

## Conclusion: The Commercialisation of Diversity

The entanglements of heteronormativity, homonormativity, and hegemonic masculinity have wide-reaching ramifications for the formation of queer subjectivities. *Queer Enough?* sought to carve out how these notions materialise in popular culture such as contemporary LGBTQIAN+-themed cinema. My findings give valuable insights into LGBTQIAN+ films that, on the one hand, take a critical stance towards heteronormative structures in society, but, on the other hand, reproduce parameters that limit the representation of the LGBTQIAN+ community. The main aim was to show the ways in which important moments and agents of LGBTQIAN+ history are depicted and made consumable for mainstream heteronormative audiences, especially following the release of *Brokeback Mountain*. I started with the assumption that there is a fundamental difference between *queer cinema* and *LGBTQIAN+ cinema*. While the latter merely describes the representation of LGBTQIAN+ themes or characters, queer cinema considers *the ways in which* they are represented and critically engages with, or possibly deconstructs (hetero)normative structures.

The exemplary analysis of the films *Howl*, *Milk*, and *Stonewall* served to refine this differentiation, by looking into the films' engagement with queer representation. They ensue from a development in queer cinema history that made the introduction of LGBTQIAN+ themes possible in mainstream Hollywood. Most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century cinema censored any depiction of LGBTQIAN+ characters or showed them in a stigmatising and discriminatory fashion (cf. Russo 59; 122). It was not before the 1980s and 90s that a queer political agenda was represented in cinema, engendering the phenomenon of New Queer Cinema (cf. B. R. Rich *Cinema* xix). Drawing from these developments, the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought forward new possibilities for representations of queer subjectivities and eventually LGBTQIAN+ themes were targeted at heteronormative audiences (cf. B. R. Rich *Cinema* 185). Simultaneously, LGBTQIAN+ cinema might in turn have influenced the heteronormative mainstream and opened it up for queer themes beyond the realm of independent cinema (cf. Nowlan 16). Moreover, popular films depicting the LGBTQIAN+ community are capable of subverting and possibly even deconstructing heteronormative structures, regardless of whether they belong to independent cinema or mainstream Hollywood. The heightened

incorporation of LGBTQIAN+ films into the mainstream U.S. film industry, however, led to an increasing commercialisation of films with LGBTQIAN+ content and hence an intertwining of hegemonic structures of neoliberalism with their production and marketing (cf. Knecht 6). LGBTQIAN+ themes have thereby been assimilated to heteronormativity. The three films analysed in *Queer Enough?* are emblematic for this contradiction. As they show important political achievements of the LGBTQIAN+ liberation movement in the U.S. and are marketed to heterosexual audiences, they tie in with the question of assimilation and/ or subversion. Indicative to this is how the films highlight and partially deconstruct the negative impact of heteronormative structures on the protagonists by re-enacting their emancipation. Negotiating their sexuality and gendered identity with hegemonic masculinity and the generic representations of the genius, rebel, and martyr archetypes became central for addressing the films' engagement with the history of LGBTQIAN+ liberation. Moreover, exploring the gaze helped me to delineate to what extent the films make use of common clichés and stereotypes and whether these are considered critically or are rather used as a means of 'othering' in order to merely offer the (heteronormative) viewer a mark of recognition. In this, I considered how the films (miss)represent and marginalise members of the LGBTQIAN+ community coming from non-white ethnic backgrounds, Blacks, lesbians, trans\*, and drag queens, by foregrounding white, middle-class, cis-male homosexuals. My findings are located at this trajectory and suggest that the films sustain a hegemonic divide regarding the LGBTQIAN+ community. The aim was to find out whether the selected films criticise the understanding of norms that uphold the hegemony of heterosexuality, but unwittingly reproduce homonormative parameters that limit the representation of homosexual men to a certain, heteronormatively shaped image. As part of popular culture, films are ideally suited to highlight and critically question social and cultural structures. In addition, the three films depict important moments or agents of LGBTQIAN+ history (e.g. the gay liberation movement) and thereby connect contemporary culture with the legacy of the 1960s and '70s. With the incorporation of LGBTQIAN+ themed films in mainstream Hollywood and the ensuing commodification of queer themes and characters, I posit that the possibilities for queer representation unfolded and at the same time tapered off. Before outlining the scope of these findings and affiliate them with the historical context of queer cinema, it is worthwhile revising the theoretical and methodological framework educed in *Queer Enough?*.

