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**DEVIANT INTERSECTIONS:
Interrogating Discourses of "Race", Sexuality
and Non-white Homosexuality in
Contemporary Films.**

Volume 1 (of 2)

Ling-Yen Chua

**A Thesis in the Joint School of Film and Literature, Faculty of Arts, submitted in
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
University of Warwick, England.**

September 1998.

Numerous Originals in Colour

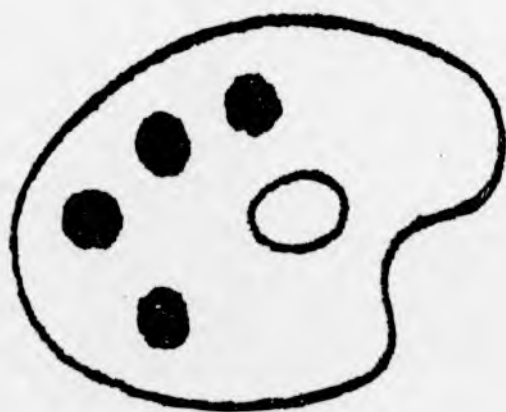


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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my partner, Karen, for her patience and wisdom.

SUMMARY.

This thesis attempts to provide a critical framework for discussion of English language films featuring non-white homosexual characters and contribute to the on-going debate concerning the cinematic representation of racial and sexual minorities. It does not attempt to offer an exhaustive account of the field. Emphasis is placed on why there have previously been few films containing non-white homosexual characters and why there are now more such films, as well as identifying the way in which these characters are depicted.

The study begins by examining the intimate relationship between Western construction of racial and sexual discourses. Through analysing several contemporary films and reviewing critical literature from the fields of post-colonial and "race" criticism, lesbian, gay and gender studies, I argue that (white) homosexuals and non-white people have often been depicted as analogous, although not identical, in sexual "perversity". I further suggest that they are depicted as similarly deviant because of the reproductive threat that they pose to the white heterosexual norm. The homosexual actions of non-whites, (who have historically been stereotyped as "naturally" sexually deviant), are usually interpreted as an example of their loose morality, rather than as an indication of non-heterosexual identity. By contrast, white subjects who engage in homosexual practises are usually accorded a lesbian or gay identity.

I argue that the recent increase in the number of films containing non-white homosexual characters reflects the influence of "politically correct" discourses and theories of "hybridity". I further suggest that the crossover success of a number of these films indicate that traditional stereotypes of race and sexuality are now called into question.

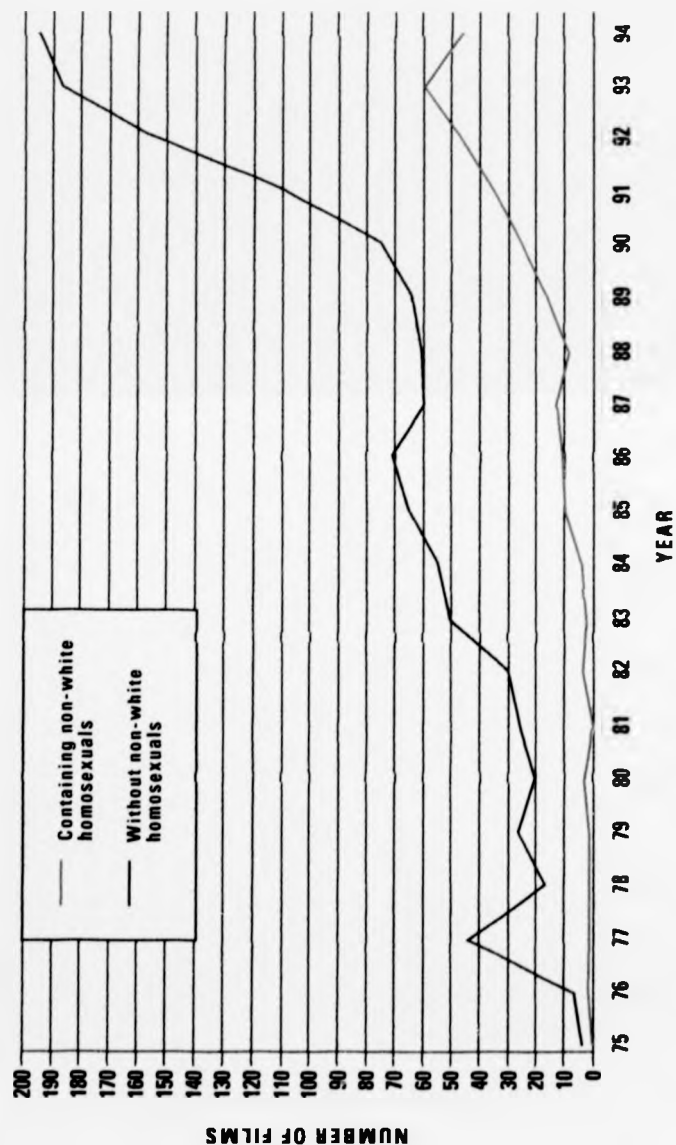
INTRODUCTION CHAPTER:

This thesis was conceived in 1989 after watching Isaac Julien's documentary Looking for Langston (UK 1988) when there were few films featuring non-white homosexuals in international lesbian and gay film festivals. The small number of such films is not usually attributed to the oversight of festival programmers, but rather, to inadequate funding for films which do not contain all-white casts. There is, supposedly, less demand for them amongst white western audiences. I propose that this explanation is now complicated by a subsequent increase in representation of non-white homosexual characters in English language films.

According to The Ultimate Guide to Lesbian and Gay Film and Video (edited by Olson) - which is a compilation of short and feature-length films and documentaries shown at the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Film Festival programmes - in 1976, non-white homosexuals appeared, as minor characters, in only two films. This number increased slowly but steadily, mirroring the increase in the number of films featuring white homosexual characters. (Refer to graph "A". (1)) In 1994, there were 46 films and documentaries containing lesbian and gay people of colour. They are featured as central characters in many of these films, suggesting that non-white homosexual characters are no longer limited to minor roles. A survey of London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival programmes further indicate that they now appear as frequently in feature-length narrative films as in short films and documentaries. (Refer to graph "B".)

Unfortunately, the increase in films featuring non-white homosexuals has not been

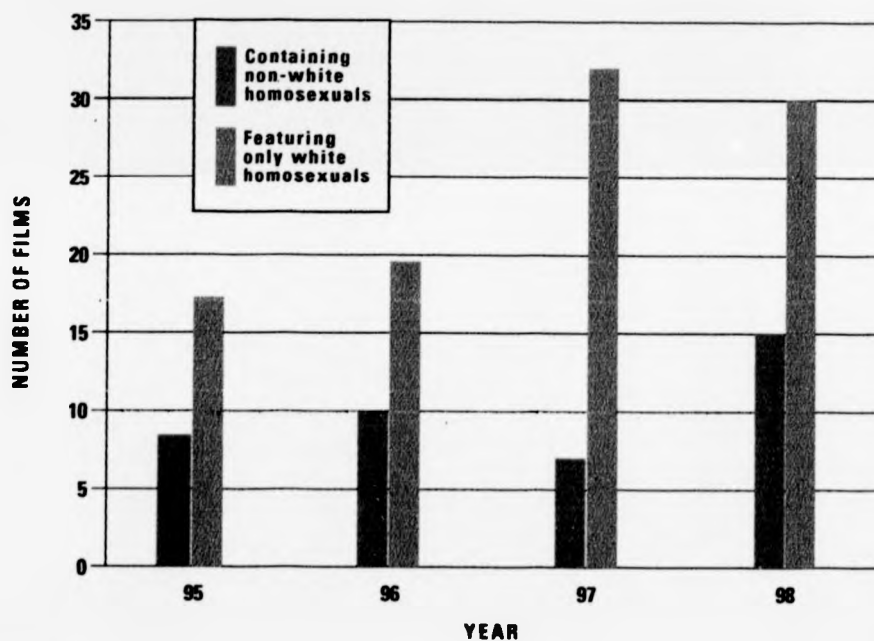
**GRAPH SHOWING THE NUMBER OF FEATURE-LENGTH AND SHORT FILMS
(NARRATIVE AND DOCUMENTARY) PRODUCED BY YEAR ***



* (based on "The Ultimate Guide to Lesbian & Gay Film and Video" (edited by Jenni Olson))

GRAPH B.

**GRAPH SHOWING THE NUMBER OF FEATURE-LENGTH
FILMS AND DOCUMENTARIES OVER 60 MINUTES IN LENGTH
SCREENED BY YEAR ***



* (based on London Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals)

matched by a parallel proliferation of critical literature. Gledhill (1978: 13) argues that it is important to distinguish the different types of racial, class or gender discourses employed by "the dominant hegemony to place and define the 'truth' of the others". As well as examining the dialogue, sound, visual style and narrative to determine what is being said and whose voice is privileged, Kuhn (1982: 84) suggests that "structuring absences" can also reveal the ideology operating in the text. Consequently, besides discussing films released after 1985, when non-white homosexual central characters started increasingly rapidly, I shall also explore reasons for the previous absence of such characters.

Although short films and documentaries such as Chinese Characters (Canada 1986), Looking for Langston (UK 1989) and Khush (UK 1991) have been politically important to lesbian and gay communities of colour, they will not be discussed as I am confining my analysis to feature length fictional films in this thesis. Furthermore, as the object of this thesis is to examine Western discourses of race and sexuality, I shall look at a range of English-language films set in the West, as well as those produced and released for consumption in "Western" countries. Similarly, in order to examine the way homosexual characters are depicted, I will interrogate only those films which contain obviously lesbian or gay central characters. There will be no discussion of heterosexual films, even those which lend themselves to "queer readings" constructed through extratextual information about the sexualities of the stars or directors (2). Finally, even though the subject of this thesis concerns sexually and racially marginalized subjects, the films examined here are not pre-determined by the filmmakers' identities. Hall (1988: 28) and Mercer (1994: 213-214) suggest that the

accuracy or quality of the films about race or sexuality can no longer be judged by authorial identities.

What is at issue is not an essentialist argument that the ethnic identity of the artist guarantees the aesthetic or political value of a text, but, on the contrary, how commonsense conceptions of authorship and readership are challenged by practises that acknowledge the diversity and heterogeneity of the cultural relations in which identities are socially constructed.... Once we recognize blackness as a category of social, psychic and political relations that have no fixed guarantees in nature but only the contingent forms in which they are constructed in culture, then questions of value cannot be decided by recourse to empirical commonsense about "color" or melanin.

(Mercer 1994: 213-214)

Mercer (1993: 248) and Parmer (1993: 6) further argue that the socially constructed term "black" is often used politically in Britain in the way the term "people of colour" is frequently used in North America to refer to all non-white people regardless of their specific racial identity. In contrast, usage of the term "white" remains less widespread because it can still be considered "offensive". The hostile reaction of the audience to my employment of the term "white" in a paper I presented on Desperate Remedies at the 1996 UK Women's Studies Conference illustrates this point. The audience argued that the term disavows their ethnic and racial specificity, for example, "Welsh", "English" or "Scottish". As several white speakers' employment of the terms "black"

and "people of colour" at an earlier session were not questioned, I suggest that the discomfort of the above-mentioned audience had little to do with "incorrect naming". Instead, it relates to what Dyer calls the "nothingness of whiteness".

This property of whiteness, to be everything and nothing, is the source of its representational power.... On the other hand, if the invisibility of whiteness colonizes the definition of other norms - class, gender, heterosexuality, nationality and so on - it also masks whiteness itself as a category.

(Dyer 1993: 143)

The invisibility of "whiteness" as a category not only functions to prescribe where the "proper objects" of academic study should lie, but also establishes the authoritative position of white academics. Whilst the relationship of white academics to their black subjects of study was not questioned, I was asked what right I had, as a woman of Chinese descent, to discuss the construction of white identities in a New Zealand film. The significance of such queries about my racial identity was emphasised by a lack of curiosity about my sexual identity. Though I talked extensively about homosexuality, no attempt was made to confirm my lesbian identity. However, I have not been questioned about my racial identity when presenting papers on non-whites elsewhere, even those concerning non-Chinese subjects. Trinh (1990: 330-332) argues that this type of interrogation epitomises the unequal racial relationship between white and non-white academics. While non-white academics are encouraged to engage in studies of racial marginalization and decolonialization, the scope of their studies is frequently

predetermined and arrogated by the "all knowing Western Subject".

Wherever she goes, she is asked to show her identity papers. What side? (Did you speak up for...?) Where does she belong? (politically, economically?) Where does she place her loyalty? (sexually, ethnically, professionally?) Should she be met at the center, where they invite her in with much display, it is often only to be reminded that she hold the permanent status of a "foreign worker," "a migrant," or "a temporary sojourner" – status necessary to the maintenance of a central power. "How about a concrete example from your own culture?" "Could you tell us what it is like in... (your own country)? ...It is difficult for her, she who partakes in theoretical production – albeit as a foreign worker – not to realise the continuing interested desire of the West to conserve itself as sovereign Subject in most of its radical criticism today.

(Trinh 1990: 331-2)

It appears, therefore, that the construction of non-whites races as objects of study is intrinsically linked to the Western hegemonic portrayal of whiteness as a (non) category. Consequently, despite the risk of establishing "whiteness" as a norm against which all other races are defined, I shall use the term "non-white" interchangeably with "black" and "people of colour" to identify the way in which such characters have been located as the negative binaristic opposite of white ones. Nelson (1993), the editor of a collection of critical essays by "lesbian and gay writers of colour" (3), argues that the political affinity between "people of colour" exemplifies their shared experience of

racial and homosexual marginalization.

...the term "people of color," though it might be a convenient signifier, has the essentializing as well as homogenizing tendency to collapse boundaries, deny differences, and conflate identities.... Differences there are among us, of course, but our shared consciousness of the many forms of exclusion and defilement that we experience in our daily lives, I believe, is sufficiently potent and significant to encourage mutual recognition, initiate honest dialogues, and forge political links among ourselves.

(Nelson 1993: xiv-xv)

Despite arguments that such alliances disavow gender differences, collaborations between lesbian and gay filmmakers and critics continue to be made. I will discuss a number of films featuring lesbian and gay men of colour in this thesis in order to examine how strategies have been adopted to negotiate their similar positions as homosexual "outsiders". Julien and Mercer (1996: 451) argue that it is imperative to begin any deconstructive project by identifying the relations of power determining the issues and representations which are prioritised in the first place. Consequently, the thesis is structured so that issues central to the representation of non-white homosexuals are examined in the earlier chapters. These will include the burden of representation, positive/negative stereotypes, whether homosexuality is a white construct and why non-white homosexuals are often shown in interracial relationships. However, though crucial, this is only an initial stage. Hall (1996: 4-5) argues that all

identities, including oppositional ones, need to be problematised. Since identities are based on the exclusion of certain elements, every identity risks reinscribing the tropes of racial and sexual demarcation laid out by hegemonic discourse. The later part of this thesis thus discusses how film representations can move beyond such issues.

Chapter one, the first of six chapters, consists of a review of existing literature related to the representation of lesbian and gay people of colour. I draw on the work of contemporary theorists working in the field of gender, homosexual studies, post-colonialism and "race" criticism to contextualize Western development of a discourse to order, locate and distinguish non-white people and white homosexuals from the socially normal white heterosexual subject. I suggest that the construction of white homosexuals as sexually deviant mirrors existing sexual discourses of non-white people.

Chapter two looks at four films: Desperate Remedies (NZ 1993), Philadelphia (USA 1994), The Adventure of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Australia 1994) and Pulp Fiction (USA 1994). Released within a year of each other, they all contain white homosexual and non-white heterosexual characters. This chapter advances the argument that Western films have often found it problematic to include lesbians and gay men of colour precisely because of the mutually exclusive (though interdependent) construction of sexual stereotypes of homosexuals and non-white people. Parmar (1993: 5) suggests that the separation of homosexual and non-white categories has often meant non-white homosexuals are excluded from discourses concerning both race and homosexuality. Homosexuals are frequently depicted as white and middle-

class whilst people of colour are often presented as neither exclusively homosexual nor heterosexual.

In **Chapter three**, I suggest that representations of homosexuals as white, and non-whites as sexually deviant, derive from the perceived *sexual* threat they both pose to white heterosexual society. Young (1996: 32) argues that the othering of non-white races, like the othering of homosexuals, is related to a prohibition against homosexual and interracial sex placed on white women (and men) whose responsibility is to ensure the continuation of their race. However, interracial homosexual relationships are consistently featured alongside same-race heterosexual ones. I suggest that the prohibition against miscegenation is specifically heterosexual, and for this reason, I shall discuss four films containing non-white homosexual central characters. They are: She Must Be Seeing Things (USA 1987), Salmonberries (USA 1991), The Wedding Banquet (Taiwan 1993) and Boys on the Side (USA 1995).

Go Fish (USA 1994), one of the few films featuring non-white homosexual characters who are sexually involved with one another, is discussed in **Chapter four**. I suggest that the influence of "politically correct" racial discourses is reflected in the unusual portrayal of their relationship. The impact of queer theories of sexuality is also evident in the diverse sexual experiences of the white characters in the film. Although "queer" is often used interchangeably with "lesbian", "gay" and "homosexual" (Jagose 1996: 97), queer discourses of sexuality often differ from lesbian and gay ones. Nevertheless, I argue that queer discourses have not replaced lesbian and gay discourses as a discursive site where racial difference can be more easily and/or adequately

problematised. Whilst lesbian sexual stereotypes are drawn upon and problematised, the racial difference of non-white characters continue to be essentialised.

Chapter five looks at Fresh Kill (USA 1993), a film in which racial and sexual norms are problematised. I draw on discourses of hybridity to argue that the film's depiction of a world of hybridity allows the non-white homosexual character to be represented in terms other than those of race and sexuality. This approach means that problematic issues such as positive/negative images, sexual and/or racial "authenticity" and the related "burden of representation" (so frequently imposed upon filmic representations of traditionally marginalized characters) are avoided. Mercer (1994: 222) suggests that instead of focusing only on the marginalization and "double or triple disadvantage" of non-white homosexuals, their "outsider" status can be used as a starting point to problematise established racial and sexual boundaries and the white heterosexual norm.

Chapter six, the conclusion, summarises the main achievements of the thesis and comments on the areas of research initialised here which can be further developed in other projects.

Endnotes (Introduction):

¹ Although only English language films are discussed in this thesis, films in other languages which were screened at the San Francisco and London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival are included in my survey (detailed in Graphs "A" and "B"). These films are included because they reveal the level of interest amongst Western audiences in watching films featuring homosexuals who are non-white. The successful screenings of such "foreign" films at the festivals often leads to increased interest in English-language films containing non-white homosexuals and funding for filmmakers who wish to direct such films.

² See for instance, Doty (1995).

³ Irish and Jewish people are not considered "people of colour" for the purpose of this thesis. Although Gilman (1992), Shohat and Stam (1994: 4) show that they have been considered "black" at historically specific moments, Walton (1994), Riggs (1991),^{also} Shohat and Stam (1994)^{also} suggest that they are characterised as "white" in contemporary Western films.

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CHAPTER 1:

REVIEW OF CRITICAL LITERATURE.

One of my concerns as a filmmaker is to challenge the normalising and universalising tendencies within the predominantly white lesbian and gay communities - to assert the diversity of cultural and racial identities within the umbrella category of gay and lesbian. There is a need to define "community," and just as there isn't a homogeneous black community, similarly there isn't a monolithic lesbian and gay community.

(Parmar 1993: 9)

Even though there have been many critical developments about the representation of homosexuals and non-white people in post-colonial discourse, "race" criticism and critical film theory, there is still a scarcity of literature examining the representation of the lesbian and gay person of colour in cinematic texts. Generally, the critical literature about lesbians and gay men discusses the representation of the *white* homosexual subject, just as most post-colonial and "race" criticism is about the *heterosexual* non-white subject.

One reason for the paucity of critical literature about lesbians and gays^{of} colour in film is no doubt a result of the scarcity of such films. After all, prior to the mid 1980s, there were few Western film representations of homosexuals of any race. Additionally, since

almost all the homosexual characters in the few such films are white, it is not surprising that most critical discourse about homosexuality has simply not discussed the racial identity of the homosexual characters. After all, as Dyer (1988: 141-163) has suggested, "white" racial identity is often seen as a non-racial identity. I also suggest that this silence about the (white) racial identity of the homosexual characters indicates that homosexuality has thus far been seen as synonymous with "whiteness" which is "invisible". (I will further discuss this point later in the thesis.)

Similarly, prior to the mid 1980s, the Western films containing non-white characters have been largely preoccupied with depicting racial difference as a social or personal problem which in some way or other, threatens the white society in which these non-white characters live. It can be argued that since the sexual identities of the non-white characters are not questioned in such films, these non-white characters are generally assumed to be "non-homosexual". Later in this thesis, I will argue that though not identifiably coded as "homosexual", they are not seen as exclusively heterosexual. However, at this point, I simply wish to note that prior to the mid 1980s, there are few representations of identifiably homosexual non-white characters in Western films.

This scale of representation changed in the mid 1980s. Over the last decade, there has been a marked increase in films containing both non-white characters and homosexual characters. Amongst the increasing number of films (i) containing still predominantly white homosexual and non-white heterosexual central characters, are films containing non-white homosexual characters. One of the earliest films featuring a major non-white homosexual character is My Beautiful Laundrette (UK 1985). Since then, feature-

length films such as Virgin Machine (USA/Germany 1988), Young Soul Rebels (UK 1991), The Crying Game (UK 1992), Grief (USA 1993), Totally Fucked Up (USA 1994), Thin Ice (UK 1994), Parallel Sons (USA 1994), Bar Girls (USA 1995), When Night Is Falling (Canada 1995) and The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls In Love (USA 1996), all containing non-white homosexual major characters, have been made.

Unfortunately, to date, the proliferation of such film representations is not reflected in academic discourse. Most critical literature about homosexuals has inadequately discussed the emergence of representations of racial difference. Similarly, most critical literature about "race" has also continued to avoid examining how the emergence of representations of non-white homosexuals has affected discourses of non-white people in general. Mercer is one of the few critics who have undertaken extensive work on the scarcity of representations of the lesbian and gay person of colour in film and other texts. Welcome to the Jungle (1994), a collection of his earlier articles, is one of the first books to examine extensively this scarcity through the simultaneous discussion of both race and homosexuality. However, films containing non-white homosexuals are only briefly discussed, usually in relation to the depiction of black people (both heterosexual and homosexual) in other cultural texts, especially photographic ones. Consequently, even though films such as My Beautiful Laundrette and Looking for Langston (UK 1988) are discussed in relation to other film and photographic texts containing black people, they are not similarly contextualised in relation to other film representations of homosexuals.

Besides Mercer, the handful of people who have written specifically about the cinematic representation of the lesbians and gays of colour include Fung (1991, 1995), Sulter (1993), Goldsby (1993), Parmar (1993, 1995), Hemphill (1995) and Chowdhry (1995). Sulter's article, "Black Codes: the Misrepresentation of Blacklesbians in Film," (1993) is one of the first attempts to examine a range of films for their representation of black lesbians. Although she usefully identifies the way in which the non-white lesbian characters are socially and politically marginalized in six films, her preoccupation with determining whether these characters are depicted negatively or positively limits her analysis to a brief discussion of the negative effects of stereotypes. Hemphill's article, "'In Living Color': Toms, Coons, Mammies, Faggots, and Bucks," (1995) which consists largely of interviews with gays and lesbians, is similarly preoccupied with discussing the manner in which black homosexuals are negatively stereotyped in the media, in particular, the television sitcom, "In Living Color". Like Hemphill, Chowdhry's article "Shooting the Shots: Lesbians of African and Asian Descent in the Media," (1995) also consists predominantly of interviews discussing the way in which black homosexuals have been generally negatively stereotyped in the media. However, her interviewees also offer suggestions about the way in which black lesbian filmmakers and audiences can subvert such negative representations.

