directed

by Patty Jenkins), Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhal in "Brokeback Mountain" (2005, based on a short play by Annie Proulx, directed by Ang Lee)<sup>1</sup>.

It is worth noting that the Lesbian characters above were either transgender who were murdered at the end, or a murderous hooker and were based on a true story. The first prime-time gay oriented television show, which was aired in the United States from 1998 - 2006, was the sitcom "Will and Grace". Despite initial criticism for its particular portrayal of homosexuals, the show aired for eight years and won numerous awards. In the British version of the show "Queer as Folk" in 1999, and the American version of it in 2001-2005; gay men were portrayed as mostly mainstream looking, however, leading very promiscuous lives. The only Lesbian representation on that show was of one Lesbian couple, which was stereotypical and fell into a "Butch and Femme" pattern. The show - "The L Word", which was aired in the US in 2004-2009, was the first time we saw mainstream looking Lesbians on prime time television. Although the show was aired on a niche channel, (Showtime) it was seen by both gay and straight women.

As a Lesbian film - maker, living in Israel, I notice that gay media awareness is extremely evolved in our country, despite the image of Israel as a mid-eastern, conservative society. I have noticed the tolerance towards that community, in prime time television shows such as "A Star is Born" (the Israeli version of American Idol) had two openly gay men on the jury and one transgender female singer (Dana International - who won the Eurovision Song Contest in 1998); and with the new "X Factor" arriving in Israel, one of the judges is an famous openly gay singer. However, the gay community, around the world, is still looked upon as one-Gay, Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender - LGBT. Why are we connected as a community? Is this even right? Why are all dark skinned people not connected? Or all Asian people? Or Spanish speaking people? Or white males or females.

This research was encountered with several books and films written about the male gay community and its representation in the media in Israel, such as: the award winning Israeli film - "Yossi and Jager" in 2002 (directed by Eythan Fox, written by Avner Bernheimer). The film portrays the secret love affair of two Israeli officers based in an IDF position on the Israeli-Lebanese border. The sequel to this film was released in 2012, and did not deal with forbidden gay relationships in the Israeli army- as the first film had, but showed an open and proud army, which does not care whether the characters were gay or not. In Professor Amit Kama's book, The Newspaper and the Closet: Israeli Gay Men's Communication Patterns, the author explains that the stigma gay men carry is just like a scar. He relates to the homosexuality stigma as a matter of manipulation. If a gay man decides to come out he is declared gay, and this declaration is a problematic concept. Freud

1 Ellen-American television sitcom that ran on the ABC Network from March 29, 1994 to July 22, 1998, producing 109 episodes. Queer as Folk: American and Canadian Television series co-production, produced by Showtime and Temple Street Productions, which was based on the British series of the same name produced by: Red Production Company for Channel 4, created by Russell T Davis. The American version was developed by Ron Cowen, Daniel Lipman and Tony Jonas. (The British version aired from 1999-2000, the American version from 2000-2005). The L Word: Produced by Ilene Chaiken, Steve Golin and Larry Kennar, written by Ilene Chaiken, Guinevre Turner, Cherie Dabis and Rose Troche. The show Aired on Showtime from 2004-2009. Lip Service: (2010) A British television serial drama portraying the lives of a group of Lesbians living in Glasgow, Scotland. The show debuted on BBC 3 on October 2010. South of Nowhere 2005-2008, created by Thomas W. Lynch. Michelle P (2006) Exes & Ohs. James Genn, Mina Shum. Venice, 2009, created by Crystal Chappel and Kim Turrisi. Tucky W (2010) Girl Girl Scene. Anyone But Me (2009-2012) written and directed by Tina Cesa Ward. Sugar Rush (2005), created by Katie Baxendale. We Have to Stop Now (2009-2010) written and directed by Ann Noble. Rosemary R (2009) Seeking Simone, Canada. "The Lovers and Friends Show", (2010), Grey's Anatomy, 2005-2012, created by Shonda Rhimes. Barron B, David SG (2009) Flash Forward. Ian B, Ryan M, Brad F (2009) Glee. Beverly Hills 90210, 2008-2012, created by Gabe Sachs, Jeff Judah, Darren Star and Rob Thomas. Gus Van Sant (1991) My own private idaho. Annie Proulx (2005) Brokeback Mountain. Patty Jenkins (2003) Monster. As good as it gets (1997) Written by Mark Andrew, directed by James L. Brooks. Boys don't cry (1999) written and directed by Kimberly Pierce. The Birdcage (1996) based on the play by Jean Poiret, directed by Mike Nichols. Philadelphia (1993) American film, written by Ron Nyswaner, directed by Jonathan Demme, produced by Jonathan Demme and Edward Saxton, distributed by Tristar Pictures.

called it "inversion" (1920) claiming it was a result of a failure to deal with the maturity process (Oedipus/Electra complex). Freud claims that gay men never addressed the complex; therefore a homosexual is a "third kind" - masculine female or feminine male. However, Freud referred to men. There are a variety of films, which represent the gay male community in Israel, there is also a gay film festival in Tel-Aviv once a year, but most of the representation is about gay men. Although in the past three years, there has been a small Lesbian film festival called "Lethal Lesbian" (even the name is stereotypical), which only addresses Lesbian audiences and not the majority of the population, unlike the gay film festival that attracts all kinds of audiences. Where is the Lesbian agenda? Professor Kama calls it "symbolic extinction" and blames Lesbians themselves. Moritz (1994) refers to "Lesbian extinction", when discussing the "gay" subject, it refers only to gay men, middle - upper class, white males. Furthermore, lesbians were never punished by law; no religious book ever referred to them and sexual intercourse between two women is not considered to be a sin, as opposed to gay men.