The theoretical basis of *Queer Enough?* is informed by postmodern (de-)constructivist as well as queer-feminist theories and extended by methodological approaches referring to narrative structure, cinematography, and normative viewing patterns. Next to heteronormativity, i.e. the social consensus that defines heterosexuality as the unquestioned norm, the innovative concept of homonormativity, coined by Lisa Duggan, has moved into the focus of gender research. It helps to grasp the tendency of heteronormativity to tolerate individuals and practices from the LGBTQIAN+ community that appear to diverge little from the heteronormative standards, making them seem almost 'heteronormalised.' Thus, the concept of homonormativity allows for an enhanced understanding of the ways in which hegemonic power structures shape these mechanisms of adaptation to dominant heteronormative culture, defining within the group of LGBTQIAN+ individuals what is perceived as 'normal' while marginalising anything deviating from it. These insights formed the basis to advance Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, which describes the social dominance of white, middle-aged, heterosexual, middle-class, abled cis-men. Combined with the analytical possibilities supplied by the criticism of hetero- and homonormativity, I analogously introduced the concept of hegemonic gay masculinity to be able to consider the implications of hetero- and homonormativity with masculinity. The concept of hegemonic gay masculinity was fruitful to carve out the hegemonic gradient and thus the processes of stratification among representations of male LGBTQIAN+ community members in contemporary biopics.

These three sensitising concepts – heteronormativity, homonormativity, and hegemonic (gay) masculinity – were central for my research. To make them the object of filmic analysis, they had to be combined with methodological approaches from film narratology, cinematography, and gaze theory. As Roland Barthes claims in his book *Mythologies*, ideologically upheld hierarchies do not derive from a person's own experience but are made coherent and comprehensible through narratives (cf. Barthes 143; 151-154). This means narrative traditions within cultural production not only reflect social and cultural circumstances, but also influence the way 'reality' is constructed and perceived and, hence, take an active part in shaping and upholding hegemonic structures. Deciphering these narrative structures serves to grasp the relation between power and representation and helps to unveil the ways in which ideology is inculcated in society. As a powerful agent in popular culture, cinema has its own narrative conventions, which shape the ways in which 'reality' is perceived. It is, thus, worthwhile to look

beyond the content to the formal-aesthetic components that can support a particular mode of representation. This becomes manifest, amongst others, in the choice of genre, since the historical biopic is used for the representation of queer history, even though it follows very traditional cinematic narrative techniques which seem contradictory to the concept of queer. Thus, the question arises in how far the deliberate employment of narrative conventions in order to raise the audiences' expectations is an important means for filmic representation to allege an ideological agenda. Historical films take an active part in shaping the cultural perception of the historical characters and events they depict and, hence, lay claim to the prerogative of interpretation. I therefore drew on the concept of heteronarrative that shows the entanglement of the films' narrative structure with heteronormativity. When it comes to the representation of masculinity, the archetypes of the male hero became most important. Moreover, I was interested in cinematic techniques, such as camera work, framing, colouration, i.e. the *mise-en-scène*, that directs the gaze of the viewer and influences *how* the characters on screen are depicted. For this reason, the question of how this gaze might work from a queer perspective was raised. Not only by making LGBTQIAN+ individuals visible, but also by having the audience perceive the action of the film through their eyes, I found that a new gaze could emerge that differs from the patriarchal male gaze. I especially focused on the question to what extent the established gaze is really queer, or in how far it enforces a normative LGBTQIAN+ perspective, which I called homonormative gaze. The comparative approach of *Queer Enough?* allows for a survey of the similarities and differences in the films' depiction of heteronormativity and hegemonic gay masculinity.