Goldsby (1993) and Chin (1993) also attempt to look beyond the issue of positive/negative stereotypes of non-white homosexuals in Paris is Burning (USA 1990) and the films of Gregg Araki respectively. Goldsby (1993) argues that even though such representations should not be limited to lesbian and gay filmmakers of color, the racial identities and sexual orientations of the filmmakers should

nevertheless be taken into account when discussing such representations. Chin (1993) suggests that the reverse is also true – that even though race and sexuality are usually important subjects in films by non-white homosexuals, such filmmakers should not be limited to making only films about homosexuals and/or non-whites. Fung (1991, 1995) and Parmar (1993, 1995), two of the most prolific filmmakers and critics of such films, have also repeatedly emphasised the importance of the filmmakers' racial and sexual identities, and the criticism they face regardless of whether non-whites and/or homosexual characters are included in their films. They argue that even though it is important to identify the way in which non-white homosexual characters are negatively racially and sexually stereotyped in both mainstream heterosexual films and predominantly white homosexual ones, thinking purely in terms of how non-white homosexuals are marginalized paradoxically reinforces the process of their minoritisation. (Parmar 1993: 10 and Fung 1995: 128)

Although I seem to have listed a sizeable number of critics, their combined published articles are few, brief and scattered in various collections on homosexual and film studies. Additionally, even though the above-named critics raise many crucial political issues regarding the cinematic representation of non-white homosexuals, the few films they briefly discuss are not adequately located in relation to the many other mainstream and independent films containing white homosexual and heterosexual non-white characters. Accordingly, because there is presently no substantial body of literature about the subject of this thesis, I need to begin with a survey of critical discourse about homosexuals and non-white people in general, in order to identify the way in which such subjects, including non-white homosexuals, are cinematically depicted. This will

not however be a comprehensive survey on the critical work on homosexuality or "race" to date. Instead, I will be focusing on specific aspects of these discourses, especially the areas where theories of race and sexuality intersect, which assist in the development of studies about non-white homosexuals in film. Finally, I will also be drawing from related diverse writings about non-white homosexuals in order to contextualise the films containing non-white homosexual characters and develop further the few existing critical articles about such films.

In order to organise the two approaches, I will divide this chapter up into two main sections. The first section will be a review of discourses of homosexual and "race" criticism, and other academic work about the relationship between the two. This will provide me with the theoretical framework of this thesis. The second section will focus specifically on critical writing about non-white homosexuals. Here, I will try to identify some of the important issues and debates within the various homosexual, non-white and non-white homosexual communities, to contextualise the films I will be discussing in the later chapters of this thesis.

SECTION 1:

Discourses of homosexuality.

It is important to start with a review of discourses of homosexuality because all homosexuals, regardless of race, are depicted in certain "typical" ways in most mainstream films. The feminist interrogation of gender is one of the most influential in the development of Western theories of homosexuality. Critics show that cinematic representations of sexuality are often dependent on the character's gender identification. Feminist film critics such as Cook (1974), Johnston (1975), Mulvey (1975), Kaplan (1978, 1983), Doane (1981a, 1981b) and Rose (1986) have argued that film theory, especially prior to the 1970s, often did not acknowledge its masculinist-gendered bias. For example, Mulvey's influential article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative cinema" published in 1975, explored the problematic issues of voyeurism, spectatorship and questions related to the sexualization of the female cinematic character. Like earlier feminist critics Cook and Johnston, Mulvey argues that the formal mechanisms of pleasure set up by mainstream and Hollywood cinema are driven by the spectacle of the woman displayed as an erotic object for the audience and for the male characters in the film-text, thereby denying the female spectator any possible pleasurable relation to the cinematic image.

Besides developing Mulvey's theories about the objectifying gaze, many later feminist critics also suggest that conventional Hollywood narrative is structured to depict female characters as sexual spectacles. They argued that narrative structures, atmospheric soundtracks, mise-en-scene, lighting and point-of-view shots are often used to highlight

the sexual desirability or threat of the female characters. This constructed representation of female sexuality often affirms the importance of the male characters within the film. It also allows the female characters to function as objects of desire for the (assumed to be heterosexual male) audience. They further show how these female characters are often marginalized through the cinematic construction of the "male gaze", "voyeurism", the sexual objectification of women, and the contradictory representation of female sexuality as threatening or as "lack".

Many of these theories later became central to lesbian and gay film theory. Lesbian and gay film critics argue that many feminist theories about the representation of women were also applicable to the representation of homosexuals, often similarly cinematically marginalized because of the close relationship between the constructions of gender and sexuality. They point out that the voyeuristic male gaze that female characters have been subject to, is a heterosexual one. Hence, the characterisation of female characters who are not exclusively heterosexual is often negative. Even though numerous heterosexual porn films and several mainstream films contain lesbian characters who are shown to be sexually desirable, they are usually also depicted as "bad girls" who need to be tamed by a "real" man. Examples include the sexually charged scenes of female "bonding" in Basic Instinct (USA 1991) and Showgirls (USA 1996), which serve as sexual titillation for the heterosexual male central characters. The lesbian characters who do not allow the male characters to finally dominate them are often depicted negatively – as manipulators or murderers who are usually cruelly eliminated by the end of the film. Because they refuse to be dominated by a "real man," these lesbian characters not considered "real women".

Unlike female characters (both heterosexual and lesbian), male homosexuals are not thought to be objectified by the same scrutinising *heterosexual* male gaze. However, it has been argued that they are often similarly marginalized through negative stereotypes used to denigrate women. Vito Russo's The Celluloid Closet was the first book to extensively map out the way negative images of homosexuals have often been employed in films. Since then, by analysing different films containing homosexuals, other critics such as Dyer (1980, 1990), de Lauretis (1987, 1988, 1990, 1991), Weiss (1992), Gever (1993) and Doty (1995) have demonstrated that most mainstream representations rely on the use of negative gender related homosexual stereotypes to marginalize and "other" lesbian and gay characters. Some common (always sexual) stereotypes include the effeminate gay man (cf. Kiss of the Spider Woman USA/Brazil, 1985), the mannish butch lesbian (cf. The Killing of Sister George UK, 1968) and homosexual as immoral murderers (cf. Rope USA, 1948).

Individually and as a class, gays are still misrepresented and ridiculed in films - as sissies in Purple Rain, cowards in Red Dawn, white niggers in Eddie Murphy vehicles, villains in JFK, or vicious killers in Silence of the Lambs and Basic Instinct.

(Hadleigh 1993: 14)

Without actually listing all the commonly-used stereotypes, it suffices to say here that just as women have been depicted in negative contrast to the male characters, these negative sexualised stereotypes of homosexuals are employed to affirm the socially

correct heterosexual "norm". Just as the cinematic mechanisms of pleasure rely on the negative sexual objectification of women to affirm the position of the male characters, homosexual characters are also similarly "othered" to affirm normative heterosexuality.

Drawing on earlier feminist work on gender, these critics further argued that homosexual characters are also negatively represented as deviant "others" because they transgress gender-related fixed social stereotypes of the way "real" men or women should behave and whom they should sexually desire. The representation of homosexuals as perverse or sick is often portrayed as the result of their "wrong *gender* identification" in mainstream films. Therefore, in the rare instances where homosexual difference is represented cinematically, it is often in negative contrast to heterosexual film characters who are depicted as "correctly gender identified". In contrast, homosexuals are depicted as gender deviants because they desire people of the "wrong" (same) gender.

Discourses about homosexual transgression are conflated with those of gender transgression in most films. *Homosexual* difference is frequently represented in terms of *gender* difference, the difference between man and woman, or femininity from masculinity. This common stereotype of homosexuals as gender deviants is the main reason why some homosexual critics have argued that homosexuals, like women, are often depicted in negative sexual terms because of their gendered sexuality.

It is not surprising then that there is often little attempt to distinguish homosexuals from cross dressers and drag queens, transsexuals from transvestites (cf. the

homosexual drag queen in Car Wash (USA 1976), the male-identified lesbian in She Must Be Seeing Things (USA 1987), the transvestites in Silence of the Lambs (USA 1990) and The Crying Game, and the transsexual in The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Australia 1994)). As this list indicates, the representation of the homosexuals as gender deviants is also evident in films made by homosexuals themselves. This suggests that like some other stereotypes of homosexuals (such as butch/femme), the discourse that homosexuals are gender deviants has been internalised, and occasionally even celebrated, by homosexuals themselves. From Nestle's (1988, 1992) stories of lesbian butch/femme, Butler's (1990) theories of gender performativity, Della Grace's (1993) photographs of drag kings, to films such as The Attendant (UK 1992) and Stonewall (USA 1996), arguments have been made that the construction of existing discourses of homosexuality is closely related to the transgression of fixed social gender categories.

However, other critics such as Ramet (1996), Bolin (1996) and Lang (1996) have argued that it is important to resist the typical conflation of gender variance and homosexuality. Through the examination of gender and sexual categories in different cultures, they attempt to distinguish between male-female *gender* difference and homo-hetero *sexual* difference. Bolin (1996) defines gender as the psychological, social and cultural domain of being male or female. In contrast, sex refers to biological components such as chromosomes, genitals, and other secondary sexual characteristics. Lang (1996) concurs that the conflation of sex with gender in Western scientific discourses can lead to confusion in trying to categorise and distinguish between cross-gender persons who identify as heterosexual and homosexual people who identify as

gender deviants. She suggests that Western thinking only in terms of binaristic man/woman gender and homo/hetero sexual categories is limiting.

These debates about the relationship between gender and homosexuality have been central to the discussion about the cinematic representation of homosexuality. Nevertheless, key critics working within the field of studies of homosexuality (such as Rubin (1984, 1994), McIntosh (1993) and Butler (1994)) concur that whilst distinctions should be made between (homo)sexual and gender differences, the study of gender remains essential since it ^{is} central to the construction of homosexual (same-gender) desire.

Besides drawing on feminist work on gender, lesbian and gay critics have also drawn on the work of social historians in the development of theories of homosexual oppression. Lesbian and gay discourses on (homo)sexuality were also made possible by the work of critics such as Weeks (1977, 1981), Foucault (1978), Boswell (1980), Faderman (1981, 1991) and D'Emilio (1983) who were working on unearthing alternative sexual histories and politics of homosexuals. Although not dealing specifically with cinematic subjects, their work concerning the re-interpretation of psychoanalytical, gay liberation, historical and social discourses of homosexuality in Western (Greek, English, Roman) societies can also give film critics another method of analysing the cinematic representation of homosexuals in films. Dyer's (1990) book Now You See It is unique in that the representation of homosexuals in film is contextualized within contemporary discourses of sexuality. The parallel emergence of popular films about homosexuals and proliferation of academic criticisms about lesbian

and gay people highlights the importance of his method of analysis.

The 1990s saw the publication of an increasing number of books dealing simultaneously with lesbian and gay film studies. These include How Do I Look? (ed. Bad Object Choices 1991), Queer Looks (ed. Gever, Greyson and Parmar, 1993), Images in the Dark (ed. Murray 1994), Out in Culture (ed. Creekmur and Doty, 1995), Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies (Straayer, 1996) and special issues of Jump Cut (1977, 1981) and Differences (1991) on "Queer Theory" and lesbian and gay film. The main focus of these books is to renegotiate the problematic negative or invisible position of lesbian and gay subjects in cinematic discourse. I suggest that the increase in publications and cinematic representations about homosexuals reflects a renewed alliance between the lesbian and the gay male political movement.

In the attempt to negotiate their marginalization, lesbian and gay theorists have taken up homosexual oppression as a site of struggle and have engaged in interrogating dominant heterosexist discourses on homosexuality in various textual, including cinematic, representations. A wide variety of strategies have been employed by homosexual theorists and activists in the attempt to renegotiate the homosexual's position as "other" (the negative opposite of the socially correct heterosexual). These range from celebration and/or idealisation of homosexuality's socially imposed "otherness" and "perverse" outsider status to the "normalisation" and/or negotiation of homosexuality through the deconstruction of discourses by attempting to "prove" that homosexuality is as "natural" or as "constructed" as heterosexuality.

I suggest that the proliferation of differing strategies reflects the on-going debate about the construction and representation of homosexuality. Besides the analysis of gender, another central concern within homosexual criticism is usually characterised as the "nature versus nurture" debate. This debate generally questions whether homosexuality is "natural" or "constructed". Disagreement has led to a split between those who have an "essentialist" notion of a stable "natural" biologically dependent homosexual identity and those who argue that homosexuality is socially constructed and hence, also socially "performative".

There are two main theories central to the "essentialist" argument. The first, presented by critics such as LeVay (1994) and Sullivan (1995), is that homosexuality is a result of a genetic biological condition and hence, the homosexual should not be discriminated against for something beyond his/her control. The second, advanced by critics such as Boswell (1980), Herdt (1988, 1994) and Hirsch (1990), argues that the "naturalness" of homosexuality is proved by evidence that homosexuality has universally existed throughout different historical moments in a wide variety of societies. Both arguments suggest that if homosexual behaviour is ahistorical and biological, the homosexual subject should not be discriminated against for something he/she cannot control. Analogies between homosexual oppression and racial discrimination are often made by essentialists advancing the above arguments.

In contrast to the essentialist argument, the "social constructionists" posit that a homosexual identity is a historically specific construct and/or the result of the sexual laws of a particular society at a particular time. Weeks (1977, 1981), Foucault (1978),

Dollimore (1991), Butler (1994) and Grosz (1994) are some of the critics who have variously been engaged in this project. Foucault (1978), for instance, argues that the "homosexual" is a construct of nineteenth century Western society. He suggests that although homosexual behaviour has always existed in different societies throughout history, it is only recently that individuals can be *categorised* and *identified* (and hence also discriminated against) as "homosexual" because of their sexual behaviour.

Butler's (1990) theory of "performativity" also points out that unlike racial difference which is relatively stable because it is visually inscribed, one's homosexual difference has to be constantly "performed". Since the individual's *homosexual behaviour* is neither timeless nor unchanging, his/her homosexuality cannot be their sole socially defined identity. Consequently, just because an individual is a "homosexual", does not imply that his/her actions are immediately subversive. Grosz (1994) elaborates that since homosexuality is a historically and socially specific construct, there is nothing *intrinsically subversive* about homosexuality. She suggests that it is hard to present an essentialist argument about homosexuality since unlike racial difference, a "homosexual person" cannot be identified until he/she "performs" some kind of homosexual behaviour. Therefore unlike oppressive racial acts, discriminatory acts against homosexuals are usually based on transitory evidence of sexual transgressions that are not always immediately visible.

Both the essentialist and social constructionist arguments have often been employed in the analysis of film containing homosexuals. In fact, most contemporary lesbian and gay film critics draw from both schools of thought. Many critics, including those I have

just cited, reflect that the on-going debate is no longer radically polarised between the "essentialists" and "anti-essentialists". Grosz (1994), for instance, argues that the division created between both groups is a mistaken one since constructionism is inherently bound up with notions of essence.

To be consistent, constructionism must explain what the "raw materials" of the construction consist in; these raw material must, by definition, be essential insofar as they precondition and make possible the processes of social construction.

(Grosz 1994a: 81)

Perez (1994) also argues that the discourses of constructionism and essentialism need not be split into two political or theoretical camps. One must be aware of both the validity of the arguments of constructionism and the necessity for a "strategic essentialism". She elaborates that even though one might espouse the view that identities are socially constructed, "strategic essentialism" must sometimes be taken up as a useful site of resistance against dominant ideologies that silence marginalized groups.

This marginalization is evident in the expected backlash from some conservative academics and the heterosexual general public against the work of critics engaged in re-negotiating the culturally marginal status of non-whites and homosexuals. More surprisingly, some academics working within these academic disciplines have also questioned some of the theoretical work being done. Queer Studies (ed. Beemyn and

Eliason, 1996) is an example of a collection of work by such critics that seeks to redress some of the overly theoretical trend of lesbian and gay studies. Despite some of the "anti-theory" positions of a few writers, this collection generally builds on the work done by earlier "theorists", albeit in a less "jargonistic" manner.

Champagne (1995), on the other hand, is more critical of the work of what he calls the "marginal academic critics" such as Dyer, hooks, Edelman, Yingling and Silverman. As well as questioning their critical analyses, he posits that the transgressive potentials of their arguments are rendered dubious because they have already become incorporated into the liberal humanist academy. However, Pease (1995) argues that besides ~~whelpfully~~ negating the positive work of those he criticises, Champagne's own ethics of marginality do not accomplish what he criticises the others for failing to achieve - not disrupting the "centre". Pease suggests that Champagne ends up reaffirming the status quo instead, through his unproblematised assumptions about gender and Western discourses.

Pease's defence of the above-mentioned academics indicates that despite the validity of some of Champagne's criticism, the fact remains that homosexuals are still marginalized, whether they are filmmakers working outside the Hollywood system or academics working within the institution. There remains a marked lack of funding for filmmakers who do not produce mainstream texts about heterosexual white people. Therefore, the most common method of renegotiating the cinematic representation of homosexuals does not involve actually producing texts about homosexuals. Bobo (1995) has suggested that the strategy of "reading against the grain" has long been used

by minoritized film audiences who have felt uncomfortable about the images produced on the screen. She gives the example of black women who enjoy watching The Color Purple (USA 1985) despite its employment of certain negative racial stereotypes.

Critics such as Mayne (1991), Wilton (1995a) and Whatling (1997) have also suggested that many homosexuals use oppositional readings to recuperate films in which storylines do not seem to allow for the existence of desiring homosexual subjects. Through the use of fantasy, homosexual audiences often "queer" a heterosexual storyline through the emphasis on the ruptures within the films. An often-quoted example is the film Morocco (USA 1930), where homosexuals use the scene in which Marlene Dietrich kisses another woman to "queer" an otherwise heterosexual narrative. Similarly, in films such as Basic Instinct, where homosexual characters are present, though in negative terms, homosexual audiences also often "read against the grain" to produce a positive reading.

I further suggest that the existence of theories about oppositional film readings by lesbian and gay audiences illustrates that there is a marked scarcity of texts about homosexuals. It also demonstrates that even when homosexuals are depicted in films, as I argued in the beginning of this section, they are often depicted in negative terms. As a result of the common negative or non-existent representation of homosexuality, the importance of positive images is central to film discourses of homosexuality.

There is little disagreement amongst activists, theorists and filmmakers that there is a necessity for positive images given the prevalence of negative cinematic stereotypes of

homosexuals in most mainstream films. Thus when lesbian and gay filmmakers manage to access alternative sources of funding available to film projects which are not predominantly about heterosexuals, they engage in making films to problematise the idea that homosexuals are perverse. Alongside these cinematic representations, lesbian and gay film critics such as Russo (1981), Stacey (1987, 1994), de Lauretis (2) (1987, 1988), Dyer (1990) and Weiss (1992) have aided in this recuperative project (which is part of the on-going lesbian and gay liberation agenda) by engaging in the identification of common negative cinematic stereotypes.

Besides examining the use of stereotypes, they have also identified some common narratives and cinematic codes used to depict homosexuals negatively. Their work has often been used in the discussion about the necessity of positive film images. Dyer is one of the first critics engaged in this project. He (1990) writes that some ways of representing homosexuality positively (or at least non-negatively) in these films include questioning homosexuality's relationship to heterosexuality, perversity, romantic (chaste) love and more recently, to AIDS. He examines how the representation of lesbian and gay people has changed over the years, often reflecting and drawing on the critical and activist discourses of gay liberation and more recently, of queer nation/activism. Dyer argues that in the 1970s and early 1980s, many of the films made by lesbians and gay men were affirmative films (comprising of both documentaries and fiction films) that engaged in the project of renegotiating negative cinematic lesbian and gay representation. (Dyer 1990: 228-274)

Related to the issue of the representation of "positive images", is the interrogation of

traditional cinematic codes itself. Narrative structure and other questions related to the representational strategies are foregrounded. Filmmakers such as Warhol, Jarman, and Anger have explored the use of alternative non-Hollywood cinematic narrative structures and filming techniques to make films about homosexuals. Some critics and filmmakers have suggested that it is not possible to depict a "positive" representation of homosexuality without a break from the use of conventional mainstream narrative structure that has traditionally been constructed around heterosexuality. Others do not advocate the use Hollywood filmmaking techniques because they are considered a "bland" uninteresting method of representation. Julien's Looking for Langston has often been cited as an example of how a interesting and powerful (read: positive) representation of black homosexuality is possible if the filmmaker breaks away from conventional cinematic techniques.

However, other filmmakers have attempted to subvert the heterosexist classical Hollywood narratives through continuing to use traditional filming and narrative structures. Whilst films such as She Must Be Seeing Things, Fresh Kill (USA 1993) and Totally Fucked Up have employed non-Hollywood cinematic techniques to represent homosexuality, films such as Desert Hearts (USA 1985), The Wedding Banquet (USA/Taiwan 1992) and Philadelphia (USA 1994) have continued to use conventional Hollywood narratives, often producing interesting "positive images" of homosexuals. Given that there are successful "positive" representations of homosexuality using either of those filmmaking techniques, I will in this thesis, look at films using both conventional and "alternative" non-Hollywood narrative and cinematic techniques. I suggest that it is more important to discuss each film

individually, rather than generally debating which method of representation more effectively portrays "positive images".

Analyses of films containing homosexual characters have shifted away from foregrounding the importance of "positive images" over the last decade. This coincides with the emergence of another type of lesbian and gay film, often collectively categorised as "queer" cinema. "Queer" cinema has been seen by many film theorists as the critique of the "positive images" depicted in earlier lesbian and gay films. Arroyo (1993) posits that "queer cinema" appears to question the seemingly uncritical production of positive idealistic representation of gay life and searches more for alternative representations particularly in response to the shift in the history of film representations of homosexuals over the last decade.

All these [queer] films are... struggling to represent a new context against the legacies of both dominant cinema and, as we can see in Swoon, Looking for Langston (Isaac Julien, UK, 1989), Poison and Tongues Untied (Marlon Riggs, USA, 1989), a previous history of gay representation (though they borrow as much as they reject). They try to place gays in history because imagining gays in history is to a certain extent a way of legitimising present existence and, more importantly, a way of imagining a future.

(Arroyo 1993: 93-94)

Hence, although "queer cinema" mounts a critique of the use of "positive images", it

can only do so because there is now an increased number of films containing "positive" representations of homosexuality. The reception of the film Cruising (USA 1980) is an example of the way the necessity of "positive images" is now being re-read. When Cruising was first released in 1980, it was widely criticised by the homosexual community as an example of Hollywood's virulent homophobia. However, a decade later, after many other "affirmative" films have been released, this same film which was boycotted for its negative representation of gay life, is now re-read as a celebrated part of "queer history" for its "entertaining" depiction of the "diversity" of different homosexual lifestyles. (Murray 1994: 303)

Similarly, contemporary films containing representations of sadomasochistic homosexual murderers, such as Swoon (USA 1992), 'Butterfly's Kiss' (UK 1995) and Basic Instinct, are now celebrated by sections of the homosexual communities for their representation of "diversity" within their communities. Even though some still protest against the stereotypical representation of homosexuals as sadistic murderers, the gay press has in general, embraced these "negative" representations as a more "entertaining" alternative to the "positive images" of homosexuality in films such as Philadelphia, Thin Ice and Boys on the Side (USA 1995) which are considered "bland". Critics such as Dyer (1990), Julien (1992, 1993), Hall (1988, 1993, 1996c) and Mercer (1991, 1994), suggest that the shift in the audience's responses and the emergence of films depicting many diverse types of lesbian and gay sexuality, indicate that film analyses also need to move away from simply questioning whether an image is positive or negative.

Theorists such as Butler (1990), Tyler (1991), Fuss (1991, 1995) and Grosz (1994, 1994a) have also pointed out that the desire for positive and negative images of homosexuality is still dependent on the degree to which it differs from heterosexuality. Limited to the preoccupation with rewriting the oppressed position of the homosexual, the representation of homosexuals can become largely defined by its opposition to heterosexuality. Hence, whilst it is important to examine whether a representation is positive or negative, it is more useful to examine why and how the discussion about the representations of homosexuality is still limited to being positive or negative. Fuss (1991) argues that discussion of homosexuality as positive or negative, or in opposition to heterosexuality, is the result of homosexual discourse being constructed as a binaristic opposition.

The philosophical opposition between "heterosexual" and "homosexual", like so many other conventional binaries, has always been constructed on the foundations of another related opposition: the couple "inside" and "outside".... Many of the current efforts in lesbian and gay theory ...have begun the difficult but urgent textual work necessary to call into question the stability and ineradicability of the hetero/homo hierarchy, suggesting the new (and old) sexual possibilities are no longer thinkable in terms of a simple inside/outside dialectic.