The stigma that comes with the word "Lesbian", automatically makes one imagine a woman who is masculine, ugly, fat and other unflattering qualities. While living in New York and visiting several European countries over the past decade, I have noticed that one can still find "Butch" Lesbians wherever you go, just like one can still find feminine gay men; surprisingly however, the majority of young Lesbians look straight. The need to stand out and scream "Queer" is no longer necessary. The question is - what came first, television shows like "The L word", which portrayed Lesbians as mainstream - straight looking, or Lesbians themselves, who got tired of living the stigma? Just like gay men, who do not necessarily need to scream Queer and be flamboyant, loud and extra feminine, they can be straight looking firemen, soldiers and policemen, and do not need to flaunt their sexual orientations to the world. Most research only focuses on gay men and their evolution and assimilation into modern society and there is very little research which explores the Lesbian point of view. Perhaps Lesbians do not have the urge to be prominent and simply wish to live their lives in peace and let other minorities fight for their rights. I believe we are at a place where sexual orientation is not the first thing one needs to know about a person, but part of a long list of details an overall complex personality. While looking at our modern international eclectic society, the need to stand out as individuals is stronger than ever. Our individuality means dressing a certain way, wearing our hair a certain way, showing our intellectual sophistication, level of education, family membership of some sort, our higher education achievements, economic state and the last thing on that long list is our sexual orientation. It is no longer necessary to present oneself as Queer at first and the rest of our complex personality second. Being gay is one of the last details people need to know about us, not because of shame, but because of its prevalence. This brings me to question whether Queer Theory is even relevant today.

## Literature Review

### Sexuality and identity of lesbians within queer culture

In this research, I explored only gay women-Lesbians. "Lesbian" is a term most widely used in the English language to describe sexual and romantic desire between females. The word may be used as a noun, to refer to women who identify themselves, or who are characterized by others as having the primary attribute of female homosexuality, or as an adjective, to describe characteristics of an object or activity related

to female same-sex desire. Lesbian as a concept used to differentiate women with a shared sexual orientation, is a 20th century construct. Throughout history, women have not had the freedom or independence to pursue homosexual relationships as men have, but neither have they met the harsh punishment in some societies as homosexual men did. Instead, Lesbian relationships have often been regarded as harmless and comparable to heterosexual ones. As a result, there is little documentation about it throughout history. When early sexologists in the late 19th century began to categorize and describe homosexual behavior, they distinguished Lesbians as women who did not adhere to female gender roles and categorized them as mentally ill.

Women in homosexual relationships responded to this designation either by hiding their personal lives or accepting the label of outcast and creating a subculture and identity that developed in Europe and the United States. With the second wave of feminism and growth of scholarship in women's history and sexuality in the 20th century, the definition of "Lesbian" broadened, sparking a debate about sexual desire as the major component to define what a Lesbian is. Women generally exhibit greater sexual fluidity than men and find it easier to become physically and emotionally intimate with other women. Portrayals of Lesbians in the media suggest that modern society, has been both intrigued and threatened by women who challenge feminine gender roles, and fascinated and appalled by women who are romantically involved with other women.

Lesbian relationships were documented as early as in 1870. The term was interchangeable with "Sapphist" and "Sapphism" around the turn of the 20th century. Sapphism is taken from the Greek Lesbian lyric poet Sappho, who was born on the island of Lesbos. The Alexandrians included her in their list of the nine lyric poets. Her birth was sometime between 630 and 612 BC, and it is said that she died around 570 BC, but little is known for certain about her life. The bulk of her poetry, which was well - known and greatly admired throughout antiquity, has been lost, but her immense reputation has endured through surviving fragments. The use of "Lesbian" in medical literature became prominent; by 1925 the word was recorded as a noun to mean the female equivalent of a sodomite. The development of medical knowledge was a significant factor in further connotations of the term. In the middle of the 19th century, medical writers attempted to establish ways to identify male homosexuality, which was considered a significant social problem in most Western societies. In categorizing behavior that indicated what was referred to as "inversion" by German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, researchers determined what was normal sexual behavior for men and women, and therefore to what extent men and women varied from the "perfect male sexual type" and the "perfect female sexual type".

While there is plenty of literature on male homosexuality, there is not enough focused on female homosexual behavior, because medical professionals never considered it a significant problem. Two noted exceptions are, Richard von Krafft-Ebbing, a German neurologist and sexologist noted for his studies of sexual deviance and Britain's Havelock Ellis, a British physician and psychologist, writer, and social reformer who studied human sexuality. He was co-author of the first medical textbook in English on homosexuality in 1897, and also published works on a variety of sexual practices and inclinations, including transgender psychology. He wrote some of the earliest and more enduring categorizations of female same sex attraction, approaching it as a form of insanity. Krafft-Ebbing, characterized Lesbianism as a neurological disease, and Ellis, who was influenced by Krafft-Ebbing's writings [3], disagreed about whether sexual inversion

was generally a lifelong condition. Ellis believed that many women who professed love for other women changed their feelings about such relationships after they married a man and lived a "practical life". Krafft-Ebbing presented Lesbianism as "Uranism" - which is a definition of homosexual behavior between two men, taken from the German word "Uranismus", taken from the Greek word "Ouranios", which means spiritual, heavenly and I believe, makes homosexuality look a little ironic. However, Ellis conceded that there were "true inverts" that spend their lives pursuing erotic relationships with women. These were members of the "Third Sex" who rejected the roles of women to be subservient, feminine, and domestic. "Invert" described the opposite gender roles and the related attraction to women instead of men; since women in the Victorian period were considered unable to initiate sexual encounters, women who did so with other women were thought of as possessing masculine sexual desires. The work of Krafft-Ebbing and Ellis was widely read, and helped to create public consciousness of female homosexuality.

### Butch and Femme-Defining the fundamental lesbian dichotomy

In this research, Gender Studies will relate to the classic definition of gender, while looking into a "Butch" and "Femme" pattern - as described by the LGBT community: masculine and feminine traits, behaviors, styles, expressions, and self-perception. Those specifications are often used in the Lesbian, bisexual and gay subcultures butch and femme can sometimes be used to categorize identities of gay or Lesbian individuals in terms that are recognized as analogous to heterosexual gender roles, with butch representing the traditionally masculine counterpart - the male role in heterosexual couples and femme representing the traditionally feminine role - the female role in heterosexual couples.