One of the most striking parallels of *Howl*, *Stonewall*, and *Milk* is their critical engagement with heteronormativity. All three films depict heteronormative structures as ultimately oppressive for the central characters and their friends. They distinguish between personal and institutionalised oppression, but all refer to its structural dimension. As I sought to carve out in my theoretical approach, the main institutions of oppression are the state, science, and religion. Other crucial sites of oppression include the family, education, sports, and media, which are often subsidiary to the three main institutions. In the films, the representation of the structural oppression emanating from governmental institutions, i.e. the state, is very consistent. Especially in *Stonewall* and *Milk*, the police as the arm of the law violently attacks LGBTQIAN+ people or denies them their assistance in cases of emergency or even murder. Next to the negative depiction of the police, the films

deplore the bleak legal situation for the LGBTQIAN+ community during the respective periods. In *Stonewall* this is illustrated by a juxtaposition of the rural and the urban sites shown in the film. Danny's rural background is informed by religious conservatism, the patriarchal rule of his father, homophobia, and above all, a strong covenant of silence. Once he makes it to New York City, he encounters a different mode of oppression – one that is noisier, more physically violent, but also one that he eventually succeeds in overcoming. At the end of the film, he and his friends participate in the first Gay Rights Liberation March through the streets of New York City in 1970. Back at home, however, he is not able to reconcile with his friends and his former lover Joe, let alone with his father. Similarly, also *Milk* establishes an urban rural divide by evoking a vision of the city, especially of San Francisco, as a place where heteronormative oppression can be overcome in contrast to rural areas where conservatism rules and the religious right is successful. For this reason, Milk recommends Paul, the boy confined to a wheelchair, to leave his home and get to the nearest big city in order to escape his oppression.

*Howl* in contrast defies this uplifting picture of the city: the metaphor of Moloch from the poem is used in the film for a metropolis where the merciless, all-devouring power of civilization reigns, oppressing all who do not conform to the uniform life of consensus. The exclusion of non-conformists is conducted in Rockland, the mental hospital where the rules of Moloch are re-impressed upon them. Next to the city as a suffocating space, the film critically engages with science as an institution of oppression, which is emphasised in the depiction of electroshock therapy and lobotomy and their negative impact on the characters. The film proposes literary expression as a possibility to escape these oppressive structures. The animation visualises the oppression of the lyrical I while the re-enacted scenes of the trial against publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti show that the arguments of the prosecutors are significantly weaker, partly ridiculous, and ultimately untenable in comparison to those of the defence. In the end, Ferlinghetti wins, which the film equates with the view that clinging to old norms and rigid structures hampers mutual understanding. Connecting artistic expression and sexual liberation, the poem functions as a symbol for the transgression of the (hetero)norm and the court case is ultimately a trial about the freedom of expression. The film offers a variety of interpretations of the poem "Howl" and thereby suggests that there is never just one perspective on any topic. Here, another juxtaposition becomes clear: that between an open and a closed world view.

Likewise, *Stonewall* and *Milk* work with this juxtaposition in their representation of religion. Intermingling the institutions of religion and the state, the representatives of religion manage to enforce their homophobic worldview. Hence, both *Stonewall* and *Milk* emphasise the concrete impact religious conservatism and homophobia have on the LGBTQIAN+ characters, calling attention to the importance of collective political activism. By juxtaposing the urban with the rural, an open with a closed world view, or liberal with conservative perspectives, the three films reveal the strong impact of both institutional as well as personal discrimination. However, *Howl* works more on a symbolic level in this respect, critiquing more universal themes such as 1950s conformity, authority, and the oppression of minorities in general. The other two films focus far more explicitly on the concrete effects of silencing, violence, and homophobia and their concomitant insidious dangers to the homosexual characters.