(Fuss 1991: 1)

Fuss argues that the binaristic construction of these homosexual discourses is limiting

because it does not allow homosexual analysis to take account of other differences. Like the male/female gender categories, since homosexual identity is constructed in opposition to heterosexual identities, other sexualities (eg. hermaphrodites, transsexuals, and transgenders) which fall outside these clearly defined gender dependent binary oppositions are ignored. (Fuss 1991: 2) Consequently, homosexual discourses are too readily problematized when a third term such as racial difference is introduced to the binary pair. When this happens, the binary relationship collapses to take account of the third term. Alternatively, the problematic third term is ignored or erased in order to maintain the binary relationship of the two terms. Therefore, she posits that because of the binary construction of contemporary homosexual discourse, other differences such as class, race and nationality are often unable to be adequately examined. Instead, the result is often that other binary pairs such as white/non-white, coloniser/colonised, exist along side each other. Since the relationship between the different binary pairs is not interrogated, this has led to the hierarchization of the various "differences" which in turn ignores the specificities of different experiences, historical and cultural contexts.

The discussion of the binaristic construction of homosexual discourse by the above critics leads me to suggest that traditionally binaristic lesbian and gay criticism *cannot* take account of race. Thus, contrary to many criticisms that lesbian and gay critics have simply not thought of discussing the representation of race, I suggest that they have *not* been *able* to discuss the issue of race within the binaristic framework with which most homosexual representations are analysed. However, instead of simply accepting that one is unable to take account of racial and other non-homo/hetero-sexual differences,

as Fuss argues, one should search for alternative means of analyses instead of persisting in using this limited binaristic means of analysis.

Critics such as Robson and Zalcock (1995), Van Leer (1995), hooks (1996) and Goldman (1996) also argue that examining a text using one set of binary terms, often results in an incomplete racially or homosexually biased analysis. For instance, contrary to many readings that the documentary Paris is Burning progressively depicts non-white queers, hooks suggests that the film's examination of racial privilege remains remarkably inadequate. She argues that even though the filmmaker portrays (homo)sexual difference sympathetically, "whiteness" and class is privileged because the black drag queens all aspire to emulate middle-class white women. Instead of questioning the drag queen's fetishization of white femininity, the construction of the film's narrative interprets these drag queens' aspirations as doomed to failure because of their racial identity. Thus, even though the film celebrates their gender and sexual transgression, the unproblematised privileging of whiteness results in a racially biased imperial narrative which objectifies and commodifies the experiences of these "sad" black subjects. Thus, hooks concludes that all films should be examined in terms of their representation of *both* racial and sexual difference.

"Queer cinema" has been heralded by some academics as a form of analysis that is able to take both racial and homosexual differences into account. Academic theorists such as de Lauretis (1991), Warner (1993) and Sedgwick (1994) posit that "queer discourse" replaces the limiting "homosexual discourse" because it is not rooted in binaristic oppositions. Other academics such as Gevert (1993), Greyson (1993), Parmar (1993),

Smith (1996), Beemyn (1996) and Eliason (1996) have also started using the term "queer" instead of "lesbian and gay" and "homosexual" as a means of taking account of racial, sadomasochistic, class and other differences.

However, some other academics such as Wilton (1995), Goldman (1996) and Goldstein (1996) have been more cynical about these celebratory claims. Wilton (1995) points out that many lesbian and gay critics argue that like "homosexual" discourse, "queer" criticism has also failed to acknowledge lesbian specificity and racial difference. Whilst these critics acknowledge that the aims of "queer" theory are admirable, it has not laid out a framework as to how these intersections of race, gender and sexuality can be explored. In fact, some of these critics suggest that "queer" theory has often perpetuated "homosexual discourse's" marginalization of those who are non-white, non-male, or ^{non}middle-class. They suggest that the emergence of queer critical and cinematic discourse does not seem to have replaced lesbian and gay discourse as a discursive site where racial difference can be more easily and/or adequately problematised.

Nevertheless, many lesbian and gay theorists including those named above, have begun to examine the impact that race and ethnicity has on representation of homosexuality. Given that many such articles are published in collections of "queer" studies such as Queer Looks (1993), The Material Queer (1996) and Queer Studies (1996), an argument can be made that "queer theory" is more aware of the necessity of examining racial representations than a binaristic homosexual/heterosexual criticism is. Nevertheless, the consistent inclusion of the terms "lesbian" and "gay" in all the long

titles of these same "queer" collections indicates that the so-called "queer" articles and theories included in these collections can also be considered "lesbian and gay" or "homosexual" ones. This returns me again to the reservations voiced by critics such as Wilton (1995), Goldman (1996) and Goldstein (1996) who suggest many of the so-called "queer" theories have still not managed to adequately take account of racial differences. They argue that even though "queer" theories have managed to free sexual practises from being defined in a rigid binaristic hetero/homosexual manner, discussion about racial difference is still often essentially fixed within binaristic categories of white/non-white. Just as black/white racial identities are seldom problematised within "lesbian and gay" discourses, racial *identities* often remain fixed and essentialised in many "queer" ones.

Discourses of "race".

Non-white people have often been relegated to the position of "other" in most Western cinematic discourses. Facing similar problems of negative representation, they also sought to reinstate the marginalised in the face of the dominant. The development of post-colonial discourse and "race" criticism operates on the premise that all discourses about the non-white subject have, as their base, a notion of racial difference. Without this assumption, there would not be a "race discourse" as such. I thus broadly define racial discourse as the analysis and examination of subjects who are racially different from the "norm". In order to contextualise my discussion of the way non-white people are depicted in Western texts, including how certain tropes are used to perpetuate

certain racial stereotypes, I shall review discourses of "race" and aspects of "post-colonial" criticism.

Like early lesbian and gay theory, earlier post-colonialist and "race" criticism sought to show the marked erasure of the marginalized non-white subject in the film texts. Critics such as Pines (1975), Cripps (1977), Stam (1983, 1994), Diawara (1988) and Bogle (1989) were concerned with the strategies of racial marginalization and denigration employed by the Western film texts. For many "race" critics, Franz Fanon's Wretched of the Earth published in 1961 is a key reference point. Although Fanon's project deals specifically with people of African descent, his work provided a starting point for many "race" critics engaged in the decolonisation project that sought to dismantle and displace the racist European intellectual tradition. The work of a later critic, Edward Said (1978), has often been seen as elaborating a similar project as of Fanon. In Orientalism, Said argued that the West had traditionally "othered" the East through various strategies in order to justify its racially based laws and process of colonisation.

According to the traditional orientalist, an essence should exist- ... this essence is both 'historical' since it goes back to the dawn of history, and fundamentally a-historical, since it transfixes the being, 'the object' of study, within its alienable and non-evolutive specificity, instead of defining it as all other beings, states, nations, peoples, and cultures - as a product, a resultant of the vention of the forces operating in the field of historical evolution. Thus one ends with a typology - based on a real

specificity, but detached from history, and consequently, conceived as being tangible, essential -which makes the studied 'object' another being with regard to whom the studying subject is transcendent...

(Said 1988: 298)

Said's Orientalism was one of the first examples of "race criticism" to illustrate how the West used certain forms of racial analysis to form stereotypes of non-white subjects in order to better maintain their sense of moral and cultural superiority often for legal and financial gains. Through his examination of the way "orientalism" (Said's term) maintained negative racial stereotypes of "orientals", Said elaborates on the project of deconstructing racist discourse pioneered by Fanon in Wretched of the Earth and Black Skins, White Masks.⁷ According to Young (1990), the publication of Orientalism was influential in the development of the widespread interrogation of the history of imperialism and presuppositions of the dominant colonial discourse.

Just as Fanon wrote specifically about the experience of Africans, Said's Orientalism was a particular critique of the Western study of West Asian civilisation. However, later academics such as Chow (1991, 1993, 1995), Spurr (1994) and Grewal (1996) have argued that the main points of Said's arguments are equally applicable to the study of other non-white non-Western cultures and people who are marginalized and "othered" in Western discourse.

The most crucial issue, meanwhile, remains Orientalism's general and continuing *ideological* role. Critics of Said in the East Asian field

sometimes justify their criticism by saying that Said's theory does not apply to East Asian because many East Asian countries were not, territorially, colonial possessions. This kind of positivistic thinking, derived from a literal understanding of geographical captivity, is not only an instance of the ongoing anthropological tendency to de-emphasise the "colonial situation"..., it also leaves intact the most important aspect of Orientalism - its legacy as everyday culture and value.

(Chow 1993: 7)

Other theorists such as Bhabha (1984, 1986, 1990, 1994), Hall (1988, 1993), Trinh (1989, 1991, 1996), McClintock (1995) and Stoler (1995) have also taken up the debate and examination of the issues surrounding "decolonisation" and "post-colonial" discourse. Their critiques have drawn attention to the fact that many texts about Africans, Orientals and other non-white or non-Western subjects produced by Western writers, film-makers and scriptwriters beyond the confines of "Race" studies have either consciously or unconsciously invoked this typology about the non-Western white subject. However, these later critics have generally rejected the use of simple inversions in favour of a more elaborated analysis of power, representational structure and author/ity.

One of the main issues of concern in their work is the examination of the way in which discourses of nationalism and racial difference function to further the earlier project of Western colonisation and obscure important contemporary processes of effecting

justice, restitution and economic status. For instance, Hall (1988) suggests that whilst nationalism might have once operated as a force of resistance in certain societies, it is now in danger of becoming a hegemonic and monologic construct that eschews any acknowledgement of the ethnic difference so prevalent in modern societies of migration and globalisation. He argues that in this time of globalisation, the conceptualisation of ethnicity and nationalism is undergoing radical changes as essentialist notions of the "authentic" ethnic native are increasingly called into question.

Numerous later attempts have argued further that people of colour are in fact not so marginal in white Western texts as has previously been thought. Instead, critics such as Dyer (1988), Trinh (1989), Bhabha (1990, 1994) and Chow (1991, 1993, 1995) argue that non-white people are central to the construction of white politics and the representation of the white cinematic subject. They suggest that certain discourses of nationalisms and ethnicity utilise the manichean polarities of self-other, civilised-native, us-them to construct white European national identities. Since the process of colonisation is often effected and maintained through these racist discourses, a subversive reading is often enabled by recognising the way in which the identities of the white subject (or coloniser) are dependent on the non-white subject (or colonised).

Others such as Mazumdar (1989), Beaver (1992) and Silvera (1992) argue that merely "reading against the grain" is not enough, that a recuperative project needs to be undertaken, so that the "marginalized" or colonised non-white subject is given a "voice". However, Spivak (1987, 1990, 1993) questions the assumption that the truly

marginalized subject (whom she calls the "subaltern"), whose identity is its difference, can unproblematically "speak" or construct a text/discourse for itself. Her argument that there is no "true" subaltern group that can "know and speak for itself" has become very influential and important. In contrast, also influential critics such as Trinh (1989) and Bhabha (1986, 1990, 1994) avoid using the notion of a "true" subaltern whose oppression renders him/her completely silent. Instead, they draw attention to the *hybridised* nature of colonisation and oppression, where the transaction of the post-colonial world is not a one way process where the coloniser is able to silence the colonised in absolute terms.

For instance, Bhabha suggests that the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised is a deeply ambivalent one. (Bhabha 1994: 85-92) Despite undergoing the processes of "mimicry" and "imitation" with which colonised peoples cope with the coloniser's presence, the coloniser-colonised relationship is constantly contested and the "hybridised" modalities which result from this colonisation process actually foreground the subversive nature of opposition and displace the site of discrimination and domination. (Bhabha 1994: 86) His theory of the *ambivalence* of the colonised subject has also become very important to the post-colonial project of how to effect agency for the post-colonial subject. Because representation is seen as a crucial site of resistance, many of the main debates in post-colonial criticism deal specifically with the interrogation of racial stereotypes and the relationship of representation to agency, subjectivity and resistance. Bhabha has himself also developed his theory of ambivalence and mimicry through the interrogation of racial representation and use of stereotypes.

On the one hand, Bhabha agrees with arguments made by critics such as Said, Stam and Pines that the maintenance of racial stereotypes persistently reduces the non-white (non-Western) subject to the position of "other". This allows the Western white subjects to justify their racially biased colonial administration by reassuring themselves of the "primitive's" foreignness. No longer reminded that this "other" could actually be "the same" as oneself, feelings of uncertainty and guilt that might arise from one's exploitative position are less likely to arise. This psychosocial construction of the non-white subject as "other" also helps to consolidate the white and/or colonial subject's superiority by allowing the projection of the negative effects of guilt onto the other.

However, Bhabha also points out the many theoretical difficulties apparent in such arguments. In "Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism", Bhabha (1990: 291-322) draws attention to the monolithic nature of Said's pioneering orientalist project by questioning the stability and power of the stereotype Said argues is inherent in racist discourse. Whilst many racist assumptions obviously persist in the process of cultural production ensuring that the resulting texts contain many negative racial stereotypes, Bhabha argues that the stereotypes (mapped out by Said) which are founded on a colonial power are themselves subject to the effects of a conflictual economy. Consequently, the orientalist colonial stereotype is in fact not as hegemonically monolithic as Said assumes, but is (as Bhabha's theory of ambivalence suggests) a complex, ambivalent and contradictory mode of representation where anxiety-revealing slippages frequently occur, questioning the very efficacy of colonial discourse itself. Thus he posits that the identity of the white and/or colonial subject is

essentially an unstable one. He suggests that the difference and relations of power between the colonised/coloniser are not fixed and can be negotiated.

Cultural difference marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification, through processes of negotiation where no discursive authority can be established without revealing the difference of itself.

(Bhabha 1990: 313)

According to Bhabha, the production of stereotypical Western film images of non-white/non-Western people (which constantly emphasise their foreignness, alien sexuality and relatively lower cultural or social skills), reveals its own underlying attempts to allay its rampant anxiety about the recent economic success and the increasing social and political prominence of non-white peoples in Western countries. The creation of white central characters whose points-of-view appear constantly civilised and rational, also allows the Western audience to indulge in a fascination with the Orient without being threatened by it.

Critics such as JanMohamed (1992), Spurr (1994), Stoler (1995) and McClintock (1995) have also demonstrated the way that the West creates different methods of "othering" non-white people. Stoler (1995) researches how sexual stereotypes of non-white people are taught to young white children from an early age in order to maintain the Western separation and relations of power between white people and the "natives". McClintock (1995) shows that the "othering" of non-white people is used to justify the

actions and regulations of the West during the times of the colonial expansion. Spurr (1994) argues that this process of imperialism is continued and reflected in contemporary and late twentieth century politics.

Although one must be aware of the danger in making generalising examinations of white/non-whites as existing solely in oppositional white/non-white dominant/colonised relationships (cf. Trinh (1989) and Grewal (1996)), racially and nationally specific discussions of non-white people are often possible since their ethnicities are often not acknowledged in Western discourses (cf. Spurr (1994) and Stoler (1995)). To date, the few films which carefully distinguish between the different non-white races and their differing socio-economic status remain generally limited to the independent films produced by Spike Lee and other lesser-known directors. The stereotypical representation of non-white people as interchangeable racial "others" in Western discourse also explains why I have decided to use the generic category "people-of-colour" instead of acknowledging racial specificity. As JanMohamed (1992) argues, within hegemonic white patriarchal discourse, the racial specificity of the non-white racially different subject is irrelevant in the formation of the racist colonial narratives.

Like colonialist literature... racialized sexuality is structured by and functions according to the economy of a manichean allegory.... Such a system functions by first reducing the colonised or racialized subject to a generic being that can be exchanged for any other "native" or racialized subject. Once reduced to his exchange-value in the colonialist

signifying system, s/he is fed into the manichean allegory, which functions as the currency, the medium of exchange, for the colonialist discursive system. The exchange function of the allegory remains constant, while the generic attributes themselves can be substituted infinitely (and even contradictorily) for one another.

(JanMohamed 1992: 106)

He suggests that since colonialist discourse is constructed so that one racial group can easily be substituted for another racial group, the racial specificity of the non-white subject is to a large extent irrelevant as long as the hegemony of the "white" subject is maintained as the "centre" through the "othering" of a (any) racially different person. Young (1990) also argues that the West uses the "non-West" (East) as a signifier of all that is alien, perverse and "other" in order to disavow its own "perversity" that exists within. This establishment of racial difference through the processes of objectification and fetishization allows the Western text to locate its own position as the "centre" of all that is civilised and morally proper.

Eurocentrism bifurcates the world into the "West and the Rest" and organises everyday language into binaristic hierarchies implicitly flattering to Europe: *our* "nations," *their* "tribes"; *our* "religions," *their* "superstitions"; *our* "culture," *their* "folklore"; *our* "art," *their* "artefacts"; *our* "demonstrations," *their* "riots"; *our* "defence," *their* "terrorism." ...As an ideological substratum common to colonialist, imperialist, and racist discourse, Eurocentrism is a form of vestigial

thinking which permeates and structures *contemporary* practices and representations even after the formal end of colonialism.

(Shohat and Stam 1994: 2)

Stam and Shohat (1994) concur that in Western discourse, there is often little attempt to distinguish the racial or cultural specificities of the different non-white people of different countries. They argue that the demonization of the non-West, non-white and non-European people by "colonialist discourse" has persisted in Western "eurocentric discourse" after the formal end of colonisation. The process of "othering" all non-white racial groups does not apply only to racial groups that exist outside the West. Young suggests that Western discourse also apply the same colonialist or "orientalist" discourse to "other" non-white racial groups that live within the West in predominantly white Western countries. (Young 1990: 139) Hall has also extensively examined how Asians, blacks and racial "Others" have been constructed in Britain, in negative opposition to the racially white "real Englishman". (Hall 1988, rpt in 1996: 447)

Other critics (3) have also extensively debated the way that the media similarly marginalises African-Americans, Chicanos, Hispanics and Asians in the UK, US and Canada regardless of their specific ethnicity. Not only is the racial specificity of the non-white cinematic subject disregarded, but the degree of "Westernisation" of the non-white subject, whether they were born in the West or outside the West, is also irrelevant to the processes of racial stereotyping. Films ranging from Trading Places (USA 1983), Volunteers (USA 1985), The Last Emperor (USA 1987), Mr Johnson (USA 1990) and The Lover (UK/France 1992) depict non-white characters who

"mimic" the idealised and idolised white Westerner. These films draw on the "jumped up" racial stereotype, which suggests that non-white people aspire to be but can never successfully, be like the white man. This "jumped up" stereotype contrasts with the other popular racial stereotype of white people who abandon all the trappings of "civilisation" to "go native". Implicit in both stereotypes, is the assumption that being born as, or having contact with, non-white people leads to the loss of "true success" which includes the trapping of high culture, Western morality and social sophistication.

Later in this thesis, I will argue that another common method of "othering" the non-white subject is through sexual stereotyping. Many of the films engaged in renegotiating the marginalisation of black people and other non-white film characters have actively interrogated popular racist sexual stereotypes. Spike Lee's Jungle Fever (USA 1991) is an example of a film that questions the old racist stereotype of the over-sexed black man who wants a white woman. His film is only one of many that partake in the recuperative project of rewriting the sexual stereotyping of non-white people. Other films include Tongues Untied (USA 1990), Boyz n the Hood (USA 1991) and Khush (UK 1991).

This leads me to suggest that homosexual criticism, post-colonial and "race" critics engage in similar problems of representation. Common pressing issues relating to the cinematic representation of non-whites and homosexuals as minoritized people include the issue of power, sexual objectification, identification and agency. Thus, although lesbian and gay criticism and post-colonial criticism superficially appear to have rather different agendas, I suggest that one of the implicit central arguments that emerges

from both is the often *negative sexual* representations of non-white and homosexuals. The use of extreme *sexual* stereotypes of non-white people in racist Western texts emphasises their inferior non-white racial and cultural differences to effectively distance them from white subjects.

Unfortunately, in the preoccupation to negotiate the negative representation of non-white people, the "othering" of non-white people, usually cinematically depicted through the process of "*sexual* othering," has not been yet been adequately explored. One of the objects of this thesis is thus to illustrate how non-white people are *sexually* "othered" and/or fetishized. I shall argue this theory of *racialised sexualisation* explains why various non-white men have been frequently contradictorily cinematically depicted as feminised "pansies", "sissies" or overtly masculine macho characters. I suggest this also explains why non-white women have also often been contradictorily sexually stereotyped as highly sexed dangerous vamps and submissive obedient sex slaves (cf. Fung (1991) and White (1995)).

The relationship between the construction of discourses of race and sexuality.

Since JanMohamed's (1992) pioneering argument that the colonialist signifying system characterises non-whites as sexual degenerates, there have been some exciting developments in the last few years exploring the importance of sexuality in the construction of racial discourses. New research by "race" and "post-colonial" critics such as McClintock (1995), Stoler (1995), Young (1995), and Young (1996b)

undercover evidence that non-white people have historically been sexually stereotyped in certain ways in the effort to contain the sexual threat they pose to white society. Through the examination of laws against miscegenation in different Western societies, they argue that negative stereotypes of "mulattos" result from the fear that the offspring of mixed race relationships confuse and disrupt the racial boundaries between white and non-white. They further suggest that the fear of non-white people's sexuality, evident in the laws against miscegenation, has been effected for economic and other social reasons.

Critics such as Raikin (1994), Hart (1994), Young (1995) and Terry (1995, 1995a), who work in the field of sexual studies, have also recently explored new theories

linking homosexual and racial minoritization.

Raikin,

for instance, suggests that by the end of the nineteenth century, the metaphor of racial degeneration had become conflated with that of sexual degeneracy (1994: 157). She argues that homosexuals and non-white people, especially those who are mixed-race, are similarly characterised negatively as "intermediate" types who threaten existing rigid racial and sexual classifications by transgressing these boundaries. Like the other critics, her work demonstrates that homosexuals, like non-white people, are also negatively stereotyped for sexual reasons. In direct contrast to the fear of non-white reproductive sexuality, homosexuals are considered sexually perverse because of their failure to reproduce any "proper" heirs.

Terry's work is also particularly relevant to this thesis because she extensively develops the links between homosexuality, racial difference and reproduction. In one

article (1995), Terry cites two popular explanations for the existence of homosexuals. The first common reason given is that the homosexual is a result of stress that leads to the debilitation of the nervous system. This in turn results in the freeing of "primitive," promiscuous wild sexual appetites. The second popular cause of homosexuality is thought to be that the demands of modern civilisation had led to the pathological response of some of the Western human species who were considered most complex by nature. The result of the advances of modern civilisation and specialisation meant that some of the Western subjects become so refined that they become sterile and/or refuse to expend any energy on the procreative activity.

In another article co-authored with Urla in the same collection of essays, Terry posits that the "robust, European, heterosexual gentleman" has been constructed as an ideal against which all other "deviant" types are compared. (1995a: 4) Thus according to her argument, the normal white, heterosexual, healthy, male body is always present - even if in shadowy form - in discourses of deviance and representation of non-white and/or homosexual subjects. Because homosexuals do not participate in correct reproduction of white subjects, they become subjects of concern. Fuss (1995) has also argued that homosexuals and non-whites are similarly "othered". She suggests that their similar social marginalization is not coincidental since discourses about homosexuals, non-whites and laws against miscegenation developed in the West at around the same time. Fuss shows that Freud's work on sexuality actually draws analogies between the "invert" and the racial "other".

As early as the first and second drafts of the *Three Essays on the Theory*

of Sexuality, we find Freud representing primitivity and homosexuality explicitly in terms of one another, arguing that inversion is "remarkably widespread among many savage and primitive races," and that "in inverted types, a predominance of archaic constitutions and primitive psychological mechanisms is regularly to be found".

(Fuss 1995: 36)

Hart (1994) and Young (1996) also point out that the development of psychoanalytic discourses about white female homosexuality drew extensively from existing contemporary conceptualisations of deviant non-white sexuality. They argue that psychoanalysts borrowed the terminologies and methods used as evidence of sexual deviance in non-white people to create similar definitions on how to identify (homo)sexual deviance in white people. Somerville (1996) argues that the close interdependence of discourses of homosexual and racial deviance has persisted into a later time, in a different continent. She identifies the way that the classification of bodies as "homosexual" or "heterosexual" emerged in the United States at the same time as the policing of racial boundaries.