According to Goodloe [4] in the past two decades, the dominant form of feminist discourse has attempted to liberate Lesbian identity from patriarchal control, compel its own identity politics on the Lesbian community, resulting those Lesbians whose behaviors did not correlate to the feminist agenda being oppressed twice; once by the dominant patriarchal culture and again by the women's liberation movement. This is perhaps most obvious in the feminist critique of role playing among Lesbians, which is considered by dominant feminist discourse to be an obstacle to a woman's true identity. While some gay or Lesbian couples may comprise a butch-identified individual and a femme-identified individual, not all gays or Lesbians identify as "Butch" or "Femme". The word femme - is French and means woman; the word Butch means "rough boy" (tough kid). This Division was accepted in the 1930's. Femmes were dressed in feminine clothes, high heels and wore makeup, and Butches dressed in suits and hats and looked very manly. In the 1970's, feminists claimed that it was a submission to oppressive male perception. American historian Lillian Federman claims that this created an androgyny and a butch look (male) for women, who are not necessarily Lesbians. The criticism claims that these identities try to replicate heterosexuality by setting one male and one female, and there is no need to imitate heterosexuality in order to live happily. Although the first gay male film was made in 1894, the first Lesbian film "Mädchen in Uniform" was made only in 1931, in Germany, and then remade in Germany in 1958. However, there is no explicit Butch and Femme distribution there, but the teacher is the more masculine, cold and calculated

character - butch. These specifications are true for the 20th century and earlier, where you could openly see butch and femme couples, both in the night scene and in various media, in such films as - "Bound" and "Go Fish", however, in the past decade, these patterns can be seen less and less, since Lesbians no longer divide themselves into butch and femme categories, but as individual feminist women who love women, and do not take male roles upon themselves<sup>2</sup>.

### Queer Identity-The queer theory and its relevance today

In the late 1980s, Judith Butler began lecturing regularly on the topic of gender identity and, in 1990, she published her work "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity" [5]. Butler's central thesis argued that gender identity does not oppose sexual biology but performs the possibility of something otherwise than male or female. "Gender Trouble" is often regarded as the most groundbreaking work on feminist theory and gender studies. The term "Queer Theory" was introduced in 1990, with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich and Diana Fuss, following the work of Michel Foucault, being among its initial proponents [6,7]. Teresa de Lauretis is the one who invented the phrase "Queer Theory". It was at a working conference on Lesbian and gay sexualities that was held at the University of California, Santa Cruz in February 1990 that de Lauretis first made mention of the phrase. She later introduced the phrase in a 1991 special issue of "Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies", entitled "Queer Theory, Lesbian and Gay Sexualities." Similar to the description Berube and Escoffier used for Queer Nation, de Lauretis (1994) asserted that, "Queer unsettles and questions the genderness of sexuality". According to Halperin [2] "Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative" [2]. Queer theorists focus on problems in classifying individuals as either male or female, even on a strictly biological basis. Some key experts in the study of culture, such as Barbara Rogoff [8], argue that the traditional distinction between biology and culture as independent entities is overly simplistic, pointing to the ways in which biology and culture interact with one another. Queer Theory is likened to language because it is never static, but is ever evolving. Richard Norton suggests that the existence of queer language is believed to have evolved from the imposing of structures and labels from an external mainstream culture. Queer theorists analyze texts and challenge the cultural notions of "straight" ideology; that is, does straight imply heterosexuality as normal or is everyone potentially gay? According to Ryan, "It is only the laborious imprinting of heterosexual norms that cuts away those potentials and manufactures heterosexuality as the dominant sexual format [9]. For example, Hollywood pursues the "straight" theme as being the dominant theme to outline what masculine is. This is particularly noticeable in gangster films, action films and westerns, which never have a "weak" (gay looking) man playing the hero, with the recent exception of the film "Brokeback Mountain".

### Overview of mainstreamism in the media

Most research in this area focused on traditional culture in women's genres, such as soap operas, novels, women's journals and female studies such as Ang [10], Currie [11], Frazer [12], Modleski [13] and Radway [14]. These female scholars have argued that women's attitude

<sup>2</sup> Bound A (1996) American film, Written and directed by: Andy and Lana Wachowsky. Rose T, Guinevere T (1994) Go Fish.



towards popular texts, stem from the awareness of self-reflection. Furthermore, it is assumed that these texts and women's ideology fight against the patriarchal and capitalist hegemony ideology while being positioned within it. Buckingham [15] emphasized the ways in which complex interaction with texts contributes to identities, including gender-specific word identities. As a general rule, therefore, communication is taken, as of reception, in which the process of incessant construction of woman's identity occurs.

In Lasswell's [16] linear model, he described this communication through the following questions: who says what, what channel is used, to whom and with what affect? A single person originates an operation, the message is what we want to transmit and the platform (television, cinema or internet) is the communication means. In this case who, is a line of filmmakers wanting to say, "Lesbians, we are here", the message they want to convey with "The L Word" is, in my opinion - we need to look at our lives, they are not much different than yours. The recipient whether an individual or the general public is affected by the change, and receives the message. However it is here that I think the series failed, because most of its audience was from the Lesbian community itself. However, the series ran six seasons so perhaps, something did penetrate beyond the Lesbian community. The prevailing opinion of the 1940's was the hypodermic syringe theory, in which the media influences recipients, who are passive and unable to resist directly. The influence of the media everywhere is the same, the creator controls the process. It connects us to the theory of socialization, which has a strong influence. The theory is concerned with processes through which an individual learns his or her position in society. This is a slow and almost constant process, during which a person acquires society's core values and norms. Selective exposure is where a recipient decides for various reasons, to what to be exposed. Different people, exposed to the same content, have a different perspectives and interpretations of the same media product (framing). When exploring different media types, one has to relate to different media theories that have been used to define mass media. The first theory on which my research is based is the Structural Functional Theory of Lazarsfeld and Merton. This is a system consisting of structures or sub systems, and a structure designed to fulfill at least one role. For example, the series "The L Word" aims to fill a "hole", demand or deficiency in the Lesbian community. Media, especially mass media, helps create coordination between many structures in the masses. From this distinction, mass media is a social structure, which coordinates between the different social structures and assists in the operation of entire system discourse. Raviv [17] explains it as something that is observed between the two components of the Apotheosis: worship (deification), which means idol worship and glorification, and imitation of model (modeling) defined as a desire to be like an idol. These behaviors are promoted, supported and rewarded by adolescents as well as the music industry. The most common form of deification is worship, expressed in consumption and collection of information about operations [17]. In the case of adult women seeking to imitate characters, I suppose worship is expressed more in physical image. If Lesbians, until now, had been presented in a manly, butch manner, because that was acceptable, with the arrival of the series, Lesbians have the legitimacy to look more feminine - straight looking, just like the women presented in the series. Starting with hairstyles similar to some of the stars of the series, which seemed to take effect with younger audience members, and continuing with the way they dressed and accessorized. The recipients, either individuals or the community with whom the series was a deliberate act of communication, were affected by the changes taking place and, as a