Nonetheless, the films also share many common features regarding the portrayal of the protagonists' negotiation of their homosexuality and heteronormativity. Their contents revolve largely around the enactment of their emancipation. All three central characters have a past of being closeted, of thinking themselves 'wrong.' They are more or less passing for heterosexual and, hence, are complicit with the heteronormative system at the beginning. Eventually they realise that it is the structures that need to be challenged and possibly changed, not their identities. As has been pointed out in the analyses, the protagonists' coming out of the closet, and hence their insistence of making their homosexuality visible in front of others combined with their refusal to feel ashamed, is presented as a tool for transgressing heteronormative structures. Before their moment of emancipation, they must go through a process of coming out. In *Howl*, the process of writing culminates in the public reading of the poem "Howl." Ginsberg's artistry is closely connected to his sexual identity and thus the performance of the poem on stage is equated with the performance of his homosexuality. Similarly, *Milk* plays with the interconnection of performance and sexuality. Milk's remark about politics being theatre condenses this very well. Thus, he emancipates himself through his political campaigns and finally wins the election to the Board of City Supervisors. Coming out is thereby framed as a tool for (self-)empowerment, which is why Milk urges everyone to come out, despite the warning of his friends. And his plan seems to work out: at least in this fight, visibility becomes a weapon to defeat the religious right.

*Stonewall*, in contrast, does not offer such an exclusively positive account of coming out. The portrayal of Danny being outed by his classmates em-

phases the violence associated with an (involuntary) outing. His journey of coming out is superimposed by his coming-of-age. His identity forms as he passes the typical steps of a bildungsroman-like plot. Contrasting the rural and the urban yet again, the city is presented as a space where he can finally be safely out and proud in the end. All three films corroborate the empowerment of one individual as a 'glass ceiling breaker,' who heralds a new era for all the disadvantaged. However, the protagonists differ in the scope of their activism. Consistent with my findings, it can be summarised that *Howl* focuses much more on Ginsberg's individual emancipation moment than *Milk* which tends to emphasise the collective struggle of the gay liberation movement. In *Milk*, coming out is the first step for the gays' collective fight for legal equality. Of course, this is primarily due to the different historic moments the films are set in. While during the 1950s, the heteronormative structures were still far more repressive and deeply incorporated into the social system, Milk could draw on a powerful social movement that had already significantly changed the legal situation for the LGBTQIAN+ community. Hence, Ginsberg's activism as presented in the film centres on individual acceptance, whereas Milk pursues concrete political goals. This involves that the subversion of heteronormativity in *Howl* occurs rather from the exterior, as Ginsberg tries to influence heteronormativity with the release and performance of his poem "Howl." *Milk*, on the contrary, seeks to subvert the system that so forcefully oppressed him and his followers from within, by entering the realm of politics, which is at the same time the realm where the heteronormative bias is perpetuated. *Stonewall* vacillates somewhere in between. The process of Danny's emancipation oscillates between assimilation and rebellion and leads to the central moment of emancipation when he throws the first brick of the Stonewall Riots. Danny's individuality is consistently emphasised while his experiences and perspective are simultaneously presented as universal to all LGBTQIAN+ individuals. He seems to have resolved his inner conflict in his decision against assimilation. Thereby making the beginning of one of the most important events in the history of the gay liberation movement a personal matter of a white, cis-gendered, middle-class male in my opinion shows a very insensitive approach to the Stonewall Riots. While he graphically performs his empowerment in his revolt, however, he cannot fully emancipate himself from the judgement of his father and friends back home. This raises the question of whether he has truly emancipated himself if he needs his father's and hence heteronormative approval. In contrast to *Howl* and *Milk*, *Stonewall's* tendency to subliminally reinforce



assimilation is already evident in its content and becomes even more apparent on the formal-aesthetic level. Eventually, all three protagonists become active instead of passively accepting their shaming and make their sexuality visible in a performative act of empowerment. Although the films thereby expose the social construction of sexual identities, they remain entrenched in essentialism. Sexuality is not presented as a fluid concept, but rather, the characters' action is targeted at finding and expressing their 'true inner self'.

This position moreover essentialises gayness to a homogeneous experience, which suggests that all gays see the world in a similar way. This is especially obvious in the films' formal-aesthetic composition. Therefore, I sought to determine to what extent the films offer a different cinematic gaze than the generic male gaze. On the one hand, the gay sensibility the films offer might corroborate the essentialism indicated on the content level, which leads to an exclusivity that might establish a lesbian or gay gaze limited in scope. Presenting the events staged exclusively from the perspective of the marginalised, on the other hand, might help to adopt a queer perspective and, hence, establish a queer gaze. The films differ greatly in their ability to offer a non-normative, ambiguous, or disruptive viewing position, which includes but is not limited to the depiction of queer desire and sex. The gaze in the films serves several functions connected to the characters sexual identity. They invite the viewers to read the events shown from a gay perspective, thereby offering them insights to the 'true inner self' that the protagonists seek to find.