Specifically, two tabooed sexualities - miscegenation and homosexuality - became linked in sexological and psychological discourse through the model of "abnormal" sexual object choice.

(Somerville 1996: 251)

However, it is not only in psychoanalytic models that discourses about homosexuality

and race eventually converged to posit that interracial and same-sex sexuality were the result of analogous "unnatural" desires. Terry (1995) also argues that eugenic doctrines were constructed to differentiate racial and homosexual "others" from healthy white middle-class heterosexuals.

The idea that homosexuality was a matter of constitutional degeneracy emerged at a time when European science supported a prevailing belief that certain socially disadvantaged classes of people were intellectually inferior by nature. Thus, the bodies - and particularly the brains and nervous systems - of the poor, of women, of criminals and of non-white peoples were assumed to be primitive, fundamentally degenerate, or neurotically diseased.

(Terry 1995: 131)

She explains that the eugenic institutions' emphases on racial and sexual purity were the result of a parallel scientific theory that emphasised that homosexuals were sexually deviant like non-whites. She suggests that eugenic doctrines were the result of the bid to prevent the spread of homosexuality to the "general population". Critics such as Fuss (1995), Chauncey (1995), Stoler (1995) and Somerville (1996) also concur that in the early half of the twentieth century, psychoanalytic theories of homosexuality, the work of sexologists, and eugenic doctrines of race and sexuality simultaneously supported white phobia about miscegenation and the growing panic that inverts and perverts were everywhere. Terry concludes that the laws and regulations about interracial sex and homosexuality were the result of this fear of the potential threats of *homosexuality*

embodied in white bodies and of interracial *sexuality* in the non-white bodies to the survival of white middle-class Europeans. (Terry 1995: 181-182)

Others such as Morgan (1996) and Patton (1992, 1995) have suggested that the close relationship between discourses of homosexuality and non-whites existed well into the later part of this century. Patton (1995) argues that the perception of homosexuals and people of color as sexually deviant and atavistically underdeveloped is still evident in the 1980s and 1990s. She shows that in popular AIDS discourse, it is generally believed that while heterosexual white working and middle class adolescents can be educated about HIV transmission, homosexuals and non-whites cannot. However, she suggests that both non-white people and homosexuals are represented negatively in mainstream Western discourses for differing reasons. She argues that white gay teens are depicted as deviant but recuperable (1995: 16) whilst all youths of color are perceived as "irreversibly and persistently at risk" by "nature" or because of their "natural environment". (1995: 355) She posits that government inaction and media misrepresentation of young white homosexuals and youth of color is a result of a logic that seeks to protect the "normal" white, heterosexual body. (I will further elaborate on the differing yet similar threat posed by non-whites and homosexuals in chapter three.)

By drawing links between discourses of homosexuality and race, these critics all seek to demonstrate how the beginning of sexology and contemporary discourses about homosexuality is dependant on the pervasive climate against miscegenation and concern about racial purity. Around the turn of the century, sexologists drew on

existing scientific racial discourses and methodologies to identify racial difference in order to try to distinguish anatomically the "perverse" homosexual body from the "normal" heterosexual one. Some of these critics have further argued that these definitions are still evident in contemporary discourses of race and homosexuals. By demonstrating that the construction of discourses of sexuality is inextricable from those of race, they argue that it is important to understand how contemporary discourses of race and sexuality are shaped by one another.

However, arguments have also been made against drawing analogies between discourses of racial and homosexual difference. Whilst critics such as Harlow (1991), Crimp (1993) and Diamond (1993) provide arguments in favour of deploying identification between various oppressed groups for political purposes, others including Chow (1991, 1993), Spivak (1993), Butler (1994) and Sommer (1994) warn that cross-cultural identifications can sometimes lead to the appropriation and negation of another's experiences (1995: 8-9). Sedgwick (1990), Grosz (1994) and Takagi (1996) are other theorists who have emphasised the danger of comparing homosexual oppression with racial discrimination. They point out that lesbian and gay people are generally distinguished by their sexual desires and practices. Unlike non-white people whose racial difference usually obviously marked by their bodies, lesbian and gay bodies are not visually different from straight bodies. Whilst a homosexual person can choose to remain "in the closet" and "pass" as a heterosexual person, the majority of racial minorities do not have the option of choosing to keep their racial identity a secret. Thus the experience of discrimination, and the strategies employed in representing homosexuals and non-whites differ.

Nevertheless, despite warning against ignoring such differences, such critics also acknowledge the importance of further examining the relationship between discourses of race and sexuality – two of the most globally influential discourses shaping contemporary “identities”. (Parker et al 1992: 2) It is therefore not surprising that those critics working specifically on non-white homosexuality, (eg. Goldsby (1990), Manalansan (1993), Hammonds (1994), Mercer (1994), Takagi (1996), Wat (1996), Thadani (1996) and Leong (1996)) emphasise that a complex relational conception of racial and homo sexualities is crucial. They argue that a careful examination of both homosexual and racial discourses is useful in the study of the representation of lesbian and gay people of colour.

I shall now move on to the second section of this chapter, beyond academic theories of representation, to identify the debates about non-white homosexuals within the homosexual and non-white communities. This section contextualises the recent films containing non-white homosexuals, many of which are made in direct response to the debates and issues raised within these communities.

SECTION 2:

The Perception of Homosexuality within Communities of Colour.

One common criticism by critics who write about homosexuals of color (eg. Julien (1992, 1993, 1993b), Harper (1993, 1994), Mercer (1994), Riggs (1995) and Hemphill (1995)) is the refusal by communities of color to believe that lesbians and gay men exist within their communities. Harper (1993) argues this point by illustrating the way in which African-American oral discourse popularises the use of homophobic phrases. Riggs (1995: 471) suggests that the homophobia of the "proud, 'afrocentric' black man" who is "resolutely heterosexual", renders all black homosexuals "game for play" for all classes of the black communities, from illiterate thugs to the best of black culture. In the article "Black Masculinity and the sexual politics of race", Mercer (1994: 131-170) posits that black homophobia is probably the result of the lack of reciprocity and mutual exchange between the gay and black civil rights movements.

Despite agreeing that black communities are generally homophobic, Julien (1993) and Hemphill (1995) also warn against the appropriation of black homophobia to negatively depict all black people as homophobic. Hemphill (1995: 393) criticises "In Living Colour" for its employment of the common negative stereotype within black communities that black gay men are inferior disempowered "sissies" who are ineffectual and womanish. Even though Julien (1993b: 130) concurs, he emphasises that negative sexual stereotypes of black people should not be prohibited. He suggests that instead of identifying instances of misappropriations for their negative representations of non-white homosexuals, the issue of how and why black

communities are considered homophobic should be explored.

An explanation offered is that black homophobia arises from the attempt to "cleanse" the black communities in order to prove that blacks are not sexually deviant. In the ICA publication based on an earlier two day conference, The Fact of Blackness: Franz Fanon and Visual Representation, Mercer (1996) and Young (1996) suggest that black homophobia is perhaps rooted in popular discourses of "blackness" which have been greatly influenced by Fanon's work. Young^(1996:97) suggests that the belief within black communities that homosexuality is a "white man's disease" might be related to Fanon's problematic linking of homosexuality and negrophobia.

Mercer, both at the conference (1996: 121) and in an earlier publication (Mercer 1994: 158), argues that the refusal to acknowledge the existence of homosexuals in the communities of colour could be the result of black "overcompensation" against racist myths of slackness and sexual depravity, first identified by Fanon.

Fuss (1995: 155) also explains that Fanon's displacement of homosexuality to white people arises from his attempt to challenge "the ethnological component of psychoanalysis that has long equated 'the homosexual' with 'the primitive'." She problematises Fanon's homophobic assumption that white people are "true" homosexuals because they voluntarily engage in homosexual acts whilst black men only become involved in homosexual activities for economic reasons. (Fuss 1995: 154-158) Unfortunately, the assumption that all "authentic" black men and women are heterosexual continues to be reflected in the popularisation of black homophobia in

films by black directors (eg. Spike Lee) or with black stars (eg. Eddie Murphy). The brief appearance by an unsympathetic black lesbian in She's Gotta Have It (USA 1986) is an often-cited example. Herein lies a reason for why "positive images" of racial and sexual minorities are necessary. (4) The importance of black positive images is also repeatedly emphasised by Lee himself, although he seems ^{to} depict only positive images of *heterosexual* blacks. In most of his other films, Lee continues to draw on the popular belief within African, Asian and other non-white communities that homosexuality is "a white disease". (5) Instead of accepting the diversity and the presence of homosexuals within black communities, the myth that lesbian and gay people of colour have become gay through contaminated social contact with white people is circulated through such films.

I suggest that the "othering" of homosexuals within black communities parallels what Harper (1994: 127) identifies as the common belief within white communities that homosexuality is a "foreign" perverse sexual practice common to all non-white people. Homosexuals in other non-African communities of colour also "other" homosexuality as a foreign disease. Moraga argues that chicano nationalism has never accepted openly gay men and lesbians within its ranks. (1996: 298) Writing specifically about Indian society, Ayyar (1993), Shah (1993) and Thadani (1996) also argue that to identify as homosexual is seen to be shameful and "non-Indian". They suggest that claims that homosexuality is a "Western thing" result from the social excommunication of anything sexually different which threatens conservative Indian society. Others such as Pamela H. (1989), Wat (1996) and Hom (1996) also proffer similar arguments concerning the perception of homosexuality as a "white disease" within Asian

communities.

These critics also suggest that it is hard for Asian homosexuals to "come out" because sexuality in general is rarely broached publicly within their communities. The fear of losing the support of their families and not receiving any support from the predominantly white gay male lesbian and gay community adds to their difficulty in "coming out". Many non-white homosexuals either remain closeted or forsake their ethnic identities by leaving their communities of colour in order not to be "outed". This distinct separation of the non-white communities and the white homosexual communities is well corroborated by the Western media where the representations of homosexuals are usually white. However, recent work of critics such as Hom (1996) and Straayer (1996) demonstrate that even though communities of colour disavow the presence of homosexuals within their communities, they are often aware of their existence. Straayer suggests that the emergence of films such as Tongues Untied, Khush and The Wedding Banquet forces the black and Asian communities to acknowledge the existence of homosexuals within their communities. Besides the films cited by Straayer, many other fictional films and documentaries containing non-white homosexuals have also been released over the last decade. These films include My Beautiful Laundrette, Mala Noche (USA 1985), The Passion of Remembrance (UK 1986), Young Soul Rebels, Osaka Story (UK 1994), Set It Off (USA 1997), Sixth Happiness (UK/India 1997) and Out of Season (USA 1998).

Despite the increase in the number of films, there are few books published by established academic presses which concern themselves entirely with non-white

homosexuals in the West. In contrast, there has recently been a much larger number books about the existence of non-white homosexuals in the non-Western world. The authors/editors of such books include), Hirsch (1990), Nanda (1990), Parker (1991), Herdt (1994), Jackson (1995), Bley (1995), Ramet (1996), Reinfelder (1996) and Thadani (1996). Although these are interesting because they dispute the assumption that homosexuality is a white or "Western" thing, two possible criticisms can be made about these books.

The first is that many of the authors are white Westerners. In response to such criticism, Hall (1995: 23) and Mercer (1994: 213) can be cited. They suggest it is important is not to draw rigid boundaries around racial subjects and the ethnicity of the authors or filmmakers. Instead, it is more important to analyse the context in which these films are made, and the way in which the articles and books are written. This leads me to the second possible criticism, that these works may simply reinforce the image of racial others as sexually degenerate. Though this critique is valid, many of these works are careful examinations of the existence of homosexuality in non-Western cultures. These arguments have, furthermore, become useful references for lesbian and gay people of colour living in the West when discussing their own experiences.

Lesbian and Gay People of Colour in White Homosexual Communities.

The popularity of documentaries such as Chinese Characters (Canada 1986), Looking for Langston, Tongues Untied and Khush with non-white homosexual audiences

suggest that the feeling that racism is prevalent within the predominantly white homosexual communities is a shared one. Parmar (1993), Julien (1993), Mercer (1994) and Allen (1995) have suggested the sometimes-subtle racism within the homosexual communities is often translated into films about homosexuals. Allen (1995) cites Salmonberries (Canada 1991), as an example of how a popular lesbian film draws on racist discourse to develop narrative tension. She argues that the central lesbian character's non-white racial identity is problematically used to heighten the erotic tension in the narrative, at the expense of racial difference. Once racial difference has fulfilled its narrative function, "whiteness" is recuperated and racial difference is conveniently erased by the end of the film to ensure that the film-text is more palatable to the predominantly white lesbian audience. Allen concludes that "whiteness" is presented as a norm for all lesbians: "...the narrative of Salmonberries plays with the idea of Native-American identity only to inscribe white lesbian identity as ideal." (1995: 141)

However, Hart (1994) points out that since contemporary understandings of lesbianism are based on the earlier work of psychoanalysts and sexologists (who created the modern definition of lesbianism in response to social anxiety around transgressive white female sexuality), it is not surprising that the lesbian has entered modern Western discourse as "white". Morgan (1996) concurs that gay communities in the United States developed as almost exclusively white. He argues that white gay people's race privilege enabled them to detach from their families of origin to form what is known today as the "gay community." Black soldiers did not have the same freedom or financial ability to leave their neighbourhoods and families to live in a white gay

community which frequently had racist door policies.

Nevertheless, Allen (1995) and even Hart (1994) herself argue that even if the modern definition of lesbianism is based on a white identity, the investment of homosexual theories in its racial assumptions has to be interrogated. A common problem of many analyses of homosexuality, apart from the work of critics such as Dyer (1988, 1997), (Charles) (1993), Hart (1994) and Perry (1995) which engage in an analysis of "whiteness," is the assumption that "whiteness," unlike "Asianness" or "blackness," is not a racial identity. Since the "whiteness" of homosexual communities in the West is often assumed, the white identities on which contemporary homosexual identities are based are often not acknowledged. Consequently, this leads to problems for non-white homosexuals when entering these white homosexual worlds. Fung (in the documentary Chinese Characters). Mason-John and Okorowa (1995), Gomez (1995) and Lee (1996) point out that it is often difficult for non-white homosexuals to come out because many of them do not fit into the white dress style and white behavioural code. They suggest that homosexual communities do not accept one if recognisably white codes of dress, behaviour and speech are not adopted.

Another common problem identified by Ma (1993), Mason John and Okorowa (1995) is that non-white homosexuals often experience sexually stereotyping. As many white homosexuals often maintain similar racial assumptions to white heterosexual communities, they frequently continue to project popular stereotypes of highly sexed non-white people onto the homosexual African, Thais, Filipinos and other black/Asian-Pacific men and lesbians. Bhabha argues that during the process of racial sexualisation,

the skin becomes the signifier of racial and cultural difference. The racially different subject becomes signified as a sexual fetish, as "the embodiment of rampant sexuality." (Bhabha 1990a: 85). In the article "Imaging the Black Man's Sex," Mercer (1986, rpt 1994: 171-189) also draws on Freud's theories of fetishization, scopophilia and voyeurism to explain the sexual stereotyping of black men in Mapplethorpe's photographs. He examines Mapplethorpe's photographs of black male nudes to argue that the non-white bodies are fetishized as "lacking" and "feminised" for the voyeuristic white gaze.

However, other critics such as Chow (1991: 24), and later, even Mercer (1991) himself, remind us that it is not only the white Western subject who gaze, are voyeurs and spectators (1995: 13). In a later article, "Skin Head Sex Thing," Mercer (1991) revised his earlier criticism of Mapplethorpe's photographs to take account of the way he, as a black gay man, also enjoys looking at, and objectifying, the images of Mapplethorpe's photographs of nude black men. After trying to explain his ambivalent feelings about his apparent contradictory fetishistic looks and political commitment, he concludes that it is the relation of power that determines whether these photographs are exploitative, and whether, in enjoying these images, he is colluding with the "white master gaze." He suggests that one should examine the purposes for which these images were created and used.

Parmar (1993), White (1995) and Morgan (1996) also write about the importance of analysing the way images of non-white people are sexualised and used. Morgan (1996) identifies how 1950s North American physique magazines sexualised images of black

men. Morgan also argues that these images draw on racial stereotypes of black men's hyper-masculinity to disavow the spectre of homosexuality, then commonly believed to be a racially white phenomenon. Like Morgan, White (1995) suggests that white homosexuality has relied on and consumed sexualised images of non-white people. Although usually confined to supporting or marginal roles, non-white characters are often sexually stereotyped to hint at homosexual deviancy. A "process of erotic doubling between a woman of Color and the white star may also serve to figure lesbianism" (White 1995: 97). Exotic and repressed sexuality is projected onto the body of the woman of Color. White argues that this common casting practise of featuring a racially different supporting actress serves to sexually highlight the desirable "whiteness" of the female star. Similarly, Parmar (1993) suggests that racially dependent sexual stereotypes of non-white people and homosexuals of colour in white mainstream and homosexual communities are often reflected in cinematic texts.

I do not speak from a position of marginalization but more crucially from the resistance to that marginalization. As a filmmaker, it is important for me to reflect upon the process through which I constantly negotiate the borderlines between shifting territories... between the margin and the centre... between inclusion and exclusion... between visibility and invisibility. For example, as lesbians and gays of color, we have had constantly to negotiate and challenge the racism of the white gay community, and at the same time confront the homophobia of communities of color.

(Parmar 1993: 5)

Parmar argues that as a filmmaker who is a lesbian of colour, a minority, her films are part of her constant fight against marginalization. In an interview with Ainley, Munt (1995) explains that the process of marginalization exists in Britain despite the belief of some people that it has been eradicated by the equal opportunities policy. Mercer (1994: 240) also argues that the lack of resources has resulted in a politics of tokenism that affects the types of representations, (usually heterosexual), produced about the black communities. Because only one "Other" is appointed at a time, the selected black artist or filmmaker becomes the representative "voice" of the entire black community. He points out that this use of a token representation from a particular minoritized community means that the representative (such as the filmmaker Parmar) is burdened with the responsibility of speaking for a diverse group of people. Hence, unlike white heterosexual artists or filmmakers whose works are not seen as "typical" of an entire community, the black artist or filmmaker is frequently not seen as an individual creating particular works unique to his/her experiences.

When black artists become publicly visible only *one at a time*, their work is burdened with a whole range of extra-artistic concerns precisely because, in their relatively isolated position as one of the few black practitioners in any given field - film, photography, fine art - they are seen as "representatives" who speak on behalf of, and are thus accountable to, their communities. In such a political economy of racial representation where the part stands in for the whole, the visibility of a few token black public figures serves to legitimate, and reproduce, the

invisibility, and lack of access to public discourse, of the community as a whole.

(Mercer 1994: 240)

Mercer (1994: 233-258) calls for minority artists and filmmakers to actively resist the burden of representation thrust upon them by the politics of tokenism. Even though audiences from their own communities often demand that the "representative" filmmakers produce images that they can identify with, they maintain that the few existing texts about non-white homosexuals should not assume the responsibility of attempting to speak for all lesbians and gay people of colour. Yutani (1996) makes a similar argument, citing Gregg Araki as an example of a filmmaker who actively resists making films about Asians and/or homosexuals simply because he is one. He argues that although the absence of lesbian and gays of color in cinematic representations is deeply problematic, Araki should not be limited to making films about homosexuality or racial difference. Instead, the individuality of Araki's filmmaking practice should be emphasised. This is a strategy the filmmaker Fung (1995) has employed.

Speaking as gay, as Asian, or as a gay-Asian man is a tricky proposition. For one thing, speaking as any one thing too implies not being listened to on any other terms.... In making a videotape or speaking on a panel I cannot escape the burden of representation; it is already inside the accumulated knowledge that allows an audience to make sense of my work or of my words.

(Fung 1995: 129)

Julien (1992: 266) argues elsewhere that a solution to the problem of being designated the "representative" of a particular marginalized group is for filmmakers to emphasise that they speak *from* experiences rather than *for* experiences. Instead of attempting to speak "for" the people, to produce "positive" or "correct" images all the time, it is far better for filmmakers of colour to produce images on their own terms. Communities should assist by not utilising this same strategy of tokenism by appointing a random representative to speak on behalf of the experiences of all lesbians and gay people of colour. Grossberg (1996: 88) suggests that in the contemporary context, a viable model of resistance against racist, imperialist and ethnocentric oppression has to move beyond simplistic assumptions between the relations of identity and culture. I suggest that that the unproblematised essential notion of a homogeneous racial and cultural identity fuels the debate about the accuracy and necessity of positive/negative images. Attempting to struggle against existing constructions of a particular identity often takes the form of contesting negative images with positive ones.

Unfortunately, the question of what makes a "positive image" often leads to the problematic issue of "authenticity". For instance, the film The Color Purple which sought to depict a "positive" image of black women sparked heated debates about the problem of "tokenism", "the distribution of resources", "authenticity" and "positive" images. I suggest that attempts to depict a "positive" or "authentic" cinematic representation of lesbians and gays of colour generally assumes three things: homogeneity of experiences within the community, a fixed identity and a consensus on what is considered a "positive" or "authentic" image.

The Myth of Homogeneous Community and Fixed Identity:

Instead of trying to establish a fixed unitary identity, most of the recent relevant literature by critics such as Julien (1992), Parmar (1993), Shah (1993), Mercer (1994), Hom (1993), Smith (1994), Mason-John and Okorowa (1995), Moraga (1996), Conerly (1996) and Duncan (1996) call for a redefinition of the notion of "community" and the acknowledgement of diversity of gender, sexual practices and ethnic differences within the different homosexual and non-white communities. Julien (1992: 271) argues that because there are too many differences, the notion of a homogenous non-white homosexual community is a "fiction." He suggests that when a homogenous community is assumed, there are always members who end up being excluded because the differences in their sexual or other identities and experiences.

ISAAC: I've found that as time goes by that the notion of a specifically gay audience becomes more and more impossible. In the course of making my last three films, the questions of difference within the community around gender, race, sexuality, become more important. There's a notion that there is a homogeneous audience which is being addressed. But that becomes more and more impossible to sustain. Its a fiction....

(Julien 1993: 51-56)

A reason offered explaining why a homogeneous community is a myth, is that some individuals do not wish to identify with their non-white homosexual communities because of internalised racism and homophobia. (Hom 1993) A second reason, is that the common experiences of racism as people of colour is not enough. Other differences, such as in sexual practices, have split the lesbian and gay communities of colour. Duncan (1996) writes that some lesbians of color who practise s/m are not accepted by other non-s/m lesbians of color who sometimes criticise these practices for reinscribing racial stereotypes. Consequently, those involved in s/m may find it easier to come out to white lesbians about their sexual practices. Conerly (1996), Mason-John and Okorowa (1995) also relate that some lesbians and gay men of colour have been deliberately ostracised by other non-white homosexuals because they have close friends or lovers who are white. Identified as "interracialists" (Conerly's term), they are accused of being uncommitted, "confused" and "out of touch" with their black identities. Conerly argues that this disunity stems from the external split between the black and homosexual communities. This results in black gays being split into two main groups: black identified gays and gay identified blacks. He defines black identified gays as those who feel their racial identities are more important than their gay identity and gay identified blacks as those who primary affiliation is with the gay community because they believe it is more tolerant than the black community.

Shah (1993), Gomez (1995) and Moraga (1996) identify yet another reason for the split within the non-white communities. They suggest that gender differences between lesbian and gay men of colour often arise to make working together difficult. They point to the existence of lesbian only networks set up in a bid to avoid dealing with

gender inequalities within mixed lesbian and gay of colour organisations such Khush and Trikone. A final commonly cited reason for disunity amongst homosexuals of colour is that these communities often consist of many diverse ethnic groups. For instance, the terms "black homosexuals" (used in Britain) and "lesbian and gay people of colour" (used in North America) employed politically, in analyses and in representations, encompass so many different ethnic groups that there are often inevitable clashes in opinion based on cultural, class and racial differences.

Despite identifying the above difficulties and differences of opinion within lesbian and gay communities of colour, these critics still often argue that coalitions must nevertheless be formed for the purposes of political lobbying and analyses of representations in textual including cinematic discourses. I suggest that this position is not a contradictory one. By simultaneously calling for coalitions whilst pointing out that a homogeneous lesbian and gay community of colour is a myth, the argument for re-examination of categories of race and sexuality, thereby problematising what it actually means to self-consciously identify as a lesbian and gay person of colour, is made.