result, received the message. Here the series failed, since the majority of its audience were Lesbians - the community itself. Nevertheless the series ran for six seasons, meaning someone had funded it and so perhaps the series did manage to penetrate beyond the small Lesbian community. This model was perfected by Braddock, who claimed that one message may have different communicative values in different circumstances. The prevailing view in the 1940's was the syringe theory, which talks about communicating a message with a subcutaneous needle. The media has a direct effect, the recipient is passive and unable to resist. Media influence is similar everywhere, the sender controls the process. It connects us to the theory of socialization. The theory deals with processes by which the individual learns to function in society. This is as low and almost constant process, in which a person acquires key norms and values of the society around him. Selective exposure, where a recipient decides what he is exposed to for various reasons and the perception is selective, in which different people are exposed to the same content, but interpret them in different ways according to their worldview (framing). According to Raymond in 1995, Larry Gross [18] used the term "symbolic annihilation" to describe the invisibility of gays and Lesbians in mass media; if, as Gross suggested, representation attaches to power, then that invisibility evidences the powerlessness of the queer community. Even media studies sensitive to portrayals of minorities in the media [19] tended to focus mostly on ethnic and racial minorities and to ignore sexual orientation as a defining aspect of identity. According to Gross, gays and Lesbians tend to be even more isolated and invisible than members of racial and ethnic minorities and are therefore probably the least permitted to speak for ourselves in the mass media." However, this was in 1995, and since then, as not only my research shows, but is clearly visible to us all in television shows around the world, LGBT characters are everywhere [20-26].

### Film-Establishing stereotypes and shattering them

It all started when gay men revolutionized and changed the way the world perceives gay men; when straight, well-known actors played gay characters in different films such as: River Phoenix in "My own Private Idaho" (1991, based on a William Shakespeare play, adjusted for screen and directed by - Gus Van Sant) Tom Hanks in the movie "Philadelphia" in 1993 (directed by: Jonathan Demme, Written by: Ron Nyswaner), Robin Williams in "The Birdcage" (1996, based on the play by Jean Poiret, directed by Mike Nichols) Greg Kinnear in "As Good as it Gets" (1997, written by Mark Andrews, directed by James L. Brooks) Hillary Swank in "Boys Don't Cry" (1999, written and directed by Kimberly Pierce, Appendix 1) Chazelle Theron and Christina Ricci in "Monster" (2003, written and directed by Patty Jenkins Appendix 2) Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal in "Brokeback Mountain" (2005, based on a short play by Annie Proulx, directed by Ang Lee). Note that the Lesbian characters were either transgender who were murdered at the end, or a murderous hooker. Gay men were always the backbone of Hollywood, the first allegedly gay film documented was created in 1894, called "The Dickson Experimental Sound Film", directed by William Dickson, showing him playing the violin, while two men are dancing together. Although the "gayness" of the film is in dispute, it is the first gay oriented documented sound film. Gay male films were common all over the world from the 1920's to this day. However, Lesbian films have only been documented starting from 1931 [27-33].

Gay and Lesbian concerns and characters often found more varied (and less pejorative) representations outside the Hollywood industry, in foreign, experimental, and documentary filmmaking. One of the

first films ever to feature homosexual love as its theme was the Swedish film "Vingarne" (Wings 1916 directed by Mauritz Stiller). Carl Theodor Dreyer's "Mikaël" (1924), filmed in Germany a few years later, and was drawn from the same source novel. In fact, Weimar Germany was home to gay directors like Murnau (Nosferatu 1922) and produced the first film to make a plea for homosexual rights and freedom. "Anders als die Anderen" (Different from the Others, 1919) was made in conjunction with early sexologist and gay rights pioneer Magnus Hirschfeld. A few years later G. W. Pabst's famous film - "Pandora's Box" (1929) featured a Lesbian subplot. When looking at Lesbian film representation, it seems as if in the 1930's version, the representation was extremely negative and the story line was manipulated into a non-consensual relationship between a student and a teacher. However, in the American 2006 version, the relationship authority seems a bit vague and thus consensual when perhaps the most well-known German film of this era to deal with homosexuality was "Mädchen in Uniform" (Girls in uniform) (Leontine Sagan 1931 Appendix 3, Appendix 4), a film about a schoolgirl's crush on her teacher, which was a remake in 1958. It should be noted that if and when these films played in America, they were often censored in ways that elided their homosexual content. A similar modern American version of that film called "Loving Annabelle" was released in 2006 (Appendix 5). However, in all these early films - Lesbians were portrayed as normal, straight looking. In the 1970's, prolific Lesbian feminist filmmaker Barbara Hammer began to make short experimental films. Her early work, made in and around San Francisco, captures the feel and spirit of the 1970's Lesbian feminist community, as it was then defining itself. Other Lesbian feminists of the 1970's, including Greta Schiller ("Greta's Girls" 1978) and Jan Oxenberg ("Home Movie" 1973), made films that documented the movement, and more recent experimental work by Su Friedrich, Michelle Citron, Michelle Parkerson and Sadie Benning, forge important links to the New Queer Cinema movement of the 1990s<sup>3</sup>.