Both Ginsberg and Milk are presented as autodiegetic narrators of their lives and most other characters and events are interpreted from their perspective. This is mediated using the poem 'Howl' and Milk's recorded will. In *Stonewall*, Danny also governs the gaze as the single mediator that filters all other characters' experiences. The intimacy that is created serves to identify with them and allows viewers to understand the severe consequences they had to face when living an open homosexual life during the depicted times. At the same time, the films refuse or ridicule the perspective and motives of the homophobes. This reverses the long tradition of the gay villain trope in cinema and, thus, questions heteronormative representation. In *Howl*, the gaze especially supports Ginsberg's alienation from heteronormativity and thus from a 'normal' romantic life. The viewer perceives several instances of heterosexual lovemaking through Ginsberg's eyes. This portrayal does not elevate the heterosexual lovemaking but emphasises his feeling of exclusion. Questioning heteronormative sexuality, these scenes receive a subversive efficacy, which is why I described the



gaze in these particular scenes as queer. Likewise, *Milk* challenges heteronormative viewing patterns, for instance in the aesthetically fragmented sex scene between Milk and Smith at the beginning and end of the plot, which sets a queer tone for the film. At the same time, the film frames Milk's love life within heteronormative expectations such as 'true' or 'eternal' love and monogamy. This aspect is even more apparent in *Stonewall*. Danny offers an easy identification for heterosexual viewers, however, at the expense of other characters who are affected by intersectional discrimination, since he takes on a heteronormative, at times even homo- or trans\*phobic, perspective. He approves of the heteronormative principles of 'true' love, monogamy, and domesticity, but is annoyed or embarrassed by effeminacy and even shocked by the display of trans\*sexuality, (public) gay sex, cruising, prostitution, and non-monogamous relationships. The camerawork highlights his moral understanding of sexuality and relationships, which is strongly influenced by heteronormativity. His gaze serves as a lens through which heteronormative viewers may safely perceive LGBTQIAN+ life, instead of confronting the viewers with a queer or gay gaze. The contrast between Danny's gaze at more normative characters and effeminate or trans\* characters is a filmic strategy of othering, which creates a hierarchy within the LGBTQIAN+ community. Nevertheless, effeminate, trans\*, drag characters, and BPOC also gaze back at Danny, making him the object of their desires. Instead of seizing this opportunity to break with the visual conventions of the (white) male gaze, the film categorises their gazing as unpleasant if not dangerous. Not only does this serve the assimilation to heteronormativity, but also perpetuates racist and trans\*-phobic views rather than challenging them. For this reason, the gaze in *Stonewall* can overall be described as homonormative. To some extent, also *Howl* and *Milk* enforce heteronormative visual patterns. *Howl* for instance excludes female characters from the narrative and marks them as the 'other' that hampers gay male desire, although they are mostly not subjected to the male gaze. Similarly, also *Milk* misses an opportunity for a more diverse perspective, for example in its representation of Milk as a mediator between the gay perspective and the heteronormative majority, in order to connect gay and straight Americans by their collective commemoration of a national hero. Thereby, however, the film disregards the hierarchy that goes along with the assumption that Milk can speak for all homosexuals. Especially the appeal to visibility obscures the hazard for many queers to come out of the closet and reduces the experience to the perspective of rather privileged gays. However, while *Howl* and *Milk* at least partially invite the viewer to

take on a queer perspective even though they cannot consistently keep up a queer gaze, *Stonewall's* formal-aesthetic composition enforces anti-queer stereotypes that vigorously undermines all asserted endeavours to suggest a critical reading of Danny's privileged position on the content level.