The work of cultural theorists such as Seidman (1996), Hall (1996c) and Trinh (1996) is useful in the examination of the notion of a "community" based on a particular common "identity." Since identities are a constructed form of closure based on the drawing of boundaries, every identity has the capacity to exclude, to leave outside its margins, an "excess", other subjects which do not fit. It is thus not surprising that whilst more cultural spaces for previously marginalised racial and sexual subjects have

been made available in the late twentieth century, (as Hall argues in a different article, 1996b), the creation of a form of "identity politics" often results in the privileging of one "difference" over another, where some groups of people are always marginalized.

Other critics such as Grosz (1994), Grossberg (1996) and Takagi (1996a) have also elaborated on the way "difference" is currently "in vogue." Takagi (1996: 23) argues that to name oneself as "lesbian," "gay," "third world," or "Asian-American" without interrogating what it means, can be an unuseful celebration of "difference." The popular assumption that one is transgressive simply because of one's multiple differences is questioned. Grosz writes about homosexuality:

...simply *being straight* or *being queer*, in itself, provides no guarantee of one's position as sexually radical: it depends on how one lives one's queerness, or one's straightness, one's heterosexuality as queer.

(Grosz 1994: 143)

Trinh (1996) also writes in reference to non-white people, that identifying as a marginalized non-white person through the process of naming is not always a transgressive act. She suggests that to name oneself is sometimes to endorse a label that has been given, serving to mark and contain their difference, be it racial or sexual. Nevertheless, a critical self-naming is sometimes necessary in the political struggle to empower the subject who has been denied their cultural heritage or marginalized as second class citizens for other reasons. Trinh argues that the struggle of marginalized people is not possible without questioning the way their own position and identification

as marginalized people helps to maintain the position of those in power. Therefore, as Grossberg explains (1996), whilst identities are a useful site around which people form politically, they will only remain a fruitful path to follow if a political practice where people are able to participate across identities, through a variety of practices, is built.

I will draw on the work of these critics later in this thesis to argue that the mere presence of film character who is a homosexual of colour does not always indicate that the film is intrinsically transgressive. Instead, I will suggest that it is important to keep interrogating the process of one's marginalization is effected (Trinh 1996), the notion of a unitary community (Grossberg 1996) and the transgressiveness of one's identity as a homosexual of colour (Grosz 1994).

Conclusion: Hybridity.

The recent work of critics such as Bhabha (1994), Mercer (1994), Hall (1995, 1996), Trinh (1996) and Laforest (1996) contends that the process of interrogating one's marginalisation has already started. They argue that identities, be they racial such as "blackness," "whiteness," or national identities such as "Britishness" and "Americanness," are constructed and can shift and change. Hall for instance, writes that whilst it is important to examine the process of sexual and racial "othering" through the hierarchization of gender, racial and sexual privileges, it is crucial to move beyond questions of good/bad stereotypes and positive/negative images to take account of the way in which identities constantly shift. He calls for an end of films that depict

unproblematised essential black subjects whose experiences in Britain are "monolithic, self-contained, sexually stable and always 'right-on'." (1996: 449) He argues that one "can no longer conduct black politics through a strategy of simple reversals, putting in place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject." (1996: 444) Suggesting all black people are good not only problematically simplify a complex issue, it also ironically, risks reinscribing the common racist assumption that all black people are the same, ("you can't tell the difference because they all look the same"), all good or all bad.

In the article "Dark and Lovely too: black gay men in independent film," Mercer (1994: 221-232) argues that the shift within black politics away from the issue of "positive" images and issues of "authenticity" also means it is no longer assumed that a black film is necessarily good simply because a black person has made it. He cites the Looking for Langston and Tongues Untied as effectively "making a difference" not because of who or what the film-makers are, whether they depicted positive or negative images, but how they represent issues surrounding black homosexuality and subjectivity.

Hall (1995) also cites the emergence of black comedies on British television as evidence that black communities have become sufficiently confident in their own identity to produce programs that humorously depict situations which result from their "racial othering." Dialogue is now open on previously taboo issues within the black communities, including problematising the myth of "the" singular "Black Experience/Self." In the article "New Ethnicities," Hall (1988) argues that the emergence of films such as Territories (UK 1984), My Beautiful Laundrette, Passion of

Remembrance and Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (UK 1987) demonstrate that the black subject cannot be represented without reference to class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. He emphasises that the particularity of any given situation and the specificity of an individual subject should be acknowledged within the representation of "new ethnicities." (Hall 1988, rpt. 1996: 446) The representation of diversity should also avoid the problematic definition of racial and/or sexual "authenticity" and "positive images."

I suggest that representations (such as those cited by Hall and Mercer), which do not attempt to homogenise different communities and experiences of marginalized groups such as non-white homosexuals, is a "*hybrid*" representation. I posit that Bhabha and Trinh's theories of the "Third Space," the "space in-between," can be a useful means of representing the diversity of lesbian and gay people of colour. Often misunderstood as the "*diversity of cultures*," Bhabha identifies the "Third Space" as being the "split-place" where the *hybridity* of cultures is inscribed, a space where the "in-betweens" of different racial, gender, national or other categories and boundaries can be explored. (1994: 38 & 219) Trinh also posits that this space is one from which marginalised people who are always socialised to understand things from more than one point of view, do not have to "speak in the singular." (1996: 8)

Although the notion of "hybridity" and "Third Space" might seem similar to "queer" theories in that they attempt to move beyond the confines of binaristic discourse mode, I suggest that the definition of "queer" is still too specifically rooted in discourses of sexuality. Despite arguments that "queer" is a discourse which can allow non-sexual

differences such as race to be simultaneously theorised, "Queer" theorists have not to date, created a framework in which race can be adequately discussed. Furthermore, the fact that most theorists working in the field of "queer" studies still see discourses of sexuality as their *primary* area of concern, and racial and other non-sexual differences as an *additional* differences, suggests to me, that "queer" discourses operate on a system of binaristic hierarchies. In contrast, the term "hybridity" has been taken up by many critics working in the field of *both* studies of race and sexuality, suggesting that it has (at least more than "queer" discourse) moved away from privileging one difference over another.

This thesis is structured accordingly. I shall start by analysing films containing homosexuals and/or non-whites before discussing how lesbians and gays of colour are cinematically depicted. As little work has been done in this area, I will devote the bulk of my thesis to examining the way lesbians and gays of colour are depicted using contemporary hierarchical discourses of race, gender and sexuality. In the final chapter of the thesis, I will look to theories of hybridity and how they might point a way forward in critical discussion and cinematic representations of non-white homosexuals.

Endnotes (Chapter 1):

¹ These include Claire of the Moon (USA 1992), The Most Desired Man (Germany 1995), Boyfriends (UK 1995) and The Midwife's Tale (USA 1995) are only a few of these numerous films, many of which are now listed in anthologies of lesbian and gay film. (cf. Murray and Olsen.)

² Although feminist critics continue to contribute to the on-going interrogation of race, gender and sexuality, I have not included a separate section reviewing "feminist theories" since the work of those critics I draw on, are often also classified under the different theories of race and homosexuality. For instance, Butler⁽¹⁹⁹⁰⁾, Stacey⁽¹⁹⁹²⁾ and de Lauretis⁽¹⁹⁹⁰⁾ have recently been published in collections on lesbian/gay studies. Similarly, I am reviewing the work of McClintock, Young and hooks under the section on race since their books are so categorised.

³ Heard at numerous conferences on "race" and "colonialism". They include Paul Gilroy, Lola Young, Kobena Mercer, Isaac Julien and bell hooks.

⁴ Cf. The earlier section of this chapter where I review arguments made by lesbian and gay critics about the necessity of positive images of homosexuals.

⁵ It is thus interesting that Lee's most recent film, Get On the Bus (USA 1997), seen as his "comeback" movie after a number of critically and financially unsuccessful movies, Lee uncharacteristically includes a sympathetic Black homosexual character to illustrate how the Black community remains largely homophobic. Also significant is the fact that this film was largely funded by well known Black celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey and Bill Cosby. Later in the thesis, I will argue that the shift in the representation of Black homosexuals is emblematic of a larger shift in how homosexuality in general is perceived.

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CHAPTER 2:

RACE AND SEXUALITY.

Although critics such as Fung (1991), Mercer (1991), Charles (1993), Ayyar (1993), Riggs (1995) and Morgan (1996) have shown that not all homosexuals are white, the representation of the homosexual subject as white remains influential in both contemporary mainstream popular representations and Western gay/lesbian activist discourses. Hart (1994) suggests that such representations remain popular because psychoanalytic theories of homosexuality (which were developed mainly to analyse white homosexual subjects) remain influential in contemporary Western discourses. Nevertheless, even though people of colour have been largely excluded from psychological and Western scientific definitions of homosexuality, they are still thought capable of performing homosexual acts. Racist assumptions have historically constructed non-white people and working class white people as naturally sexually deviant. Their homosexual actions, however, are usually interpreted as an example of their loose morality, rather than an indication of non-heterosexual identity. In the quote below, Riggs (1995) writes specifically about black men, but his observations are equally applicable to other non-white men and women.

Pseudo-scientific discourse fused with popular icons of race in late nineteenth-century America to project a social fantasy of black men, not simply as sexual demons, but significantly, as intrinsically corrupt. Diseased, promiscuous, destructive-of self and others-our fundamental nature, it was widely assumed, would lead us to extinction.

(Riggs 1995: 473)

Whilst a white middle-class subject's homosexual practise immediately threatens his/her heterosexual identity, homosexual acts are accepted as part of a non-white and/or working class person's naturally deviant sexuality. Gilman (1985a, 1991, 1993) argues that in sexological discourses, non-white people are often perceived to be innately sexually deviant, regardless of their actual sexual activities, whereas white subjects only become deviant after engaging in socially prohibited sexual practises such as homosexual acts. It follows that a person of colour who engages in homosexual acts will not necessarily be identified as a homosexual in the same way a white subject will. Hart (1994) and Chauncey (1995) further argue that not all white people are considered specifically "homosexual". They suggest that homosexuality is largely defined according to and for white middle and upper class subjects.

The distinction that was being made between heterosexuality and homosexuality was [thus] built on a prior division between white, middle-class women and other(ed) women: women of color and working class women.

(Hart 1994: 4)

Hart (1994) argues that like non-whites, white working class women are often thought to be inherently sexually degenerate. In his discussions of gay male sexual behaviour in the early twentieth century in New York, Chauncey (1995) proffers a similar argument about homosexual men. Like Hart, Chauncey argues that the notion of a specifically

"homosexual" identity became widespread during the world wars towards the middle part of the century. Homosexuality became depicted as a lifestyle "choice" of white middle and upper-class subjects. As non-white and working class people are already "wildly" (not just homosexually) sexually deviant, the question of "choice" and "homosexual identity" is characterised as an option that is not available to them. Consequently, the question of whether a non-white or working class person is to be classified as sexually normal (that is, heterosexual), or homosexual, does not arise in the same way as it would for the white middle class person whose sexual practise defines him/her. Nevertheless, white middle class homosexuals who "chose" to be homosexually active started being compared to the white working classes who were thought to engage in prostitution, homosexual sex and other "social evils". (Chauncey 1995: 139)

Hart (1994), Chauncey (1995) and Terry (1995) argue that the comparison of white middle and upper class homosexuals with non-whites and white working class people is directly related to the threat they pose to the preservation of white heterosexual society. Unlike non-white people whose differences are usually visually obvious, white homosexuals are often indistinguishable from the socially sanctioned norm. Harper (1994) suggests that identifying white homosexuals as similar to racially "foreign" outsiders enable white heterosexuals to distance themselves from what is deemed sexually immoral and perverse.

...[an] identification of the homoerotic as a literally foreign characteristic... suggest that the homoeroticism need not be at all

threatening precisely because it is a characteristic of a foreign people who are not at all "like us".

(Harper 1994: 127)

The sexually deviant "othering" of homosexuals and non-white people allows the Western white heterosexual subject to maintain a hegemonic position of authority, the perfect centre of balanced morality and sexuality. I suggest that the negative comparison of white homosexuals with non-white people draws on racist discourse in which foreigners, (especially visually obvious non-whites (1)), are traditionally considered sexually perverse in Western discourse and capable of practising a range of deviant sexual acts, including homosexual ones. In this chapter, I will analyse four contemporary films to examine the way in which white homosexuals are set up in comparison with non-white characters through being similarly located as outsiders of mainstream society. These films are Desperate Remedies (NZ 1993), Philadelphia (USA 1994), The Adventure of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Australia 1994) and Pulp Fiction (USA 1994).

White homosexuals and non-white heterosexuals:

A central argument of this thesis is that the scarcity of films containing non-white homosexuals is directly related to the separate categorisation of homosexual and non-white people. For this reason, I have decided to examine films which contain both non-white and homosexual characters. By analysing their on-screen relationship, I can

explore how categories of "homosexual" and "non-white" are kept separate in these films. I shall then discuss how this relates to the scarcity of films containing non-white homosexuals.

Although there are currently a significant number of films containing white homosexuals or non-white heterosexuals, there are fewer films containing both. To avoid a generalised survey of such films, I have decided to limit my discussion to a group of four films released around the same time, facilitating a more containable contextual analysis. The films are: Desperate Remedies (NZ 1993), Pulp Fiction (USA 1994), Philadelphia (USA 1994) and The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Australia 1994). Besides being English-language films released around the same year, they crucially contain both white homosexual and non-white heterosexual characters. Significantly, though they have different national origins, production budgets, filmmaking styles and targeted audiences, repeated viewings reveal a striking narrative similarity - that the contact (negative and positive) between the white homosexual and non-white heterosexual characters are pivotal to each film's resolutions. I suggest that the analysis^{of} these bonds is crucial to the understanding of each entire film.

I shall start with an analysis of the most widely screened film discussed in this chapter, Philadelphia. This big budget Hollywood production starring two established lead actors, (one of whom won the best actor Academy award for his performance as a HIV positive gay lawyer) is perhaps also the most critically and financially successful film discussed here. In contrast to Philadelphia, the second film I will discuss, also a gay themed film, The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert, (abbreviated here to

Priscilla), is a smaller budget non-Hollywood film. This film has become a crossover success despite its relatively unknown director (Stephan Elliott) and largely internationally unknown cast (2). Next, I will examine Pulp Fiction, a film whose central characters are both black and white, but predominantly heterosexual. Like Priscilla, Pulp Fiction can also be considered a medium budget film. Directed by Quentin Tarantino, a now widely known "underground" director, the film has become both a cult and mainstream hit. Finally, I shall conclude with a discussion of Desperate Remedies, arguing that in contrast to the film's sympathetic portrayal of female homosexuality, it's non-white characters continue to be depicted in racist terms. Although less commercially successful than the other three films, Desperate Remedies has surpassed the financial and critical expectations of a low budget New Zealand film with an internationally unknown cast.

Philadelphia:

Philadelphia is advertised as the story of two young lawyers engaged in a court case that alters their lives. 'Andrew Beckett, a promising young lawyer, finds his career suddenly cut short when he is fired from the prestigious law firm he works for. Andrew knows it's because he's got AIDS. Determined to defend his dignity and professional reputation, Andrew hires a small-time personal injury lawyer, Joe Miller, to sue his former employees for wrongful dismissal. The two men launch an historic and moving struggle against society's ignorance and intolerance. One man is fighting for his reputation, his life and justice. The other is battling to overcome his own and society's prejudice and fear.' (TriStar videotape cover, Philadelphia USA 1994)

When Philadelphia was first released, it was widely heralded by the mainstream press as the first Hollywood film to represent the impact that AIDS had had on the American gay male community over the last decade. (3) This marketing ploy evidently worked, as the film achieved both critical and box office successes. Tom Hanks, the actor who plays the lead character Andrew Beckett (who eventually dies of AIDS related complications), won his first Oscar for the role. Although he was already an established Hollywood star, this film marked Hank's transition from featuring predominantly in feel-good comedies to being recognised as a "serious" dramatic actor. Denzel Washington, who plays the other protagonist in Philadelphia, Joe Miller, was also an established actor before taking the role of the homophobic lawyer who eventually becomes friends with a homosexual man. As with Hanks, this film further raised the profile and salary of Washington.

However, despite featuring two Hollywood stars and being written by the gay screenwriter Ron Nyswaner, Philadelphia was criticised by gay presses as arriving a little too late to be groundbreaking. Finch (1996), for instance, argues that earlier films such as An Early Frost (USA 1985), As Is (USA 1986), Parting Glances (USA 1986) and Longtime Companion (USA 1990), predominantly independent gay films about HIV/AIDS, depict more "realistic" portrayals of the debilitating effects^{cf} the HIV virus. Alongside criticism that the film's treatment of AIDS does not tread any new ground, Philadelphia has also been derided for an unrealistic depiction of male homosexuality. This leads to my next point; what is the film really about?

The (un)covering of homosexuality:

Although it is advertised as a courtroom drama about AIDS, Philadelphia has been widely received as a film about male homosexuality. This perception is supported by the film's narrative. When Joe addresses the judge with an eloquent speech suggesting it is homosexuality, not AIDS, which is really on the minds of those in the courtroom, his comments reflect the common perception of the film's targeted audience, the heterosexual English speaking public. At the time Philadelphia was released, AIDS was popularly thought to be transmitted predominantly through gay male sex. Few feature-length Western films produced prior to the release of Philadelphia depicted HIV related issues without reference to male homosexuality. (4) Even films such as Savage Nights/Les nuit fauves (France 1992) and Closing Numbers (GB 1993) whose

characters are not exclusively homosexual demonstrate that heterosexual HIV infection originates from homosexual activity.

The testimony of another character, the lawyer Walter, reaffirms the popular perception that AIDS is a homosexual disease. Although Walter's homophobia is obvious when he argues that those who engage in homosexual acts should expect to become HIV positive, shot-reverse shots between Walter and a white male juror shown laughing at his comments illustrates the appeal that his homophobia has to the jury. Walter's description of gay bashing in the navy echoes heated debates concerning homosexuals and their place in the United States military, presenting the largely anti-gay stance of the American public. Although Joe's negative response to Walter's testimony reveals the irrationality of homophobia, Walter is given the last word in this scene. No further objections are heard and the scene ends with a zoom-in close-up of Walter's face confidently asserting that homosexuals such as Andrew deserve to suffer with AIDS. This homophobic stance contradicts his earlier statement that heterosexuals who contract AIDS deserve only "our greatest sympathy". The sudden cut to a city street outside after Walter's comments suggests that his views are commonplace amongst the general public.

The less homophobic character, Joe's wife, also indicates that Joe believes there is a difference between HIV positive homosexuals and heterosexuals. In one of the film's earlier scenes, she reveals Joe's "problem with homosexuals", not his fear of HIV positive people, that leads him to reject Andrew's case. The "truth" of her comments is later confirmed in the "after party scene" where Joe confesses to being homophobic.

Despite the inclusion of such scenes, where prejudices against homosexuals are questioned, the film's mise-en-scene suggests that there are vast differences between heterosexual and homosexual lifestyles and morals, thereby reinforcing negative stereotype of homosexuals.

Although the representation of Andrew's modern apartment and Joe's suburban house is not necessarily a negative one, it perpetuates the stereotype that heterosexuals prefer living in the suburbs whilst homosexuals flock to the inner-city. The interior decoration of their homes also highlights their contrasting lifestyles. Andrew's apartment is stylishly but minimally furnished with deco-style cool steel objects while Joe's house is almost over-furnished with quilts and other "homely" unstylish and comfortable traditional trappings not dissimilar to Andrew's parent's family home.

These differences are further highlighted in consecutive contrasting scenes of Andrew and Joe's homes (after the only gay party in the film). Left alone together, Andrew and Joe sit facing each other in Andrew's living room. A panning high camera angle reveals Andrew dwarfed by a large sparsely furnished uncarpeted room, emphasising the emptiness and hopelessness in his life. It's fragility is enhanced by his reliance on the cold metallic drip feeding medication into his arm. Shadowy lighting and a melodramatic opera soundtrack serve to further heighten his despair. When Andrew refuses to go through the court case because he is feeling too emotional, Joe leaves, unable to empathise. Andrew is left crying, listening to the opera over and over again, sitting alone in his apartment's large living room, which is empty bar a table and two chairs.

By contrast, Joe returns to a scene of familial domesticity and redeeming heterosexual love. After leaving Andrew crying, Joe's car is shown pulling up in a pleasant tree-lined suburban street. The following few shots show Joe moving through a well furnished, carpeted house with corridors which lead him from ^{one} cosy room to another. The first room he enters contains his baby daughter. After kissing her goodnight he enters another room, where his wife is sleeping. He lays down and cuddles up next to her. Surrounded by the solid wooden furniture, lying next to his wife, Joe finally appears at ease. Unlike his lonely homosexual client, Joe has a pleasant home and ever-present wife to comfort him. In contrast, Andrew's partner Miguel never appears when Andrew needs him.

Homosexuality is also presented negatively in the scene at a basketball stadium which occurs immediately after Joe agrees to represent Andrew after witnessing how the latter had degenerated from a well-dressed popular lawyer into someone who is shunned in the library. In this scene, Joe walks in on Andrew's former employers, who are having a party in a private box at a basketball game. Once again, the loneliness of Andrew in the previous scene contrasts with the gaiety of his former employers who continue to enjoy the privileges Andrew had when he passed as a heterosexual. The shift in Andrew's social and moral status is underscored by his mentor and former employer, Charles Wheeler, whose immediate response when served with a summons is to give angry instructions to the other lawyers to delve into Andrew's homosexual lifestyle in the bid to discredit him in court. The heated conversation between Charles Wheeler (abbreviated as CW) and the other partners of the law firm in that scene at the

basketball stadium follows (my italics):

CW (angrily): Now, about Andy, I want to know everything about his *personal life*. Does he frequent those *pathetic* bars on Chester –

Anonymous Lawyer (interrupts, despairing): -Oh Jesus-

CW (emphatically): What other *homosexual facilities* does he go to?

Anonymous Lawyer (loudly): Absolutely.

CW: What *deviant* group or organisation does he *secretly* belong to?

Bob (youngest lawyer present, the sole sympathetic voice): Wait a minute Charles. Let's make him a decent offer and put this behind us.

CW (angrily, grabs Bob hard with both hands, hurting him): Andy brought AIDS into our office, to our men's room, to our annual family cocktail picnics!

Walter (loudly agreeing): We ought to be suing *him*!

In the bid to defend himself against Andrew's law suit for unlawful dismissal, instead of requesting more information about HIV or AIDS, Charles Wheeler's responds with enquiries about Andrew's "deviant", "homosexual" lifestyle which he assumes involves "secretly" frequenting "those pathetic bars". He draws on popular stereotypes of "typically" promiscuous gay male behaviour to negatively contrast Andrew's "deviant" AIDS tainted homosexuality with their heterosexual presumably disease-free "men's room" and "annual family cocktail picnics" (supposedly filled with loving monogamous heterosexual couples). Instead of refuting Charles' assumption that all homosexuals go to "pathetic bars" where they transmit HIV to one another, it transpires that Andrew did in fact become HIV infected after a casual sexual liaison in the

Stallion gay pornography cinema. Andrew's irresponsibility and untrustworthiness is highlighted by an anguished look when confessing that the deed occurred when he was already involved in a long term relationship with Miguel.

The contrasting casual promiscuity of homosexuals and responsible monogamy of heterosexuals is further emphasised by the scene in which an African-American gay man in a drug store propositions Joe. This gay man is shown persistently coming on to Joe despite knowing that Joe is married with a wife waiting at home. (5) The inclusion of indiscriminate and casual homosexual overtures indicate that despite the film's ostensibly pro-gay narrative, homosexuals are still represented as being "a bit loose," both morally and sexually. The impression that gay men are irresponsible is reinforced by the exclusion of gay friendships and romantic affection. Murray (1994: 427) suggests that although the party scene at Andrew's apartment is "far from offensive," the representation of gay men as people who only appear in drag to "come out of the dark to party and camp it up" perpetuates negative stereotypes of homosexuals.