Films of the 1960's and 1970, such as "The Killing of Sister George" (1968 Appendix 6), based on a 1964 play by Frank Marcus and adapted as a 1968 film directed by Robert Aldrich and written by Lukas Heller and Frank Marcus. "Sister George" is a BBC soap opera character that is "killed off" due to low ratings. The aging actress who portrays Sister George is a Lesbian living with a childish middle-aged woman named Childie, who works in a factory when not playing with her doll collection. Conflict arises between the two lovers when the hard-nosed BBC female program director, who told George of her canceled part, also steals Childie away. As consolation for losing both her job and her lover, George is offered the voice part of a puppet cow in a new animated cartoon series [34-49]. Mainstream films with openly Lesbian content, sympathetic Lesbian characters and Lesbian leads began appearing during the 1990's. By 2000 some films portrayed characters exploring issues beyond their sexual orientation, reflecting a wider sense that Lesbianism has to do with more than sexual desire. Notable mainstream theatrical releases included "Bound" (1996 Appendix 7), "Chasing Amy" (1997, Appendix 8), "Wild Things" (1998), "Kissing Jessica Stein" (2001), "Lost and Delirious" (2001), "Mulholland Drive", "Monster" (2003), "D.E.B.S" (2004), "Rent" (2005, based on the Jonathan Larson musical), "My Summer of Love" (2004), "Loving Annabelle" (2006) and "Imagine Me & You" (2005). There have also been many non - English language Lesbian films, such as "Fire" (India, 1996), "Show Me Love" (Sweden, 1998 known as "Fucking Amal"), "Aimée & Jaguar" (Germany, 1999), "Blue" (Japan, 2001), "The Mars Canon" (Japan, 2002), "Blue Gate Crossing" (Taiwan, 2004), "Butterfly" (Hong Kong, 2004), "Love My Life" (Japan, 2006) and "Les Filles du Botaniste" (France/Canada, 2006) (Tables 1-4)<sup>4</sup>.

## Research Methodology: Mixed-Method Research

### Film - categorizing various relevant films 1931-2013

Stage 1	Quantitative	2 Closed-ended questionnaires with responses from Israeli, American and western European women
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<sup>3</sup> Die Büchse der Pandora: Pandora's Box, 1929. A German silent film based loosely on Frank Wedekind's play Erdgeist (Earth Spirit, 1895 ) and Die Büchse der Pandora (1904) Directed by Australian filmmaker Georg Wilhelm Pabst. Mädchen in Uniform (Girls in Uniform) (1931). German film based on the novel and play "Gestern und heute" by Christa Winsloe and directed by Leontine Sagan, Produced by Carl Froelich. A remake of the film was made in 1958 by Geza Von Radavanyi. Greta's Girls: A 1978 American film, Directed by Greta Schiller and Thomas Seid. Jan Oxenberg (1973) Home movie.

<sup>4</sup> Lost and Delirious: (2001). Candian film, directed by Lea Pool and based on the novel The Wives Bath, by Susan Swan. Apples (2007) Olga Marti, directed by Alfonso Diaz Andres als die Abderen: Different from Others, 1919, is a German film produced during the Weimar Republic, written by: Max Fassbender and directed by: Richard Oswald. Far Out, (2009) created by Faye Hughes. "FEED", (2008) created by Mel Robertson, Piper K (2012) Frequency. GIA: A 1998 HBO Television Movie, Written by: Jay McNerney and Michael, Cristofer, directed by: Michael Cristofer. Aryka Randall (2012) Girl Play. Lisa C (1988) High Art. I Hate Tommy Finch, 2012, If These Walls Could Talk (1996). Directed by Cher (segment "1996"); Nancy Savoca (segments "1952" and "1974"); Writing credits (WGA) Pamela Wallace (story) (segment "1952") & Earl W. Wallace (story) (segment "1952") and Nancy Savoca (story) (segment "1952") Nancy Savoca (teleplay) (segment "1952") Susan Nanus (written by) (segment "1974") and Nancy Savoca (written by) (segment "1974") I. Marlene King (story) (segment "1996"); I. Marlene King (teleplay) (segment "1996") and Nancy Savoca (teleplay) (segment "1996"). Le Deuxième Sexe: The Second Sex 1949 Simone de Beauvoir. Katherine B, Karen K (2006) Loving Anabelle. Pam Rosenthal, "Another Take on Pride And Prejudice", History Hoydens, William D (1928) Sex in chains. TH3M (2010) Created by Tye Green. Lisa Cholodenko (2010) The kids are all right. Tellofilms.com productions. The Throwaways (2012), 3way (2008). The Watermelon Woman: A 1996 American film, written and directed by: Cheryl Dunye. The theory of sex - (1920) Sigmund Freud based on work by Wilhelm Fliess. Viégner, M. "The only haircut that makes sense anymore," in Queer Looks: Lesbian & Gay Experimental Media (Routledge, New York: 1993) & "Kinky Escapades, Bedroom Techniques, Unbrid. Vingarne: Wings - a Swedish silent film from 1916, directed by Mauritz Stiller. It is based on a 1902 novel by Herman Bang's - **Mikaël**, which was used for the film Michael, by Carl Theodor Dreyer in 1924. Will and Grace (1998 - 2006), American sitcom from NBC. Yossi and Jagger: (2002) Israeli film written by Avner Bernheimer, Directed by Eathan Fox.

<b>Stage 2</b>	Quantitative	Small convenience sample focus group of Israeli women only. Structured interviews with women from missing age groups to reach theoretical saturation.
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**Table 1:** Categorization.