Another parallel of the films is the function of the gaze to create an authentic mood by including original footage that connotes historical accuracy of the events featured. They offer a view of the past in order to reflect upon contemporary issues while undergirding the myths about the historical figures and events shown on screen. This aspect is even more apparent when looking at the films' narrative structure. Memorialised through biopics, Ginsberg, Danny, and Milk have been stylised into iconic figures of queer American history. The three films present them as the archetypical figures of the genius, the rebel, and the martyr, highlighting Ginsberg's literary output, Danny's rebellious energy, and Milk's political success. Thereby, the protagonists claim social positions of power they were denied in heteronormative society. Despite their stylistic differences, the three films exhibit very similar narrative structures in their representation of masculinity.

Reminiscent of New Queer Cinema, *Howl* is the most experimental of the three. However, the film also follows the biopic tradition in depicting Ginsberg as the misunderstood but brilliant genius figure. It makes recourse to the post-impressionist visual art of Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh to enhance Ginsberg's modernist sense of art and poetry and stage him as a genius coming from a well-established line of geniuses. On the one hand, this serves as an act of empowerment, since putting Ginsberg in a hegemonic position turns around the social stratification of gay men who are oppressed by hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, this representation marginalises women and might even foster a misogynous bias. Thereby feeding the myth of a male canon of (Beat) geniuses, the film imbeds Ginsberg into the American literary tradition. He occupies a special position within the hierarchy of masculinity despite the fact that he is homosexual. Instead of depicting the story of a real-life person such as the queer icons Marsha P. Johnson or Sylvia Rivera, *Stonewall* implements the fictional character Danny. Telling his story against the backdrop of the Stonewall Riots, Danny is not only centralised as the key player of the film, but also in relation to allegedly the most important moment in LGBTQIAN+ history. He is the one to throw the first brick, symbolically beginning the gay liberation movement and becoming a national hero. In his masculine outburst of anger and his cry for "Gay power!," Danny chooses violence

to claim a hegemonic position within the structures of masculinity. Instead of presenting a form of queer rebellion by way of queer practices of resistance such as effeminacy or camp, the film follows heteronarrative patterns, trading a more diverse queer representation for heteronormative amenability. This emphasises the way the film uses the rebel archetype to embed homosexuality into American national identity. Very similar to *Stonewall*, *Milk* seeks to raise its protagonist to an American national hero in relation to an important moment in the history of gay rights. In the depiction of Milk as a martyr, the film comes closest to the classic narrative tradition of the biopic. Milk succeeds in reversing his antagonists' hegemonic position by claiming a position of power within the system of hegemonic masculinity that even transcends death, eventually rendering him and his cause immortal. Moreover, Milk's martyrdom makes him a national hero commemorated by both homo- and heterosexual Americans. This endorses a gay-straight alliance, which can also be interpreted as a means to assimilate homosexuality into American national identity. Presenting the protagonists as the archetypal hegemonic masculinities – genius, rebel, and martyr – all three films comply with heteronormative narrative traditions. The protagonists are all striving for a hegemonic position within the hierarchy of masculinity, but they are denied a place at the top because of their homosexuality. In their failed attempts to reach hegemonic masculinity, however, they produce hegemonic gay masculinity. This means a similar hierarchical order is established in which the most heteronormatively assimilated masculinity is in a hegemonic position. Simultaneously, this process creates new normative structures and stratifies other members of the LGBTQIAN+ community, especially men who are not conforming to the masculine gender role. Furthermore, these narratives help to create an enactment of memorial that seeks to generate a collective identity not only amongst members of the LGBTQIAN+ community but also amongst the heterosexual majority.

Being labelled un-American during the McCarthy era, homosexuals may now become national heroes, who are celebrated and commemorated by a majority of the American society. Allen Ginsberg and other Beat Generation authors are celebrated figures of American popular culture and have long entered the literary canon. In 2016, the site of the Stonewall Riots was designated a National Monument as the first monument in the U.S. dedicated to LGBTQIAN+ history (cf. Stein 19). And former President Obama honoured Harvey Milk posthumously with America's highest civilian honour, the Presidential Medal of Freedom (cf. B. R. Rich *Cinema* 257). However, embedding LGBTQIAN+ lives and history into American national identity

influences which queer practices are seen as worthy of heteronormative acceptance. In conclusion, the mythologisation of historic characters such as Ginsberg, Milk, and the initiators of the Stonewall Riots facilitates the containment of queer history within the mainstream and thus contributes to the maintenance of heteronormativity.