By contrast, the identifiably heterosexual characters with speaking parts have monogamous, affectionate and productive nuclear families. The first time where Joe is depicted with his family (also the first time a character is explicitly identified as heterosexual) occurs during celebrations for the birth of his baby daughter. As in this scene, babies and children function elsewhere in the film to emphasise the heterosexuality of Andrew's friends and family. Davis and Smith (1997: 140) argue that the inclusion of scenes where Andrew is depicted surrounded by a supportive heterosexual family serve to "naturalise" his homosexuality. However, I suggest that



even though Andrew's homosexuality is tolerated, it is presented as a less attractive lifestyle than the familial heterosexual one. The scenes of joyful children, babies and heterosexual families which are consistently intercut with scenes of Andrew solemnly discussing his homosexuality and HIV status can only lend to the conclusion that heterosexuality signifies life and joy while homosexuality leads to AIDS and death. The strategic inclusion of the only scene of affection between gay men – when Miguel kisses Andrew's fingers as he lies on his deathbed – reinforces the comparison of homosexuality with loneliness and death.

The scene at Andrew's family home also portrayals the inequitable difference between homosexual and heterosexual relationships. As the camera pans round the room, Andrew's heterosexual parents, brothers and sisters are shown cuddling up to their partners. By contrast, when the camera rests on Andrew and Miguel, Andrew is shown cuddling his sister's baby whilst Miguel squats beside his chair, not touching him at all. Given the important role that babies play in signalling the characters' heterosexuality, an awkward, contextually displaced, unexpected piece of dialogue is inserted to inform the audience that Andrew is holding his sister's baby, not Miguel's or his own child. The marked scarcity of homosexual affection in the film leads me to suggest that like AIDS, homosexuality may not be the central theme of *Philadelphia*. Instead, I posit that although Joe's African-American racial identity is seldom discussed in the publicity synopsis or within the film, his racial difference plays a crucial role in structuring the narrative.

Highlighting racial difference:

Following Philadelphia's opening sequence, a pan of the city, the camera cuts to a medium shot of the two central characters, Joe and Andrew. They are framed in a single shot, seated next to each other facing the judge in her chambers, fighting a case against each other. Although they are shown arguing, their difference of opinion is undercut by their identical dress code. Both men wear white shirts, jackets and ties. Only Andrew's blue coloured jacket differs from Joe's grey one. However, this color difference is undermined in the next scene, where they are shown in the lift after the hearing in the judge's chambers. Again shot in the same tight frame with both characters facing the camera, Andrew is now shown wearing a grey tone overcoat that is of identical colour as Joe's jacket. Similarly, Joe's overcoat is of an identical blue colour as Andrew's jacket. Their similarity is further emphasised through their mirroring actions as they dictate to identical voice organisers and answer identical mobile phones. However, their similarities end once they step out of the lift.

Subsequent scenes reveal that Andrew and Joe live in very different worlds. Andrew is a yuppie HIV positive gay man who works in an upmarket law firm, Joe, a suburban high street lawyer and devoted family man. Their outward appearances start to vary as Andrew is shown becoming increasingly ill. Nevertheless, these differences are elided towards the latter half of the film when the two men are again seated side by side in court, as in the beginning of the film, dressed similarly in suits. By this stage, however, Joe and Andrew are on the same side despite the discovery of their social and sexual differences. They are united in their legal prosecution of the discriminatory practises of

Andrew's former employees, who are presented as bigoted white, heterosexual middle-aged men. I suggest that despite the scarcity of discussion (both within the film narrative and in reviews of Philadelphia) concerning Joe's racial identity, his Afro-Americanism is the shared minority link which finally unites them.

Aside from homosexual discrimination, racial discrimination is the only other form of discrimination mentioned in the courtroom, indicating its importance in the narrative. In order to establish that Andrew's employers are homophobic bigots, Joe attempts to argue that they are also racist. Joe's defense strategy implies that if someone is racist, they are more likely to be homophobic. Joe, Miss Burton and the judge also hint that racial and sexual discrimination are related. The judge responds to Joe's subsequent speech against homophobia by arguing that racial and sexual discriminations do not have a place in the courtroom. It is noticeable that the judge does not mention gender discrimination, which is a more common part of the 'race, gender, and sexuality' mantra. Instead of disputing that one who is homophobic is necessarily racist, other characters, such as Walter and Charles, seek to defend themselves simultaneously against both accusations.

This leads me to the significance of Joe's African-American racial identity. Before agreeing to defend Andrew, Joe learns that other lawyers have already rejected his case, presumably because of their homophobia. Joe's own homophobia rules out the possibility that he accepted Andrew's case because he is "gay-friendly". The way in which Joe decides to defend Andrew – characterising his defence as a fight for justice against discrimination, both racial and sexual – points to the bond developed as the

result of their shared experience as "minoritized" people. Joe's racial identity thus plays a crucial role in providing a narrative reason for a homophobic heterosexual character to empathise sufficiently with the white gay character's predicament to defend him legally.

The analogy between sexual and racial oppression, as characterised in this film by Joe and Andrew's strategic alliance, is one often made by activists during the days of early gay liberation and the civil rights movement. Critics such as Roof (1998: 30-35), Davis and Smith (1997: 104) identify the way in which lesbian and gay activists and critics in the late 1960s and early 1970s argue that alliances between homosexuals and non-whites can be formed because homosexual oppression is similar to racial discrimination. Even though these parameters were problematised by critics in the 1980s and 1990s, recent films such as *Philadelphia* indicate that "the crossover of racially 'marginal' figures into the mainstream has now come to function in respect to other kinds of marginality (in this case, of course, male homosexuality)." (Davis and Smith (1997: 5). Davis and Smith argue that as well as facilitating the comparison of racial and homosexual minorities, Joe's black racial identity is vital in establishing the heterosexuality of his character.

...the default position of white heterosexuality is no longer stable. Since visually Hanks as Beckett appears precisely to occupy that position, Miller/Washington's ethnicity visually represents sexualised difference and denotes the separate sphere of gay and straight. Of course, the irony is that here blackness is used to signal the mainstream which is usually

read as white and heterosexual. But this ironic turn relies on a continued stereotyping of the black male as the extreme of heterosexual masculinity.

(Davis and Smith 1997: 142)

They suggest that the representation of Joe (Miller) as "naturally" heterosexual draw on the "overtly racist representations" of blacks as "natural" primitives. Because heterosexuality and blackness are depicted as "natural", "a black gay identity must be disavowed since it would disturb its economy of race and sexuality" (Davis and Smith 1997: 142). Although I agree with Davis and Smith that the representation of the homosexual as white and the black character as heterosexual is pivotal to the development of the narrative, the inclusion of two non-white gay characters (Miguel and the black gay law student) complicate their argument. Instead, I suggest that racist stereotypes of black men being sexually (including homosexually) deviant, offer an explanation for the way in which Andrew is characterised as white and Joe as black. If Andrew is depicted as non-white, his homosexual practise will probably be attributed to his "perverse" racialised sexuality rather than to a specifically "homosexual" identity. Bogle (1973) argues, in relation to the boom of black movies in the 1970s, that blacks have been stereotypically represented as irrationally highly sexed in order for productions to commercially profit on the myth of high-powered black sexuality.

Curiously enough, the big sex scene in Super Fly... Melinda(1972), Slaughter(1972), and Shaft... looked as if it had been inserted simply to play on the legend of blacks' high-powered sexuality. While the movies

assiduously sought to avoid the stereotype of the asexual tom, they fell, interestingly enough, into the trap of presenting the wildly sexual man. Rarely was there a mature male view of sex.... Then, too, the [black] women are rarely defined in any way other than as the hero's love interest.

(Bogle 1973: 240)

The drug store scene in Philadelphia, where Joe is mistaken for a homosexual by a black gay law student, draws on the stereotype of "wildly sexual" black men identified by Bogle. The most obvious reading of this scene (as offered by Davis and Smith) is that Joe's angry rejection of the gay proposal confirms his heterosexuality. His response to the black law student's suggestion that they go somewhere for a drink can also be read as typical of a heterosexual homophobic black man. However, because Joe asks "Do I look gay?" instead of replying with an emphatic "No", the possibility that he could be actually gay is introduced. The ambiguity of the question: "Do I look gay?" is reiterated by the law student responding in kind. Like Joe, he does not "look gay." Instead, the consecutive close-ups of their faces when asking the same question suggest that they simply look African-American, people who have depicted as wildly sexually, including homosexually, deviant in racist Western discourses. The inclusion of a black law student who is open to gay sex even though he does not look obviously gay nor claim a specifically gay identity compromises Joe's heterosexuality. Given their racial similarity and the law student's assumption that Joe could be persuaded to participate in homosexual acts even though he is married further affirms such negative racial stereotypes of black people.

By contrast, gay characters elsewhere in the film look "obviously" gay. Compared to Andrew's white gay male friends seen at his party and in his apartment, neither Joe nor the African-American law student looked gay. The answer to both their questions "Do I look gay?" would be, "no". The black characters do not look gay in the way the film has thus far constructed a gay look. The possibility then arises that codes for representing and detecting gay men are based on a white racial identity and exclude identifiably homosexual non-whites. However, even though the two African-American characters in the drug store scene are not denoted as specifically homosexual, the play on their potential homosexual availability suggests that their racial identity renders them more open to non-heterosexual acts. Consequently, despite the generally non-racially stereotypical portrayal of the African-American central character, the drug store scene indicates that slippages still occur. Nevertheless, the extensive comparison of racial and homosexual discrimination results in a film that manages to depict two often-marginalized characters, the homosexual and the African-American, as sympathetic heroes.

The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert:

The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (6) is a very different film from Philadelphia. Whilst the latter is a big budget, big star Hollywood film, the former is a much smaller budget Australian film which features only one moderately known actor (Terence Stamp) and two Australian actors rarely recognised outside Australia (7). The differing narrative style of both films is also reflected in the use of music. The soundtrack of Philadelphia consists largely of sentimental love songs and operas reflecting its sensitive "politically correct" representation of non-white people and homosexuality. In contrast, Priscilla's predominantly loud disco ABBA soundtrack mirrors its brash depiction of energetic homosexual lifestyles, crude sexual jokes and employment of problematic sexual stereotypes of non-white people. This difference in music style aptly reflects the different lifestyles of the central characters in both films. Whilst the central characters in Philadelphia are upper-middle class lawyers who seek to be accepted and assimilated into the white heterosexual social mainstream, the central characters in Priscilla, two homosexual drag queens and a white male-to-female transsexual, are portrayed as sexual radicals who refuse to conform to heterosexual moral standards.

The opening scene of the film, set in a Sydney gay nightclub where two of the central characters, Mitch and Adam, are shown performing in drag, establishes the "in-your-face" homosexual focus of the film. This performance ends when a beer can thrown by a member of the audience hits Mitch in the head. Apparently triggering Mitch's disillusionment with Sydney gay life, he tries to convince Bernadette, a sarcastic male-

to-female transsexual, to travel with Adam and him to Alice Springs, where they have a drag show lined up. As her boyfriend has just died, Bernadette agrees. During the long drive from Sydney to Alice Springs in a converted school bus, Mitch discloses that the Alice Springs show has been arranged by the hotel manager, his ex-wife, who needs Mitch to help care for their son. Adam offers a less dramatic reason for going to Alice Springs – to fulfil his dream of climbing Ayers' Rock in drag. Besides getting to know more about each other, the long drive also brings them to several small towns where they meet various homophobic groups of Australians. Their bus breaks down in the middle of the desert, further increasing their exposure to the homophobic abuse of the white "locals" in the Australian outback.

Fortunately, an Australian Aborigine appears unexpectedly, leading them to an unusual white mechanic, Bob. Besides fixing their bus, Bob also leaves his Filipino wife for Bernadette. The film finally ends after Bernadette – characterised as the only member of the trio able to pass as heterosexual – decides to enter a "heterosexual" relationship with Bob and remain in Alice Springs. Unaccepted throughout their journey across the white heterosexual Australian country, the other two homosexual drag queens are shown retreating to the twilight world of Sydney gay ghetto at the end of the film.

Racialised Sexuality:

Like the non-white central character in Philadelphia, the few non-white characters in Priscilla play a crucial role in developing the film's central narrative. Despite

appearing only briefly and often unexpectedly, their sexual tolerance towards the homosexual characters emphasizes the homophobia of the white heterosexual Australians in the outback.

The homophobic abuse suffered by the gay men and transsexual begins at the first town they stop at outside Sydney. After an eventful evening drinking at the local pub with other white Australians, Bernadette, Mitch and Adam awaken to find their bus is graffitied with the words: "AIDS fuckers go home." Visibly shocked, they leave town somberly. Even though Priscilla is not a film about AIDS, the graffiti suggests that AIDS is frequently associated with male homosexuality, as I already argued in relation to Philadelphia. The graffiti also reveals that although Bernadette is a transsexual, she continues to be seen as a homosexual, an identity (I shall later argue) which is reinforced in subsequent scenes.

The second instance of homophobia occurs soon after, when their bus soon breaks down in the middle of nowhere. A series of shots suggest that they wait for an undefined length of time before Bernadette, the only ^{member} of the trio capable of passing for "straight" (in both the *heterosexual* sense and in her manner of dress) returns with a white heterosexual couple in a jeep. Several close-ups and shot/reverse shots between the heterosexual couple looking at Mitch reveal their intended rescuers' horror at realizing that Mitch, Adam *and* Bernadette are a group of homosexuals. Without a word, the heterosexual couple departs rapidly, leaving the homosexuals and transsexual stranded.

The next scene, a quiet evening scene containing no music, show the dejected drag queens trying to cheer up by putting on colourful dresses and practising their campy dance routine. They remain quietly engrossed until they suddenly jump in fright after turning round during one of their moves, screaming loudly at something off screen. A reverse shot reveals that an Aborigine man looking at the drag queens is also screaming. Although the Aborigine man's initial shock mirrors the reactions of the white heterosexual Australians at seeing the drag queens, the drag queen's reactions to the Aborigine man differs from their blasé unemotional responses to the white heterosexuals who spurn them. Their terrified screams at seeing the Aborigine and vice versa, reveal that they see each other as *something* foreign, unexpected, perhaps *something* to be afraid of. Subsequent shots showing them looking at each other from out head to toe reinforce this impression.

Unlike their previous encounters with heterosexuals, the drag queens do not make the first move to speak to the Aborigine man. He makes the first move instead. After he calms down, he greets them smilingly: "Nice night for it." "It" is dancing and singing, the same activities the Aborigines also engage in at the camp where he invites the drag queens to spend the night. Despite the Aborigine man's friendliness, the wary homosexual men make an effort to dress "straight." When these now heterosexual looking white men walk into the Aborigine camp, they are greeted with indifference. However, this lacklustre greeting quickly transforms into a warmly enthusiastic welcome after they change back into drag. A warm and meaningful cross-cultural exchange takes place through the medium of music. After dancing the night away together, the Aborigine man becomes their first saviour. He "rescues" the white

homosexual men by bringing a white Australian mechanic, Bob, to repair their bus.

The sequence of events – where the drag queens' "encounter" with the Aborigines only occurs after their homophobic experiences with white Australians – highlights the fact that the Aborigines are the first group of people outside the gay community in Sydney who accept the homosexuals. Instead of being offended by their appearance, the Aborigines are shown warming to the drag queens only after they remove their conservative clothing and start dancing in drag. Shots of the Aborigines singing and dancing late into the night to different types of music draw on traditional stereotypes of non-white people (especially indigenous people and people of African descent) as inherently musical. Although Bogle writes specifically about the representation of black people in 1940s American films, his comments also accurately describe the way that the Aborigines are depicted in Priscilla.

Indeed, in almost every American movie in which a black person had appeared, filmmakers had been trying to maintain the myth that Negroes were naturally rhythmic and natural-born entertainers. With their cast of darkies singing and dancing... blacks [were presented] not only as jesters but uninhibited entertainers too.

(Bogle 1973: 118)

Characterised as naturally appreciative of all forms of music and dance, the Aborigines have no inhibitions about dancing and singing with the drag queens. Just as the drag queens had used music and dance to distract themselves from being left

stranded in the desert by the white homophobic Australians; the Aborigines also enjoy themselves musically even though they live in a makeshift desert camp. Although the history of the oppression of native people in Australia is not mentioned, this scene of poignant revelry draws upon the common knowledge of their oppression, to suggest that the drag queens dancing with the Aborigines are also "outsiders" left stranded in the desert by white heterosexual Australian society.

Nevertheless, the white homosexuals and Aborigine characters are depicted differently. Unlike the white drag queens whose homosexual difference is signified through the use of camp gestures, heavy make-up and women's clothing, the Aborigines' racial difference need not be marked through clothing. The lingering close-ups of the Aborigines' faces reiterate their already visually obvious racial difference. Their racial difference is also characterised as indicative of an innate sexual difference. During one of the dance scenes at the Aborigine camp, the white homosexual men suddenly decide that the heterosexual looking Aborigine man will look "good" or "natural" in drag. The Aborigine man in question, unlike the homosexual men, had not previously exhibited any interest in women's clothing nor employed any camp gestures. However, his implied deviant sexual difference is simply assumed by the white homosexual men because of his marked non-white racial identity. Indeed, he neither protests at being put into a dress nor exhibits any of the homophobic behaviour common to the other heterosexual white men in the film. The embodiment of the Aborigine man as possessing a more "natural" sexuality which transgresses the binaristic heterosexual / homosexual categories is typical of cinematic representations of non-white races.

I thus argue that the Aborigine's non-white racial identity is crucial to the development of the film's narrative. If he ^{was} a white character, there will be no explanation for his strange acceptance of the white homosexual men and their drag performance. Similarly, the white identities of the homosexual characters ensure that their bad treatment by white Australians is attributed to their homosexuality rather than racial difference. The inclusion of a non-white homosexual character would alter the focus of the film, which is about homosexual discrimination in white Australian society.

The influence of "non-white sex":

The Aborigines' enthusiastic acceptance of the white homosexual men is rendered more remarkable by the events in the latter half of the film. The homosexuals' drag performances in the small town bar and in Alice Springs to white Australians fall flat. Apart from the homosexual audiences in Sydney and the Aborigines, the only person who enjoys their drag show is Bob, the white Australian mechanic introduced by the Aborigines man. As the only white heterosexual character who wears a hippie leather headband and goes on "walkabouts", (an Aborigines tradition), Bob's appreciation of the gay men's company and their dance routine is characterised as resulting from Aboriginal influence.

However, his status as a socially "normal" white heterosexual man is undermined when he defends the gay men against a violent group of white Australian men. With the

words: "I better not show myself around this town again", Bob leaves the small Australian town and rides off with the gay men in their bus, Priscilla. Given Bob's simultaneous role as "token Aborigine" and "token homosexual", it is not surprising that he is also the only white character married to a non-white person in this film, Cynthia. His friendship and sexual involvement with non-white people establishes Bob as more sexually adventurous than the other white heterosexual Australian men. His eventual romantic involvement with Bernadette, the transsexual, is rendered plausible as he has, after all, been sexually involved with Cynthia, who is presented as sexually different from other white heterosexual women.

Apart from the Aboriginal characters, Bob's Filipino wife, Cynthia, is the only other non-white character in this film. As if drawn from a textbook of negative stereotype of Asian women, Cynthia is depicted as oversexed and irrational. Attention seeking and sexually unrestrained, she starts rolling her eyes (in unflattering close-ups) and screaming uncontrollably at the slightest hint of disagreement. She is thinly sketched as an Asian woman driven by her excessive sexual desires in the common racially sexualised manner that Fung describes.

...[there is a] depiction of *all* Asians as having an undisciplined and dangerous libido...

(Fung 1991: 147)

Fung (1991) argues that although there are many cinematic representations of undersexed Asians, there exists an equally popular, though contradictory, image of

Asian women as perversely oversexed. Cynthia is modelled on this latter stereotype. Her crassly sexual, grotesque stage performance demonstrates the unthreatening and even loveable nature of the drag queens' shows (8). Presented negatively as centred on heterosexual pleasure, her show's climax consists of popping Ping-Pong balls from her vagina. Bob's ashamed reaction and Mitch's terrified expressions suggest that her blatant display of female sexuality is both shameful and scary. Unlike their mutually appreciative encounter with the Aborigines, the white homosexuals openly regard the Filipino woman with distaste. Although the Aborigines are also characterised as sexually adventurous, their sexuality is presented as unthreatening and "innocent" (9). Cynthia's sexual openness, however, appears castrating and frightening. Even though her unexpected appearance at the pub saves the drag queens from the hostility of an unimpressed audience, they huddle in shock, expressing repulsion at Cynthia's bar top routine. The next morning, they witness her voracious sexual appetite again - overhearing her complaint that Bob is inadequate because he has a "small ding ling".

The negative representation of Cynthia is consistent with the negative portrayal of other heterosexual women in the film. Apart from Mitch's wife (who appears only briefly and in the role of a "fag hag"), women are presented as pitiful jokes. Female residents of the small town the bus stops at, are put down by the homosexual men as badly dressed and unattractive. Extreme close-ups of a women they meet at a pub (old Jill), her sneering face, frumpy unbrushed hair and shoulders revealing a sagging black bra slipping from her too small white singlet, emphasize her unattractiveness. Even though her homely dress and staunch personality draw on negative mainstream stereotypes of "lesbian-feminists", Jill's heterosexuality is established when uses the term "Uranus"



to insult the gay men. The confrontation between the homosexual men and old Jill suggests that the physical unattractiveness of women only reflect their ugly personalities. Intercut close-ups of an obnoxious Jill and the embarrassed expressions of male patrons at the bar mark her as the only openly homophobic person in the bar. This representation of tolerant heterosexual men and a homophobic heterosexual woman contradicts the numerous accounts of heterosexual male homophobia within gay communities. The glamorised presence of the artificially constructed woman, Bernadette, reaffirms the narrative rejection of biologically natural female sexuality. Significantly, it is Bernadette who cracks the anti-women joke.

Listen here you, mullet! Why don't you just light your tampon, blow your box apart, because it is the only bang you're going to get, sweetheart.

- Bernadette, Priscilla

The shot of the men laughing at Bernadette's joke is followed by a high angle shot of Jill, the only woman in the room, lost and defeated, with a room of men laughing at her. Their laughter breaks the tension between the homosexual and heterosexual men, leading to scenes of male bonding. Although an argument can be made that Jill was not the only woman in the room, that Bernadette is also a woman, Bernadette is consistently depicted as different from biologically gendered women. By cracking misogynist jokes about female sexuality (calling other women "mullet" in a derogatory manner), Bernadette behaves as if she herself is not a woman. Her other anti-women jokes reminds the audience that she was once a man and does not identify as a woman.

After all, male-to-female transsexuals who feel they were born female would not seek to affirm the difference between themselves and "real" women.

By constantly discussing her past and difficulty in finding a husband, Mitch and Adam assist in reminding the audience that Bernadette was once a man. Furthermore, unlike the transsexuals in other films such as Paris is Burning (USA 1990), Different for Girls (UK 1996) and Stonewall (USA 1996), Bernadette does not have transsexuals or heterosexuals friends. Her only friends appear to be gay men. Because of her lack of sympathy with other transsexuals and female characters, and her intense relationships with gay men, I read Bernadette as *not* being a woman. hooks (1996) writes that men dressing in drag is generally regarded by the dominant heterosexist culture as crossing into a female realm of powerlessness.

To choose to appear as 'female' when one is 'male' is always constructed in the patriarchal mindset as a loss, as a choice worthy only of ridicule.

(hooks 1996: 215)

Although the argument can be made that Bernadette's male-to-female surgical transformation and the gay men's drag performances are potentially encouraging the desirability of female sexuality, the derision of biologically natural women opposes this reading. "Real" women become the object of ridicule in this film to divert laughter from the drag queens. Since the only woman who is not ridiculed is Mitch's wife, (a "fag hag" and possibly a lesbian), the misogyny of the gay men and (especially) the

transsexual can partially be attributed to the competition for male attention between the gay men, the transsexual and heterosexual women. This rivalry is most explicit when Bernadette who bitches most about Cynthia, eventually takes her place as Bob's sexual partner.

Even though the negative representation of Cynthia's sexuality contrasts with the sympathetic portrayal of Bernadette (and the other two homosexual men), they are all depicted as social outsiders because of their sexuality. As entertainers who dress in glittery costumes performing to predominantly male audiences, both Cynthia and the drag queens capitalise on their flamboyant sexuality to make a living. Even though the drag queens are shocked by Cynthia's outrageous behaviour, they each grudgingly admit to identifying with different aspects of her character. Before their drag show, Mitch reveals his empathy with Cynthia when Bob says she is banned from the pub because of her drinking problem. After the show, Adam expresses admiration for Cynthia, wishing that he too could pop Ping-Pong balls. Even Bernadette shares Cynthia's attraction for Bob.