Film	Year	Country	Type	True Story	Positive/ Negative	Butch Femme	Enviornment	Occupation
in Woman Uniform	1931 1958	Germany	Drama	No	Negative	No	Bad	Student teacher
Sister George	1968	USA	TV	No	Negative	No	Bad	Actress
Home Movie	1973	USA	Docu	Yes	Negative	Yes	Bad	
Greta's Girls	1978	USA	Docu	Yes	Negative	Yes	Bad	
Personal Best	1982	USA	Drama	Yes	Positive	Yes	Bad	Athlete
Silkwood	1983	USA	Drama	Yes	Positive	Yes		Worker
Lianna	1983	USA	Drama	No	Positive	Yes	Bad	Housewife
Desert Hearts	1985	USA	Drama	No	Positive	Yes	Good	Professor
Even Cowgirls get the Blues	1993	USA	Drama Comedy	No	Positive	Yes	Good	Model
Film	Year	Country	Type	True Story	Positive/ Negative	Butch Femme	Enviornment	Occupation
Go Fish	1994	USA	Docu Drama	No	Positive	yes	Good	Student
Heavenly Creatures	1994	New Zeland	Drama	yes	Negative	No	Bad	Teens
Bra Girls	1994	USA	Drama Comedy	No	Positive	Yes	good	
The Incredible Story of 2 Girls in Love	1995	USA	Drama	No	Negative	Yes	Bad	Teens
oundB	1996	USA	Crime	No	Negative	Yes	Bad	Housewife
Fucking Amal	1998	Sweden	drama	No	Negative	Yes	Bad	Teens
Gia	1998	USA	TV	Yes	Negative	No	Bad	Model
High Art	1998	USA	drama	No	Negative	Yes	Bad	Photographer
Aimée and Jaguar	1999	germany	drama	No	Negative	No	Bad	Housewife
But I'm a Cheerleader	1999	USA	Comedy	No	Negative	yes	bad	Student
If These Walls Could Talk 2	2000	USA	TV	No	Negative	Yes	Bad	
Kissing Jessica Stein	2001	USA	Comedy	No	Positive	No	Good	Copy Editor
Lost and Delirious	2001	Canada	Drama	No	Negative	No	Bad	Student
Monster	2003	USA	Drama	Yes	Negative	Yes	Bad	Prostitute
My summer of Love	2004	UK	Drama	No	Negative	No	bad	Teens
Film	Year	Country	Type	True Story	Positive/ Negative	Butch Femme	Enviornment	Occupation
Les Filles de Botaniste	2006	France	Drama	No	Negative	No	Bad	Students

		Canada						
Spider Lilies	2007	Taiwan	Drama	No	Positive	No	Good	Teens
Love My Life	2007	Japan	Manga Based action	No	Negative	No	Bad	Student
The Secrets	2007	Israel	Drama	No	Negative	No	Bad	Students
I Can't think Straight	2008	USA	Drama	No	Negative	No	Bad	Housewife
The Kids are All Right	2010	USA	Drama	No	Positive	Yes	Good	Professor Artist
So Hard to Forget	2010	Brazil	Drama	No	Positive	No	Good	Teens
The 3 Veils	2011	USA	Drama	No	Negative	No	Bad	Teens
Cloudburst	2011	USA	Drama	No	Positive	Yes	Bad	Elderly
A Perfect Ending	2012	USA	Drama	No	Negative	No	Bad	Housewife
Blue is the Warmest Color	2013	France	Drama	No	Positive	No	Good	Teens

**Table 2:** Films.

Name	Year	Country	Type	Character	Positive/ Negative	Butch Femme	Environment	Theme
All My Children	1970-2011	USA	Soap	Bianca	Positive	No	Good	Straight
L.A. Law	1986-1994	USA	Drama	C.J	Positive	No	Good	Straight
90210	1990-2013	USA	Drama	Gia	Positive	No	Good	Straight
Friends	1994-2004	USA	Comedy	Carol	Positive	Yes	Bad	Straight
Ellen	1994-1998	USA	Comedy	Ellen	Positive	Yes	Bad	Straight
Party of Five	1994-2000	USA	Drama	Julia	Positive	No	Bad	Straight
Ally Mcbeal	1997-2002	USA	Drama	Alley	Positive	No	Good	Straight
Buffy the Vampire Slayer	1997-2003	USA	Sci Fi	Willow	Positive	No	Good	Straight
Sex and the city	1998-2004	USA	Drama Comedy	Samantha	Positive	No	Good	Straight
Queer as Folk	2001-2005	USA	Drama	All	Positive	Yes	Good	Gay
Fast Lane	2002-2003	USA	Action	Billie	Positive	No	Good	Straight
The Wire	2002-2008	USA	Drama	Kima	Positive	Yes	Good	Straight
The OC	2003-2007	USA	Drama	Alex	Positive	No	Good	Straight
The Ellen Show	2003-2013	USA	Talk Show	Ellen	Positive	Yes	Good	Straight
The L Word	2004-2009	USA	Drama	All	Positive	No	Good	Gay
South of Nowhere	2005-2008	USA	Drama	Spencer	Positive	No	Good	Straight
Sugar Rush	2005-2006	UK	drama	Kim	Positive	No	Good	Gay
True Blood	2008-2013	USA	Sci Fi	Suki	Positive	No	Good	Straight
Chicago Fire	2012 - present	USA	Action	Leslie	Positive	No	Good	Straight
Lip Service	2009-2012	Scotland	Drama	All	Positive	No	Good	Gay



Glee	2009-2013	USA	Drama	Britanny	Positive	No	Good	Straight
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**Table 3:** TV shows variables.

Name	Year	Country	Type	Race	Positive/ Negative	Butch Femme	Environme nt	Youtube exposure
Exes & Ohs	2006	USA	Drama	White	Positive	No	Good	Minimal
Girltrash	2007	USA	Drama Comedy	White	Positive	No	Good	Good
Apples	2007	Spain	Drama	European	Positive	No	Good	Good
Anyone but Me	2008	USA	Drama	White	Positive	No	Good	Excellent
Time Traveling Lesbian	2008	USA	Comedy	white	Positive	Yes	Good	Minimal
Feed	2008	USA	Drama	White	Positive	No	Good	Good
way	2008	USA	Comedy	White	Positive	No	Good	Excellent
Chica Busca Chica	2008	Spain	Drama	European	Positive	No	Good	Excellent
Venice	2009	USA	Drama	White	Positive	No	Good	Excellent
J.B. Fletcher	2009	Canada	Action Comedy	White	Positive	yes	Good	Minimal
Seeking Simone	2009	Canada	Comedy	White	Positive	No	Good	Good
Far Out	2009	UK	Drama	Homogenic	Positive	Yes	Good	Mininal
We have to Stop Now	2010	USA	Drama	White	Positive	No	good	Good
Girl Girl Scene	2010	USA	Drama	White	Positive	No	Good	Good
Out with Dad	2010	Canada	Drama		Positive	Yes	Good	Good
Name	Year	Country	Type	Race	Positive/ Negative	Butch Femme	Environmen t	Youtube exposure
TH3M	2010	USA	Drama	Homogenic	Positive	Yes	Good	Good
Lovers and Friends	2010	USA	Drama	Black	Positive	Yes	Good	Good
Frequency	2012	USA	Sci Fi	White	Positive	Yes	Good	Minimal
The Throwaways	2012	USA	Drama	White	Positive	Yes	Bad	Minimal
I Hate Tommy Finch	2012	USA	Drama	White	Positive	No	Good	Minimal
Orange is the New Black	2013 now	- USA	Drama	White	Positive	Yes	Both	Good