These representations of LGBTQIAN+ individuals in mainstream Hollywood films are emblematic of current debates on diversity. At first glance, their representation seems inclusive, as it gives voice and visibility to realities outside the (hetero)norm. On closer inspection, however, it is vital to consider *how* they are depicted. It appears that the heteronormative system opened a little window of opportunities for some but did not fundamentally change for all. Thereby, many of these 'glass-ceiling-breakers' become tokens that are taken as evidence of improvement although no structural changes have been made. Thus, the representation of the formerly oppressed becomes a cliché for the dominant culture that enacts the acceptance and tolerance of the LGBTQIAN+ community while further enforcing hetero- and homonormative structures. This new diversity discourse is more subtle and more difficult to grasp than blatant homophobia, unabashed sexism, or obvious racism. While feigning tolerance, it resists more complex social experiences of exclusion and discrimination and presupposes static identities that solidify binary oppositions such as queer and straight. At the same time, the experience of marginality and discrimination is aestheticised and made consumable.

Yet, films like Barry Jenkin's *Moonlight* (2016) show that more complex negotiations and irritations of common diversity narratives can and do find mainstream appeal. The film follows its protagonist Chiron from boyhood to young adulthood in three chapters each of which deals with a significant period in the main character's life (played by Alex Hibbert as the boy 'Little', Aston Sanders as the adolescent 'Chiron,' and Trevante Rhodes as 'Black' in his mid-twenties). While negotiating a variety of themes such as coming-of-age, violence, poverty, drug use, masculinity, homosexuality, race, and class, the film stays very close to Chiron's subjective perspective. The film's structure carves out the complexity of Chiron's character by showing three versions of him at different points in his life. In this way, it defies any essentialism concerning racial, gendered, or sexual identities. To grow up is not a linear development into one's true self, but an ongoing, reversible, and often fragmented process. The three-fold structure of the narrative is also apparent in the film poster, which shows the three versions of Chiron in a collage of the three actors all in one face. Moreover, the film

“evokes clichés of African-American masculinity in order to shatter them” (Scott “Moonlight” n. pag.) and, hence, breaks with cinematic conventions of representing BIPOC and LGBTQIAN+ individuals. Archetypes such as the African American gangster or the drug dealer are transgressed by an emphasis on their solicitude, emotionality, and vulnerability. Without generalising the experiences of the characters, the film “dwells on the dignity, beauty and terrible vulnerability of black bodies, on the existential and physical matter of black lives” (Scott “Moonlight” n. pag.). Water, and the sea in particular, serves as the film’s predominant metaphor for the fluidity of life. Accordingly, the film constantly highlights its own “open-endedness, its resistance to easy summary or categorization” (Scott n. “Moonlight” pag.). Like *Brokeback Mountain*, *Moonlight* suggests another watershed moment in the history of LGBTQIAN+ filmmaking. While *Brokeback Mountain* narrowly missed the Award for Best Picture at the Academy Awards in 2006, *Moonlight* achieved full success in 2017. It was nominated in eight categories and won the Awards for Best Supporting Actor, Best Adapted Screenplay, and above all, for Best Picture. The award ceremony caused a sensation, because at first the presenters Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway held the wrong envelope in their hands. In this historically unique incident, the film *La La Land* was mistakenly named as the winner. While the film’s crew was already on stage giving their acceptance speeches, the mistake was noticed and *Moonlight* became the first LGBTQIAN+ film to win the award for Best Picture. This underscores that LGBTQIAN+ themes and characters are now firmly established within mainstream Hollywood cinema. Furthermore, it became one of the most prominent examples of more recent films, such as *The Danish Girl* (2015), *Carol* (2015), *Bessie* (2015), or *Vita and Virginia* (2018), which do not focus on heteronormative, white, or gender-conforming cis-men and thus might indicate newer paradigms in queer cinema.