Given that Jill and the other heterosexual women in the small towns seem to have no redeeming qualities, I suggest that the gay men's empathy with Cynthia arises from their shared position as sexual outsiders. Whilst the gay men are ostracised because of their deviant *homosexual* difference, Cynthia is feared for her *sexual* behaviour, depicted as part of her racial difference. It seems that sexual difference is the common denominator between homosexuals and non-white characters in *Priscilla*. The non-white characters are coded as "outsiders" whose common different sexuality leads to an

understanding of, and subsequent "rescuing," of the white homosexual characters (even if unintentionally, as in Cynthia's case). I thus conclude that though the non-white characters only play minor roles in Priscilla, they are pivotal ones. As well as serving as timely saviours to the stranded homosexuals, they function to emphasise the bigotry of white heterosexual Australian society – reflecting early gay activist discourse which suggest that racial bigots also tend to be homophobic, and vice versa.

Pulp Fiction:

Although released in the same year, Pulp Fiction's avenues of production, genre and subject matter differ from Philadelphia and Priscilla. Filmed in the United States, it has a much smaller budget than Philadelphia. Even though Pulp Fiction was then only his second feature, it established the director Quentin Tarantino as the new auteur of American independent and arthouse films. Like his low budget first feature Reservoir Dogs (USA 1991), Pulp Fiction features several crucial days in the lives of gangsters who double-cross each other. A non-linear narrative structure present several simultaneous storylines, breaking away from conventional linear narrative popularised by Hollywood. Instead of presenting one central plot with an introduction, climax and conclusion centring around two or three main characters, several equally important plots involving more than eight characters (sharing almost equal screen time) are depicted. Even though Tarantino's filming technique and choice of subject matter has been heralded as innovative, I suggest they can be considered pioneering only in the context of North American English language films.

As Tarantino has himself frequently acknowledged, many of his supposedly innovative trademark directorial techniques and subject matter - such as depicting climactic action scenes in slow motion and the presentation of gangsterdom from a sympathetic insider point of view - are drawn from Hong Kong action films. These include John Woo's A Better Tomorrow (HK 1988), The Killer (HK 1989), Hard Boiled (HK 1992); Ringo Lam's City on Fire (HK 1987) and Full Contact (HK 1992). Tarantino's signature referencing and reworking of Hollywood films - within his own films - is used

frequently to construct new films in Hong Kong - Lam Yee Hung's Die Harder (HK 1992) is only one such example. Another much celebrated trademark of Tarantino's films also borrowed from Hong Kong gangster films, is his use of black suits and white shirts to identify gangster "cool".

Despite these similarities to contemporary Hong Kong action cinema and the popular perception (it must be said, largely amongst white audiences and critics (10)) that Tarantino's films are "hip", "post-modern" and "post-race", Pulp Fiction continues to draw extensively on conventional Western stereotypes of race and (homo)sexuality, often to incite racist laughter and homophobia for the purposes of heterosexual male bonding. Consequently, although my synopsis may be confusing, I have opted not to rearrange the scenes temporally in order to argue that the order of scenes constructs a negative image of non-white and homosexual sexuality. My argument will run contrary to the many glowing film reviews which interpret the non-linear narrative structure as a part of the film's apolitical racial and sexual representation.

Pulp Fiction begins in a diner where a white man, Pumpkin (Tim Roth), and his white girlfriend, Honeybunny (Amanda Plummer), discuss the most successful way to conduct a robbery. After a long conversation, they produce two guns and declare they are robbing the diner. The dramatic theme music of Pulp Fiction starts abruptly as the screen fades out to black and the opening credits start to roll.

The next sequence, the first proper scene of the film, opens with a similar shot of a black man, Jules Winnfield (Samuel L. Jackson), and a white man, Vincent Vega (John

Travolta), engaged in conversation. They drive to an apartment (Brett's), reveal that that they are hitmen working for "Marsellus Wallace" (the only character constantly referred to by both his first and last name), kill two white guys and recover a suitcase filled with a mysterious gold object.

The following sequence titled "Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace's wife" is set in a deserted nightclub. Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames), a black man, gives Butch (Bruce Willis) money to throw a fight. Vincent arrives to meet Marsellus Wallace and bumps into Butch at the bar.

Four white characters are introduced next. They include a drug dealer Lance (Eric Stoltz), his wife Jody (Rosanna Arquette), her friend Trudi (Bronagh Gallagher) and Marsellus Wallace's wife, Mia (Uma Thurman). Vincent meets the first three when he buys drugs. He then takes Mia to dinner. After winning a dance competition, Mia overdoses on Vincent's drugs. Trudi and Jody watch Vincent and Lance revive Mia with a straight-to-the-heart injection. Vincent drives Mia home and agrees to keep the event a secret from Marsellus Wallace.

The next five characters introduced are: Captain Koons (Christopher Walken) an army friend of Butch's father, Esmeralda Villalobos (Angela Jones) a taxi driver, Fabienne (Maria de Mederois) Butch's French girlfriend, Zed a homosexual and an unnamed shopkeeper who is also a rapist. This sequence begins with a flashback to Butch's childhood. Captain Koons tells Butch the story of "The Gold Watch." The story ends when Butch wakes. He wins his boxing match and runs from Marsellus Wallace and

Vincent. Esmeralda Villalobos drives him to a motel where Fabienne is waiting. The next morning, Butch discovers Fabienne has forgotten to pack his gold watch. Butch returns to his apartment to get his watch, kills Vincent, runs into Marsellus Wallace and crashes his car. Marsellus Wallace chases Butch to a shop where they are kidnapped by the shopkeeper. The shopkeeper's friend, Zed, rapes Marsellus Wallace. Butch escapes but returns to save Marsellus Wallace. Zed and the shopkeeper are killed. Marsellus Wallace forgives Butch for throwing the fight.

The final sequence returns to events depicted in the second sequence. Although ^{set} in the same apartment at the same time, the events are now shot from a different perspective. A third white guy is now shown hiding in Brett's kitchen. He shoots at Vincent and Jules, but misses. They kill him and drive off with Marvin, a new black character. Vincent accidentally shoots Marvin in the head during an argument. They clean up his remains at Jimmy's (Quentin Tarantino) house. Marsellus Wallace organises for Mr Wolf (Harvey Keitel) ^{to} dump the car and headless body. Vincent and Jules go for breakfast. Pumpkin and Honeybunny are at the same diner. Vincent and Jules foil their robbery. They leave the restaurant. The film ends.

The pre-credit opening sequence and last scene of the film - both located in a typically American diner - crucially establish North America as the setting and perspective of Pulp Fiction. (11) References in other scenes to fast-food such as pancakes, blueberry muffins, Macdonald "quarter pounders", Wendy's and Jack in the Box's burgers, further emphasise the Americanness of the film. *American* fast food become a universal leveller of differences as black, white, male and female characters in Pulp

Fiction bond through discussing the options available for their breakfasts. Racial and (homo)sexual differences are similarly erased by the assumption of a white, liberal, heterosexist discourse as a norm. Despite not occupying much screen time, the homosexual characters crucially function to reaffirm the heterosexuality of other male characters. I shall argue that the contact between the homosexual characters and the non-white protagonist, Marsellus Wallace, exposes the interdependent relationship between discourses of race and (homo)sexuality.

Sexualised black men:

Marsellus Wallace is first introduced by Jules, the other central black character. Jules' story about the legendary act of revenge taken by Marsellus Wallace against a man who had touched the feet of his wife, establishes Marsellus Wallace as an in-charge, possessive, violent, black macho man both socially and economically powerful. The graphic scene which follows, where Jules kills two white men who had double-crossed Marsellus Wallace literally serves as another example of Marsellus Wallace's violent nature. The audience later learns that every one of the gangsters fears Marsellus Wallace's vengeance.

By the tenets of black macho, true masculinity admits little or no space for self interrogation or multiple subjectivities around race. Black macho prescribes an inflexible ideal: strong black men - "Afrocentric" black men-don't flinch, don't weaken, don't take blame or shit, take

charge, step-to when challenged, and defend themselves without pause for self-doubt.

(Riggs 1995: 474)

Even though Marsellus Wallace is presented in the mode of a "macho" black man, (as defined above by Riggs), his authority and social status is constantly challenged by white characters. Brad, the white man killed by Jules, double crosses Marsellus Wallace in a deal. His white wife (Mia) and his trusted white 'right hand man' (Vincent) then contemplate betraying him by sleeping together. This threat is only averted when Mia overdoses on heroin. Butch, another white man, is next shown double-crossing him. An argument can be made that the betrayal of Marsellus Wallace by his white associates is not racially motivated since Tarantino's previous film Reservoir Dogs also concerns double crossing amongst white gangsters. However, such an argument is complicated by the way in which scenes of economic and emotional betrayal build up to the climax of the film, (also the narrative temporal conclusion), the scene where Marsellus Wallace is raped. Although a white character, Butch, is set up as a possible rape victim, I shall argue that narrative incidents, emphasized by the strategic order of certain scenes, prefigure the subsequent rape of Marsellus Wallace.

Firstly, I must mention that his rape is not presented as racially motivated. The chance encounter with Butch at the traffic lights, the hilarious chase sequence, Butch's presence at the rape scene and Zed's method of choosing the victim offer the impression that Marsellus Wallace is only a victim by chance. Non-linear editing also

suggests that rape only occurs as a result of apparently random coincidence. However, not reading Marsellus Wallace's rape as racially motivated negates racially loaded references in two earlier scenes. The first, is the shoot out over the briefcase in Brett's apartment. The second is the childhood flashback scene within the sequence called "The Gold Watch". Respectively situated in the beginning and middle of the film, the significance of both scenes becomes obvious after the events of the film are rearranged temporally. In these terms, the scene at Brett's place occurs on the first day, and the childhood flashback takes place in the last 24 hours of the few days depicted in the film.

By strategically locating the scene at Brett's place as the film's first scene (both structurally and temporally), Tarantino ensures the audience is given a profile of Marsellus Wallace from the beginning of the film. Besides providing Vincent with a macho character profile of Marsellus Wallace, Jules encourages Brett to give a fearsome physical description of Marsellus Wallace. However, Jules also asks Brett: "Why are you trying to fuck him like a bitch?" The importance of this question, of Marsellus Wallace being "*fucked* like a *bitch*" is highlighted by the strategically replayed image of Marsellus Wallace being fucked by a white man. After the graphic scene where Marsellus Wallace is visually shown being raped, a repeat of the scene at Brett's apartment is inserted. The first words heard are Jules': "Yes, you did Brett! You tried to fuck him! And Marsellus Wallace don't like to be fucked by anybody except Mrs Wallace!" Although these lines are part of a longer conversation about hamburgers and acts of betrayal, only this part of Jules' speech, which emphasises Marsellus Wallace's vulnerability to being raped, is repeated. This repetition serves as a cruel gag

as well as undermining his social status and heterosexuality to remind the audience that the literal penetration of Marsellus Wallace actualises the figurative allusion in the beginning of the film.

Just as Marsellus Wallace's rape had been foreshadowed in an earlier scene, the impossibility of Butch's rape is presaged in the childhood flashback scene where Butch inherits the gold watch. In a comic retelling filled with anal jokes, Captain Koons reveals that Butch's father had successfully ^{hidden} the heirloom in his anus when the "gooks" captured him during the war. His success in passing the gold watch to his son indicates that his father was actually never anally searched nor penetrated by anybody. Thus, when Butch inherits the family heirloom, he inherits not only the gold watch, but also his father's impenetrability. Being the son of the father, Butch will not get raped even when he is held as a helpless prisoner as his father was. He instead becomes the macho hero who saves the helpless Marsellus Wallace from his rapist.

Uncovering racial difference:

The racially selective way in which Marsellus Wallace and Butch are respectively addressed as "boy" and "man" also indicates that traditional black/white racial hierarchies remain enforced in Pulp Fiction. Despite being his superior in terms of wealth and status, Butch addresses Marsellus Wallace as "big boy" (in Zed's shop). By contrast, Marsellus Wallace calls Butch a "man" (in Marsellus Wallace's club where he is bribing Butch to throw a fight). The racially particular use of "man" and "boy"

suggest that traditional black/white racist hierarchies continue to operate within the film text. Since Zed also calls Marsellus Wallace a "boy" before raping him, his decision to choose the black Marsellus Wallace to rape cannot be characterised as a racially blind choice.

The racial difference between Marsellus Wallace and Butch is further emphasised by the different visual representations. The first time we see both characters is at the deserted night-club. Butch is ^{introduced} via a lingering medium length frontal shot of his face squarely in the middle of the frame. The lighting is adequate enough to reveal a white man with a frowning but confident expression staring into the camera where the man (Marsellus Wallace) talking off camera is presumably sitting. A similar reverse shot does not expose the face of the man talking to Butch. Instead, a clearly lit lingering medium shot places the back of the speaker's black bald head squarely in the middle of the camera frame. Since Brett has already described Marsellus Wallace as being black and bald, so this faceless man is identified as Marsellus Wallace.

A stationary close up of the rear of Marsellus Wallace's head offers his skull as an object of both scrutiny and ridicule, a picture of incongruity. At first glance his black skull appears bumpy and solid, attached to a thick muscular neck. However, as the lingering camera remains focused on the skull of the still faceless man, we notice a big plaster (band aid) placed prominently over the base of his skull. This beige band aid (the popular widely available type that is advertised as being "skin colour") is visually striking in it contrast with the *skin colour* of Marsellus Wallace's neck. The band aid reveals that this man is not as tough as he sounds (or as his thick muscular black neck

suggests). After all, his rear is vulnerable, he has been hurt. A pair of large hoop gold earrings also adds to the effect of softness, vulnerability and feminisation. Even though men wearing pairs of ear studs are now common place and do not suggest effeminacy, hoop earrings are still usually worn singly on men. Consequently, even though he has a deep steady voice and formidable reputation, the visual image of an obviously wounded neck and his large feminine hoop earrings present Marsellus Wallace as a vulnerable figure. The visual framing of Marsellus Wallace (as faceless and "gazeless," to be objectified as the savage yet feminine black skull) contrasts with that of Butch whose facial shot allows him to look back at the viewer to convey a staunch defiant personality.

Most of the other characters are introduced through a frontal or side view shot. The only other character visually introduced in a similar manner to Marsellus Wallace, is his wife, Mia. The first image of Mia is also her back, she is shown moving as she speaks into the intercom to Vincent. The similar camera framing of Mia Wallace, a white woman, and Marsellus Wallace, a black man, is repeated in other scenes. When an overdosed Mia lies on the floor of her living room, an unflattering lingering high angle close up of her unconscious face is used. A similar scrutinising high angle close up is also used to frame an unconscious Marsellus Wallace on the floor of Zed's shop. Even though Butch is lying unconscious next to Marsellus Wallace in this scene, the camera does not linger on him (or any of the other characters elsewhere in the film) in this unflattering way.

The significance of the uniform camera framing of Marsellus Wallace and Mia is



revealed when Marsellus Wallace becomes the only man in the film to be raped. On the one hand, Marsellus Wallace is depicted as a macho black man, conforming to the old racial stereotype that macho black men are the most masculine of men. However, seemingly contradictorily, he is also compared to his wife, an attractive feminine character desired by both black and white male characters - a white woman - the epitome of sexually desirable femininity in Western films. The simultaneously savage yet feminising representation of Marsellus Wallace draws on racist stereotypes of black men as brute slaves - at once terrifyingly threatening in physical stature, but also immediately subservient because he is after all only a slave, an object owned and subject to the wishes of his white master. I refer here to racist stereotypes forged from slavery. The scene after Marsellus Wallace has been raped is reminiscent of a common occurrence - white master raping black female slave.

In this scene, after the tied-up white character Butch escapes, he immediately removes the black leather gag placed over his mouth. However, when Marsellus Wallace is released, he does not discard the black leather gag. Instead, he stands directly in front of the camera without his trousers (a visual reminder that he has just been raped), with the black gag worn around his neck like a choker. This image of Marsellus Wallace with the choker-like black gag draws on the numerous cinematic representations of black slaves shackled with similar neck chokers worn to signify their slavery. In his essay on the sexual objectification of black men, Mercer (1991) writes that black men (as "savages" or "slaves") are frequently located in a similar position as women to affirm the hegemonic position of the white subject/text.

Women, children, savages, slaves, and criminals were all alike insofar as their otherness affirmed his identity as the subject at the centre of logocentrism and indeed all the other centrisms - ethnocentrism and phallogocentrism - in which "he" [the hegemonic white male subject] constructed his representations of reality.

(Mercer 1991: 206)

As a socially and economically powerful man whose position is symbolised by his white wife (his possession of a white wife is significant because white women represent the epitome of the patriarchal and racial value of exchange), Marsellus Wallace transgresses the traditionally low social status of black men/slaves. It is therefore not surprising that Marsellus Wallace is disempowered. hooks argues that Marsellus Wallace' rape in Pulp Fiction disempowers black men and privileges white masculinity. His rape symbolically re-establishes the normal disempowered black / privileged white social, sexual and economic norm.

Note that even when the black male arrives at the top, as does Marsellus in Pulp Fiction - complete with a lying, cheating lapdog white child-woman wife - he is unmasked as only the imitation cowboy, not the real thing. And in case viewers haven't figured out that Marsellus ain't got what it takes, the film turns him into a welfare case - another needy victim who must ultimately rely on the kindness of strangers (i.e., Butch, the neoprimitive white colonizer, another modern-day Tarzan) to rescue him from the rape-in-progress that is his symbolic castration, his

return to the jungle, to a lower rung on the food chain.

(hooks 1996: 48-49)

Since the rape scene is the only sexual situation Marsellus Wallace is shown in, his disempowerment and feminisation by the hierarchically lowest of white men, the white homosexual man, (I shall elaborate on the position of the white homosexual man later), is imprinted in the audiences' minds. His possession of a white wife is never sexualised on-screen. I suggest that the depiction of a white female-black male interracial sexual coupling would be out of context in this film's narrative, since such scenes would sexually undermine the white norm, as Guerrero argues.

...interracial unions usually end in separation or tragedy, with the person of color being eliminated... or more often just killed off.... Yet more subtly, when occurring between a non-white man and what is presumed by the dominant imagination to be the object of desire of all races of color, the white woman, interracial unions are often flawed by rendering them between subjects who are distinctly unequal in ways that inversely underscore the superiority of the all-powerful white norm.

(Guerrero 1993: 173)

The contradictory characterisation of Marsellus Wallace as feminine (feminised by his anal rape, inability to sexually possess his wife, and objectified by the camera framing) despite being earlier depicted as aggressively masculine (in terms of social status, movement and body structure) reflects the process of the racial fetishization which

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enables contradictory views about non-whites to be held.

...the fetish... is the means, in other words, whereby 'a multiple belief' may be maintained and hence serves to support the wildly divergent stereotypical associations that accrue around the fetishized body. For it is not just the black who is marked in the dominant discourse as, in Homi Bhabha's words, 'both savage ...and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants; ...the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child...."

(Modleski 1991: 120)

Not all black people are depicted in such contradictory fetishistic terms. The only other central black male character in the film, Jules, is framed no differently from the other white male characters in the film. However, Jules is in a different social and economic class from Marsellus Wallace. Unlike his boss, Jules is not physically imposing and, more significantly, is not in a position of power. He starts off simply as an employee, and by the end of the film, he quits the economic and social hierarchy *totally* to become (as Vincent says disparagingly), "a bum," economically the lowest in society. Since he has voluntarily placed himself at the bottom of the social ladder, (where as Hemphill argues, Western racist discourses stereotypically locate black men), there is hence no need to feminise or disempower Jules.

...every nightly news show projects of young, black males... often with handcuffs on their wrists or sheets drawn over their bullet-riddled

bodies.... How many black males, dressed like me, have endured this...
 being harassed [by police officers] because... [of what] we often see on
 the nightly news and have come to associate with drugs?

(Hemphill 1995: 390)

White homosexual scapegoats:

Unlike the more subtle denigration of black characters through racist stereotypes, homosexual characters are simply violently "blown away" and killed in Pulp Fiction. This returns me to the significance of Marsellus Wallace being raped by a white homosexual man, and not a white heterosexually identified man or a black man. In my discussion of Philadelphia, I argued that the spectre of two black men being sexually involved together would be more readily attributed to their racial perversity rather than to any sort of homosexual identity. Consequently, I suggest that if a black man rapes Marsellus Wallace, whether straight or gay identified, racial perversity will be reluctantly foregrounded in a film that pretends to be "post-race." Following this line of inquiry, if Marsellus Wallace is raped by a heterosexual white man, the only plausible reason for a heterosexual white man to perform the (to him) "sexually abnormal" act has to be located in an act of assertion of power. Again, the rape would appear to be either a premeditated act of revenge by someone he knew, or an act of racial anger. In both instances, his rape by a heterosexual white man will be read as an avoidable assertion of power. This works against the narrative pretence that it is a "post-race" film, since an obvious feminisation or de-masculinization of the only economically

powerful black man in the film's narrative may be interpreted as blatantly racist.

On the other hand, gangster films such as Tarantino's Pulp Fiction have a history of depicting homosexuals negatively. Therefore, by locating Zed the white rapist in a recognisable homosexual sadomasochistic subculture, his perverse homosexuality is readily identified. The fact that Zed wears an American police officer's outfit draws upon the common knowledge that gay men have a fetish for uniforms (12). Other identifiably sadomasochistic homosexual "clues" such as the leatherclad "gimp" and the image of Zed's partner masturbating whilst watching the rape conveniently confirm their homosexuality. Besides maintaining the pretence that Marsellus Wallace's rape is not racially motivated, the identification of a white homosexual as a rapist allows the insertion of ^{scenes of} heterosexual male bonding. Butch, who had so far been trying to kill Marsellus Wallace, suddenly feels the "call of (straight) brotherhood," and returns to save his previously hated enemy from the evil homosexuals. By locating the rape of Marsellus Wallace as a heterosexual male versus homosexual male thing, Pulp Fiction neatly side-steps the issue of Marsellus Wallace's obvious racial identity which had been built up earlier in the film both visually (in the use of camera angles) and narratively (in the dialogue).

...that moment in Pulp Fiction when Butch and Marsellus are boy-bonding, with the tie that binds being their shared fear of homosexual rape... [illustrates] the homophobia of our times - ... the way patriarchal homosocial bonding mediates racism....

(hooks 1996: 50)

hooks (1996: 47-51) sarcastically identifies the way in which Pulp Fiction tries to avoid being obviously racist through its use of homophobia. She argues that there is little attempt within the film text (and in interviews with the filmmakers) to excuse the negative homophobic representation of the white gay men. Where the jokes made throughout the film about "niggers" attempt to lighten the problematic use of racial stereotypes, there is seriousness in the way that the white homosexual men are represented as unambiguously perverse, and evil rapists. Blowing a man's genitals away with a shotgun in a film predominantly about male bonding reassures the heterosexual male audience that male bonding does not contain elements of homoeroticism.

The exposure of Pulp Fiction's continued employment of racist and homophobic cinematic discourses in the same scene – the scene where the only powerful black man is raped by a white homosexual man – suggests that the analogy between deviant white homosexuality and corruptible black sexuality (as displayed in Philadelphia and Priscilla) is also made in Pulp Fiction. I shall now discuss Desperate Remedies in order to determine whether white homosexuality is compared to non-white sexuality, which is as different from the previous three films as they each are to one another.