**Table 4:** Web series variables.

## Findings

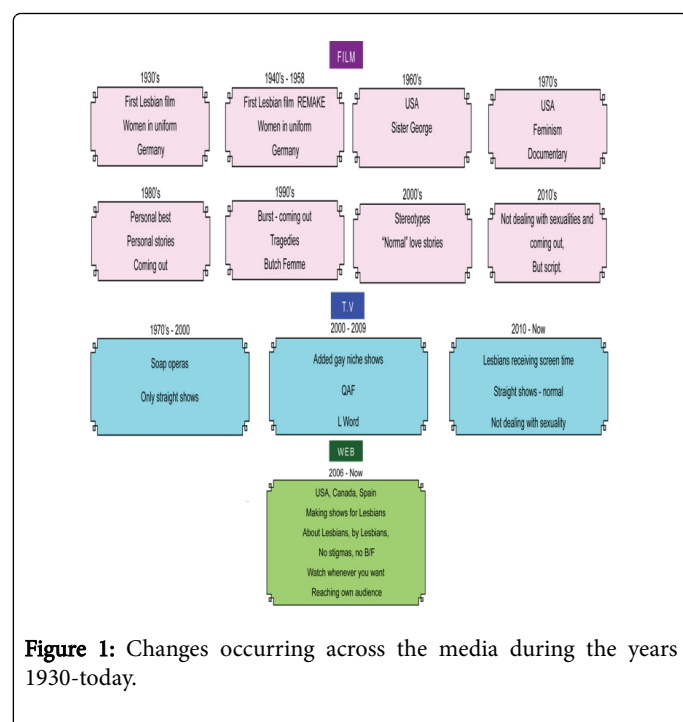
The findings emerging from this study portray the changes that occurred during the years 1930 until today regarding the representation of lesbians across the various media [50-61] (Figures 1-4).

### Film

Analyzing the 35 different films I chose to integrate in my research, I found that 73% of the films were American, 6% Canadian, and 1% other countries such as – New Zeeland, Germany, Taiwan, Japan, Israel and Brazil.

66% were dramatic films, 33% documentaries, 10% comedy and 6% made for television. 76% were not based on a true story, 63% had a butch and femme categorization of its main character, 66% presented lesbians in a negative light and only 33% showed them in a positive one.

In 63% of the films the close environment of the main character did not accept or react well to their being gay. And finally, 36% of the main characters were teenage girls or students, only 6% were educated, 16% were housewives, and 6% models, artists, athletes or prostitutes.



### Television

Author found that 90% of the television shows were American, 5% British, and 5% Scottish. 65% were considered Drama, 10% Comedy, 10% Sci Fi, 5% -Action, Day time Soap or Talk shows. On TV, only 25% had a butch and femme categorization of its main characters, and unlike Film, 100% presented lesbians in a positive way. In 85% of the shows the close environment of the main character accepted or reacted well to them being gay. And finally, 75% of the researched television shows had a straight theme, and the gay characters were secondary, or had recurring roles, or their "gay story" was told within the main theme.

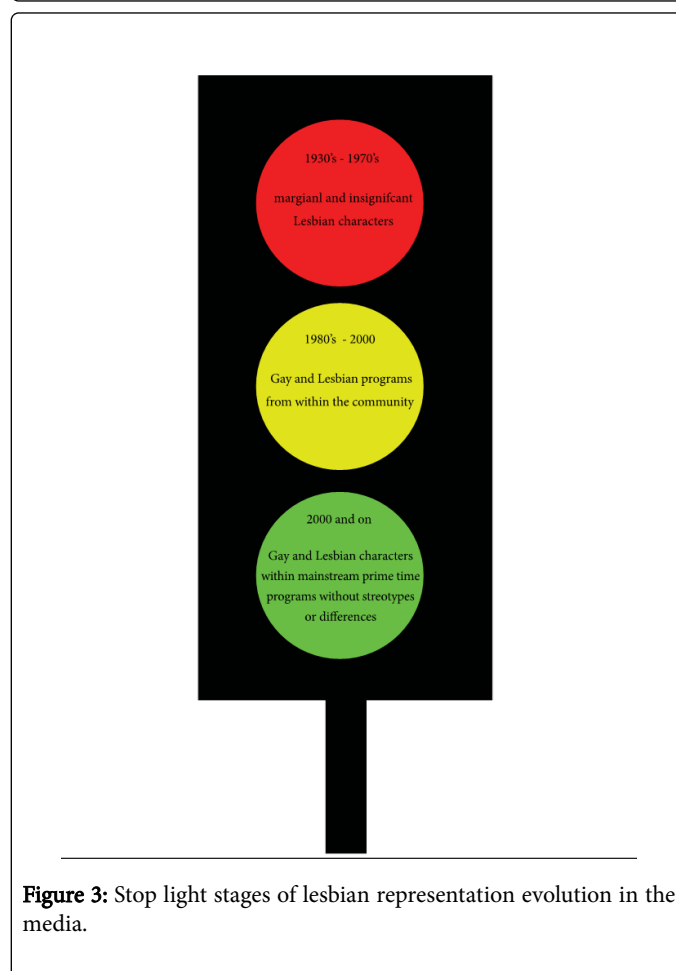
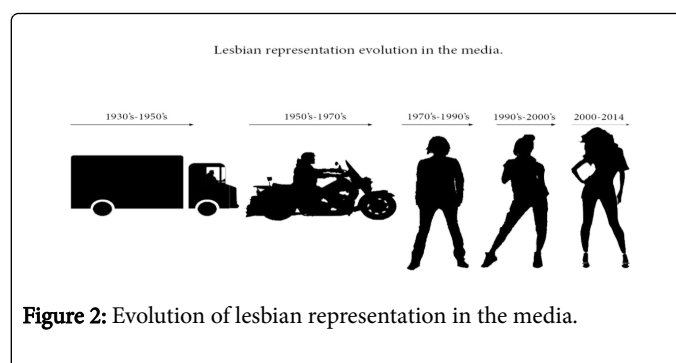
### Web

Author found that 75% were American productions, 5% British, 10% from Spain and 10% Canadian. 85% of the web series were considered Drama 5% Sci Fi and only 10% Comedy. 70% featured White actresses, 10% Homogeneous, 10% Spanish – European, 5% Latino and 5% Black. Only 35% had a butch and femme categorization of their main characters, and 95% presented lesbians in a positive way.

In 95% of the shows the close environment of the main character accepted or reacted well to them being gay. And finally, 35% had minimal exposure, 45% had good exposure and only 20% had excellent exposure.

Figure 1 shows the shattering of stereotypes and patterns throughout the years and the evolution of the Lesbian characters within the various types of media, leaving prejudice behind and mainstreaming into mainstream, by shattering stereotypes over time.

Thus mainstreamism is all around us and will continue to grow and perhaps expose other marginalized groups into the mainstream awareness in the future.



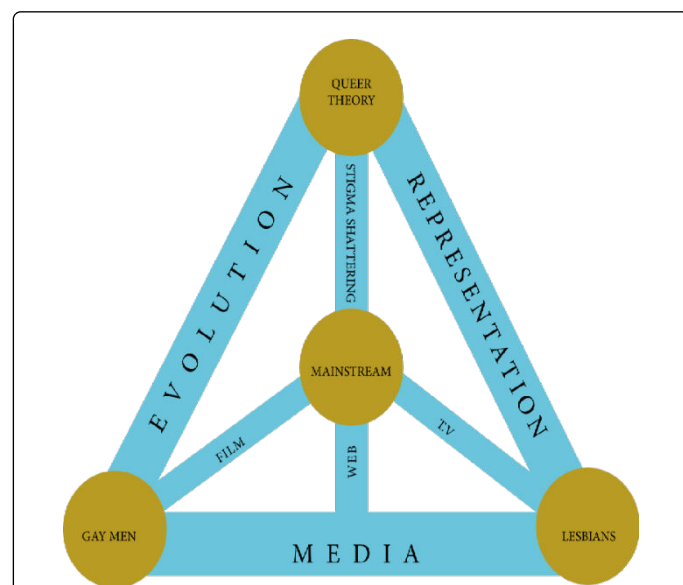
Gay and Lesbians characters have integrated in the various media throughout the years, showing the opening of possibilities for the Gay and Lesbian community throughout all media types during the years 1930's until today:

“Red light” showing that lesbian characters were marginal and insignificant in various films all around the western world.

“Yellow light” Gay and Lesbian programs, both in experimental films came within the LGBT community, thus still marginalizing the community and keeping them at a “safe” distance from mainstream media and the heterosexual eye.

“Green light” showing Gay and Lesbian characters within mainstream prime time television programs, films and web series free

of stereotypes and given equal screen time and exposure in a positive way as heterosexual characters.



**Figure 4:** A model of lesbian mainstream representation evolution in the media.

## Conclusion

Figure 4 illustrates how it all comes together in a very simple model: Everything leads to mainstream. How gay men and Lesbians have come together, taking different evolutionary paths to media representation over the years, putting the different types of media in the middle of it all (film, TV and web) – while laying the differences between them pros and cons and how they reveal the evolution of the media revealing how the media itself opened its doors to Gay and Lesbian characters, while shattering stigmas and stereotypes, thus leaving the traditional, old fashioned, straight based butch and femme distribution patterns and moving into mainstream awareness, not only in the media, but in society itself, thus showing that queer theory is no longer relevant in the year 2014.

That being said, this model and basically this entire research is relevant, unfortunately, only to modern western countries such as: United States, Western Europe and Israel.

Like a volcano on the verge of erupting, the evolution of media representation of Lesbians has, and continues to erupt through Queer Theory, leaving behind a large cloud of dust, resulting in the theory's irrelevance in the 21st century.

Since we are all queer, or individuals, as we like to be regarded to nowadays, the term queer is no longer whatever is at odds with the normal, but a consensus of a modern society that screams individuality and uniqueness.

The intrusion of the Internet into modern life, destroying privacy and creating a single, overbearingly powerful culture is raising a generation of people well aware of their uniqueness, distinctions, abilities and aspirations.

## Contribution to Knowledge

This research contributed to theory by closing the gap in knowledge regarding lesbian representation evolution in the media. Additionally, the research added to knowledge by creating a change in the perception of Queer theory, while portraying this theory as irrelevant when it comes to describe lesbians' representation in the media as approaching the mainstream. Thus, a change in the perception of Queer as a social phenomenon will occur, by understanding that 'queer' is no longer a sexual oriented definition. Within modern society adopting a culture that advocates for individuality and uniqueness, being queer can no longer be considered as being whatever is at odds with the normal. Since this topic has never been researched before, this is an original and an innovative research, as it developed a model of Lesbian Mainstream Representation Evolution in the Media.

## Limitations and Future Research

This entire research is relevant unfortunately only to western modern countries such as: United States, Western Europe and Israel.

While attending and lecturing in The Asian Conference on Arts and Humanities in Osaka Japan this April, I was deeply enchanted by their culture and manners.

I realized that I would like to explore Lesbian media representation in the Japanese culture throughout their abundant, fascinating and traditional history.

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