Desperate Remedies:

Unlike Pulp Fiction, the temporally linear narrative structure of Desperate Remedies revolves conventionally around one central character, Dorothea Brooke (13) (Jennifer Ward-Lealand). A sensible, upper-middle class white woman living in the colony "Hope", Dorothea has a "drug crazed sister", Rose (Kiri Mills), who must be "freed from the clutches of an evil rogue", (14) the mixed race Fraser (Cliff Curtis). Because the unmarried Rose is pregnant with Fraser's child, Dorothea arranges a marriage of convenience between Rose and a recent English immigrant, Lawrence Haste (Kevin Smith). The marriage is unable to take place until Lawrence assists in disposing of Fraser, by packing him on-board a ship to San Francisco. Lawrence then marries Rose and retires to the country. In the meantime, in order to improve her financial situation, Dorothea enters an unhappy marriage to a white man, MP William Poyser (Michael Hurst). Unknown to Dorothea, William is himself already heavily in debt. Her secret lesbian lover and governess, Anne Cooper (Lisa Chappell), continues to live with them. Unfortunately, Fraser returns after a few years and threatens to re-enter Rose's life. He tells William the true nature of Dorothea's lesbian relationship with Anne. Anne reacts by murdering Fraser. At the same time, Rose and her mixed-race child unexpectedly die of cholera, leaving Lawrence free to declare his love for Dorothea. Dorothea decides to leave William, not for Lawrence, but for a life away from "Hope" with Anne.

It was written and directed by "out" gay men, established New Zealand filmmakers Stewart Main and Peter Wells. Their camp depiction of lesbianism is one explanation

for the popularity of Desperate Remedies with lesbian and gay audiences. The exaggerated acting method, excessively dramatic soundtrack and ironically humorous costumes have delighted audiences who sometimes assume camp depictions of sexuality are politically progressive as the heterosexual norm is often narratively displaced in such films. However, as Doty argues, camp style and politics are not necessarily subversive.

While camp's ironic humor always foregrounds straight cultural assumptions and its (per)version of reality, and therefore seeks to denaturalize the work of dominant (patriarchal, heterocentrists) ideologies, its political agenda is not always progressive.

(Doty 1995: 335)

I shall argue that the ^{negative} representation of Desperate Remedies' non-white characters reveal that racist stereotypes continue to be drawn upon despite the attempt to depict a "positive" representation of lesbianism.

To facilitate my discussion, the term "white" ^{instead of} "Pakeha" shall be used. Although "Pakeha" is considered an acceptable alternative to "white" in New Zealand because it supposedly avoids the connotations of supremacy that the latter term carries, I suggest that the replacement of the term "white" with the term "Pakeha" would simply be window-dressing. Dyson (1995) argues that "Pakeha", originally a Maori term meaning "outsiders" or non-Maori people, has come to refer exclusively to people of a white ethnic identity.

As part of my larger project of identifying the way in which "whiteness" has been crucial to the construction of discourses of homosexuality, I will illustrate that Dorothea's eventual expulsion from Hope for her homosexual and interracial sexual transgressiveness is directly related to her specifically *white* racial identity. Western rules, expectations and definitions of white femininity and behavior apply most strictly in the "colonies" (where non-whites are present) to *all* Western women considered white. By contrast, being a "Pakeha" woman is a specifically New Zealand concept, and as a Maori derived term, does not convey the way a white Western woman, especially an upper-class white woman, is considered representative of a certain white ruling class (who should behave accordingly). Similarly, I use the term "mixed race" in this paper to describe the way in which certain characters are depicted racially. Instead of suggesting that there is something akin to "pure" race, term "mixed race" is used to describe Fraser and his offspring. Their specific racial identity is never revealed. Fraser only identified himself as "half caste".

Desperate Remedies as a New Zealand film:

Desperate Remedies did not receive a wide general release in North America and Britain, but was enthusiastically promoted in both New Zealand and Australia. It was released in 1994, around the same time as two more popular New Zealand films - the much discussed Jane Campion film *The Piano* (NZ 1993) and Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures* (NZ 1994). Like *Desperate Remedies*, *The Piano* and *Heavenly*

Creatures can both be read as films which examine the way in which Pakeha New Zealand society has been constructed through the sexual liberation and repression of the central white female characters. In The Piano, we follow Ada as she arduously discovers her sexuality and position as a Scottish woman newly arrived in New Zealand. In Heavenly Creatures, Juliet, also recently arrived in New Zealand from England, struggles unsuccessfully to find a place within heterosexual New Zealand society as she becomes sexually involved with her Pakeha girlfriend, Pauline.

As well as these three films, the subsequent two years saw the release of other New Zealand films such as Once Were Warriors (NZ 1995), The Cinema of Unease (NZ 1995) and Broken English (NZ 1996). Although these three later films are not as explicitly concerned with the representation of white female sexuality, they are all preoccupied with an interrogation of New Zealand identity, both past and present. One of Desperate Remedies' filmmakers, Stewart Main, also directed a short film called Te Keremutunga o Nga Atua (NZ 1995), translated as Twilight of the Gods. The film tells the story of a tense camaraderie that develops between a Toa (Maori warrior) and his white enemy during the historic land wars which took place before the creation of present day Pakeha New Zealand society. Te Keremutunga o Nga Atua explicitly foregrounds what Desperate Remedies hints at - that homosexual and interracial sexuality was unacceptable to the white people who won the war which marked the establishment of present day Pakeha New Zealand society.

Also interesting is the negative reception that The Cinema of Unease, (produced by New Zealand actor Sam Neil for the centenary of cinema), received within New

Zealand. As The Cinema of Unease is a documentary tracing the way in which transgressive elements of a repressed heterosexual society emerge in New Zealand films, the local audience's unenthusiastic response indicates an unwillingness to acknowledge a contemporary crisis in Pakeha New Zealand national identity. Although Desperate Remedies is set in fantasy land during a historical time, the film's representation of racial and sexual differences reflect the crisis in Pakeha New Zealand identity during the early/mid 1990s, when racial tension amongst New Zealanders of European, Maori, Asian and Pacific Island descent was heightened.

Dockside beginnings:

The opening scenes of any film are important because they usually set the tone and hint at what is to come. In Desperate Remedies, the words "a distant point of Empire, in a land called Hope" fill the screen. The setting of the opening scene at the docks retells the history of the arrival of English settlers to the new British colony, "Hope." Lyden (1997) argues that ships and docks play an important role in New Zealand films as historically, it is a settler nation. It is significant that Desperate Remedies' opening and closing scenes are set at the docks, with long shots, medium shots and close-ups of ships. In order to distinguish "Hope" from other English colonies, there are several shots of people with Maori tattoos, identifying "Hope" as New Zealand. Later rivalrous references to Sydney and snide remarks about Australian aristocracy later in the film further establish it's antipodean origins. It is therefore natural to suggest that the film can be read as a story about the creation of Pakeha New Zealand society.

The central character, Dorothea, is introduced in this dockside scene. Dressed in rich red period clothing, Dorothea sweeps into view accompanied by an equally dramatic soundtrack (15). Shots of shabbily dressed people and a close-up of her business card, where she is described as a "lady of distinction", highlight her social status. Her attraction to white men is hinted at by an extended sequence of shot-reverse shots between Dorothea and an Englishman, Lawrence (16). However, when Dorothea returns to the dock in the last scene, her respectable heterosexual status has been tarnished. It transpires she has transgressed the two taboos (miscegenation and homosexuality). She shifts from being an economically successful entrepreneur and upwardly mobile wife of a Minister of Parliament to an outcast running from Hope.

Although many lesbian and gay audiences have read Dorothea's departure from Hope, with Anne, as a happy ending, this optimistic reading is compromised by the fact that Dorothea and Anne seem able only to be together if they leave Hope. McClintock (1995), Nussbaum (1995) and Stoler (1995) argue that the regulation of white female sexuality is integral to the expansion of the British empire, especially in the new colonies.

...the "fate of the race and the nation" were also tied in colonial discourses to individual sexual practices in Africa, Asia, and the Americas... Male sexual anxiety focused on more than suitable Christian marriage partners for European women and on the transmission of property, but on the unmanaged desires of women

themselves.... In both the Dutch and British accounts, the sexual choices of white women were at issue; they are desired objects, but unruly desiring subjects as well.

(Stoler 1995: 41)

Dorothea's eventual expulsion from Hope can thus be read as a necessity, reiterating the impossibility for sexually transgressive white women to continue living respectably in the "colonies". Since Dorothea is first depicted as sexually transgressive because of her involvement in an interracial relationship, I shall begin with an exploratory discussion of the threat of miscegenation and non-white sexuality.

The sexualization of non-white characters:

The centrality of racial difference to the film narrative is signalled by a shot of a placard with the words: "Natives no problems," in the dockside opening scene. As "natives" do not arrive by sea at the same time as the English immigrants, this placard is obviously not aimed towards "native" arrivals. Instead, the placard functions as a narrative device to reveal that the English immigrants shown getting off the boats are arriving in a land containing an indigenous population. Crucially, it establishes the hierarchy of white/native racial relations. Even though the statement "natives no problem" suggests that everyone has an "equal opportunity" regardless of their race, it also indicates that white people are already in control of the distribution of land and making the rules about who is or is not a problem.

The underclass status and the perceived (often sexual) threat posed by the natives is signalled by the use of clothing. As suggested earlier, wealth, poverty, morality and sexuality of the various white characters are also signalled through dress. However, the poorly dressed white characters who sometimes resort to debauched sexual acts are depicted as victims of circumstances. In contrast, the consistently "improper" dress of the non-white characters reaffirms the narrative characterisation of non-whites as servants, evil seducers or opium distributors. Even when clothed, the non-white characters who are more frequently depicted in various states of undress, are shown in figure hugging clothes that are vampish and sexualised.

The first non-white character seen in Desperate Remedies, a scantily clothed Maori man with chains around his neck, draws on the racist stereotypes that "natives" are savages who need to be tamed. The image of a "tamed native" is repeated later, in the party scene at Dorothea's house. After a subtitle telling us two years has passed, the scene opens with a wide angle shot zooming to an eroticised close up of a man's naked butt with Maori tattoos. Although his face is not exposed, the tattoos identify his ethnicity. This tamed faceless savage is subservient, serving a white guest food and drink. A Chinese character is similarly racially stereotyped. She is a worker in the opium house filled with wan laughing addicts, a place where degenerate Chinese are often depicted profiting from the distribution of illegal drugs. Her skin-tight clothes not only emphasise her sexual appeal, but their style (reminiscent of prostitutes in Western films) also suggests she profit from the desires of others.

The mixed race central character, Fraser, is also depicted in negative sexual terms. Fraser and the other non-white characters are always dressed in reds or blacks - a colour often associated with danger, evil, rebelliousness and dirt (Dyer 1997: 80). When Fraser is introduced, he wears only a pair of tight *black* leather trousers and nipple rings. As well as using his exposed, sexualised, body to seduce Rose, Fraser also blackmails Dorothea in return for keeping their illicit interracial liaisons a secret. A scene at his apartment where Fraser flirts with Lawrence to elude capture suggests that he is not adverse to using his sexuality to manipulate men. By contrast, even though Lawrence is also seen in various state of undress, his sexuality is characterised as pure, moral and healthy. Lawrence is almost always clothed in strikingly *white* clothes, a colour which is often used to symbolise purity (Dyer 1997: 70-81). Soundtracks further emphasise Fraser and Lawrence's differing sexualities. Where Lawrence's appearances are usually accompanied by happy laughter or romantic music, music of sinister suggestion is played when Fraser appears.

Just as Fraser's dangerous sexual appeal causes Rose's downfall, so it leads Dorothea to sexual transgressiveness. In a dramatic confession, Dorothea blames Fraser for seducing her in her youth and not taking responsibility for the resulting mixed race child. This revelation places Dorothea in the same position as her sister, Rose, "undone" because of her interracial sexual liaison with Fraser. Miscegenation is deeply frowned upon in this film. Lawrence, the representative voice of normative white heterosexuality, sneers at Dorothea when he discovers their interracial liaisons: "the situation does not flatter you". Despite the statement in the placard in the opening scene, "Natives No Problem," the white characters' negative reactions suggest that



"natives" and all non-white people problematically embody the ever present sexual threat of heterosexual miscegenation.

Young (1995) suggests that white paranoia about non white "limitless fertility" is related to the fear that interracial reproductive sex will result in the creation of mixed race offsprings who confuse the racial boundaries of black and white. Stoler (1995) also argues that the desire for racial boundaries and the fear of miscegenation is related to white fear about the instability of their own racial identity:

In contrast to the stereotype of the fixity of the racial other, bourgeois white identities, both child and adult, were more vulnerable, unstable and susceptible to change. Protection from this fear demanded a rerouting of desires, a displacement of eroticism, an externalisation of arousal to a native or mixed-blood surrogate self.

(Stoler 1995: 163-4)

It is therefore not surprising that Dorothea and Rose are considered "undone" because of their productive interracial sexual liaisons. Just as Lawrence's earlier discovery of his bride-to-be, Rose's, interracial liaison with Fraser conflates with the knowledge that his step-child will be half-caste; the revelation of Dorothea's past interracial relationship occurs simultaneously with the confession that she too was pregnant with a mixed race child. The conflation of confessions of interracial relationships with the production of mixed-race children indicates that the prohibition of white women involvement with non-white men is directly related to threat of producing mixed race

children.

Reflecting old colonialist laws against miscegenation prohibiting legal marriages between different races, all the mixed race people (Fraser, Dorothea and Rose's children) in the colony "Hope" are illegitimate. It can be argued that the depiction of mixed race characters as inherently illegitimate simply reflects, rather than condone, traditional colonialist belief that miscegenation pervert the natural purity of the white race. This sympathetic reading, however, is complicated by the contrasting representations of white sexuality as healthy and non-white as deviant. As discussed earlier, the non-white central character Fraser is consistently presented as the deviant seducer, desirable but immoral, forever preying on white women; tempting them to transgress the racial boundaries which lead to their undoing.

The ill-treatment of Dorothea and Rose suggests that Fraser remains a dangerous sexual threat as long as he is alive. Fraser has to be eliminated before the heroine, Dorothea, is able to live "happily ever after". Even the death of Fraser, both the product of mixed race liaison and producer of illegitimate children, is not enough. All traces of racial impurity are erased when his only mixed race child still living in Hope succumbs to cholera. The white women who participate in interracial liaisons are also removed from "Hope." I have already mentioned that the film's heroine, Dorothea, who was involved with Fraser, is expelled from "Hope" by the end of the film. Fraser's other white lover, Rose, is also removed from "Hope" when she dies of cholera. Stoler (1995) suggests that a white woman's racial identity is more fundamentally threatened by her involvement with a non-white man than a white man's would be with a non-

white woman.

Europeanness was not only class-specific but gender coded. A European man could live with or marry an Asian woman without necessarily losing rank, but this was never true for a European woman who might make a similar choice to live or marry a non-European. Thus in the legal debates on mixed-marriage in 1887, a European woman who has married a native man was dismissively accorded native legal status on the grounds that her very choice of sexual and conjugal partner showed that she has "already sunk so deep socially and morally that it does not result in any ruin... [but rather] serves to consolidate her situation."

(Stoler 1995 :115)

Having jeopardised her racial identity and social status through her sexually transgressive interracial involvement with Fraser already, Dorothea's later lesbianism becomes a plausible aspect of her character.

The threat of white homosexuality:

Given the film's negative sexualization of non-white people in general, it is not surprising that the sympathetic heroines of the film, Anne and Dorothea, are white. Their white identities play a crucial role in constructing heroic racial and sexual

struggle which the good *white* lesbians have to undergo in order to dispose of the bad *black* man who keeps them from being together. Presented as the character who exposes Dorothea's past interracial sexual transgression, Fraser, the non-white central character, doubly undermines the heroine assumed pretence of being a "proper white lady". First "tainting" Dorothea by illicitly seducing her, Fraser again jeopardises her social status by telling Lawrence and William (both white heterosexual men) about her past. However, unlike the other white woman who was previously involved with Fraser (Rose, like Fraser and the bastard child, dies), Dorothea survives because her unlawful desire for Fraser dies. Nevertheless, though she lives, Dorothea's social status as a "proper English woman" is already undermined by her interracial sexual transgression. Her subsequent illicit involvement in a lesbian relationship with Anne, can thus be read as a plausible act of a sexually transgressive woman who, socially, has nothing more to lose.

Anne's lesbian sexual deviancy, on the other hand, can be attributed to her imperfect class status. In a tense scene in Dorothea's living room, William Poyser, the white Member of Parliament, disparagingly reminds Anne that prior to her involvement with Dorothea, she was formerly *only* a governess. Even though not exactly working class, governesses are nonetheless considered inferior. As she is repeatedly referred to as a "servant", Anne is more definitively marked as working class than middle-class. Hart (1994) argues that although contemporary definitions of female homosexuality are based predominantly on a model explicated for the white middle class, there still exists a stereotype that both non-white people and white working class people are innately sexually deviant, and hence, also homosexually deviant. An

example of the way in which the white working class lesbian is compared to non-white character occurs in an unusual bedroom scene in the middle of the film. In her drug induced sexually aroused state, Rose, the white heterosexual woman, who serves as the pawn which the lesbians and Fraser struggle to gain control over, mistakes Anne for a sexually attractive but evil looking Fraser.

Just as Fraser is characterised as "dangerous" because of his interracial sexual desires, Anne's "deviant" white working class sexuality is also depicted as driving her to the act of murder. Eventually placed in direct confrontation with one another, so that the demise of one party leads to the narrative resolution, a negative comparison between the non-white character and the white lesbians is unfortunately established. Even though Anne is eventually revealed to have killed Fraser, this fact is not established until after Fraser is dead. In the climatic graveyard scene where Fraser is confronted by the white lesbian Anne, Anne is dressed in Dorothea's clothes, giving Fraser and the audience a mistaken impression that it is Dorothea who kills Fraser. Anne's disguise as Dorothea and the subsequent disclosure of her true identity indicates that even though only she literally kills Fraser, *both* lesbian characters (Anne & Dorothea) confront and kill him symbolically. The homosexual desires of *both* Dorothea and Anne become negatively implicated as similar to Fraser. In consequence, the generally positive representation of homosexuality in Desperate Remedies is unravelled by the comparison between Anne, Dorothea and Fraser.

The removal of only the white lesbians and the non-white villain from Hope furthers the comparison between the homosexual and non-white characters. Since the

negative representation of the non-white characters in Desperate Remedies suggests that white heterosexual hegemony is not problematised, it becomes difficult for the homosexual characters to continue existing in a society oppressive to those who are not white and heterosexual. In contrast, the presumably heterosexual white characters, including prostitutes and the corrupt William Poyser, are permitted to remain in Hope along with Lawrence and other more morally respectable heterosexual men and woman. As if celebrating the death of the participants of miscegenation and the departure of the lesbians, the film ends with scenes of dockside celebration by white heterosexual characters who have won an unidentified war.

In conclusion, I suggest that the employment of negative racial stereotypes in Desperate Remedies eventually unravels the politically correct representation of homosexuality. The interdependent construction of racial and homosexual stereotypes has not been interrogated. In the next chapter, I shall elaborate on the way in which non-whites, and white homosexuals, are similarly "othered" because of the differing reproductive threats they pose to the white patriarchal institution. Right now, it suffices to say that the non-white character's death and the white lesbians' departure from Hope can be read as the inability of the country's white heterosexual society to contain the threat they pose.

Conclusion:

I have looked at four films containing both white homosexual and non-white characters to examine the way in which homosexual characters are often depicted as white, and non-white characters as sexually deviant. I have also argued that the non-white characters of these films are usually characterised as more open to sexually different activities, including homosexual acts. Hence, homosexual behaviour serves to mark only the specifically homosexual identities of white characters. "Whiteness" thus becomes central in establishing the specifically homosexual identities of the homosexual characters.

I have argued further that comparisons between non-white and homosexual characters indicate that the construction of contemporary racial and homosexual discourses is intimately related. Though the non-white and white homosexual characters are often depicted differently in all four films, they are set up in direct confrontation with one another. Even when these encounters do not lead to the formation of political alliances, they are central to the films' narratives because they lead to changes in the protagonists' lives.

Finally, I argued that the continued marginalisation of non-whites in order to achieve the "normalisation" of homosexuals (in Priscilla and Desperate Remedies) and vice versa (in Pulp Fiction) is often unsuccessful because Western stereotypes of race and homosexuality are co-dependent. Most surprisingly, it is not the three independently produced films cited above, but the Hollywood film Philadelphia, which contains the

most politically correct representation of both non-white heterosexual characters and white homosexuals. As discussed earlier, despite the sometimes problematic representation of white homosexuality and black sexuality, because affinities between racial and homophobic oppression are explored, it comes closest to problematizing the assumption that all homosexuals are white and non-whites cannot be specifically homosexual because they are simply generally sexually deviant.

Philadelphia's exploration of potential alliances between homosexuals and non-white people opens up the possibility for increased cinematic representations of the homosexual person of colour. Here, I refer to the existence of the minor character Miguel in Philadelphia. Although played by a white man (the actor Antonio Banderas is of Spanish descent, which makes him foreign but not, strictly speaking, a person of color), Miguel is supposed to be Hispanic – which, within the American context, a person of color. Even though Miguel is only a minor character, his mere existence illustrates that unlike Pulp Fiction, Priscilla and Desperate Remedies, (which do not explore the co-dependency of the racial and homosexual stereotypes they draw upon), a space has been opened up in Philadelphia for the representation of the homosexual of colour.

This leads me to my next chapter where I shall discuss the way in which non-white homosexual central characters are depicted in another four films. I shall further examine the relationship between the construction of homosexuality as white, the perception of non-whites as sexually deviant and the prohibition against homosexuality and interracial heterosexual relationships.

Endnotes (Chapter 2):

¹ As opposed to those "non-white" people who are able to pass racially for white.

² Besides Terence Stamp, the other characters, including his two costars, (Hugo Weaving and Guy Pierce), are internationally unknown. Although Guy Pierce was already known in Australia for his role in the television soap "Neighbours", he is not recognized outside that country when this film was released. Since appearing in LA Confidential (USA 1997), he has become more well known. Hugo Weaving has so far remained unknown.

³ This fact is widely mentioned in many newspaper reviews of Philadelphia such as the Chicago Sun-Times (Roger Ebert 14/01/1994), The Tech MIT Press (Scott Deskin 12/01/94) and the Washington Post (Desson Howe 14/01/94).

⁴ There have since been a few films about HIV positive women. I shall elaborate further in the next chapter, in the section on Boys on the Side (USA 1995).

⁵ Joe is shown buying diapers in this scene. Babies and baby products are repeatedly used to signal different characters' heterosexuality in this film.

⁶ Abbreviated to Priscilla in this thesis.

⁷ However, Priscilla became so financially and critically successful that it was remade as a big star big budget Hollywood film, To Wong Foo, Thanks For Everything, Julie Newmar (USA 1995). Starring Wesley Snipes and Patrick Swayze, it follows three drag queens across middle America as they head for Hollywood.

⁸ Even though the drag queens lip-sync to Abba, (a campy, trashy pop group), their songs are generally considered socially acceptable and artistically respectable to the targeted audiences of this film. Abba's cheery songs also add to the feel-good theme of this film, making it easier for the audience of Priscilla to enjoy the drag queens' performances. Unlike the narrative representation of hostile heterosexual audiences within the film, the success of Priscilla with mainstream audiences exemplifies the popularity of drag shows with heterosexual audiences. It is common for heterosexuals to love drag queens since drag is not seen as being exclusive to homosexuals.

⁹ The difference in the representation of the Australian aborigines and the Filipino woman can be attributed to the film's being produced in a time where politically correct representation of native people is globally gaining momentum. Compounded with the fact that the Australian aborigines (who, depending on the region they hail from, sometimes prefer to be known as "kooris") are increasingly vocalizing their call for rights to their native land, and the prevalent anti-Asian feeling at the time of the making of Priscilla, it is thus not surprising that despite the continued sexualization of both the Australian aborigines and the Filipino woman, there is an attempt to depict one group in a more politically correct manner. I will elaborate on the effect political correctness has on the representation of people of color and homosexuals in chapter four of this thesis.

¹⁰ Most, if not all, of the black audiences I spoke to has commented on the racism of his films. It has thus far been the white audiences, mostly male heterosexuals, who have argued that his films are not racist. The racially split reception of Tarantino's films has recently been highlighted after the release of his latest film, Jackie Brown (USA 1998). Black audiences have come out in support of Spike Lee's public critique that Tarantino has unwittingly reinforced negative racist stereotypes of blacks by using the term "nigger" extensively and indiscriminately in his films. In response, Quentin Tarantino and his predominantly white male fans argue that every gangster character is called 'nigger' regardless of their white or black racial identity.

¹¹ Even though American-style diners are now found in many European, Asian and other countries, the accents, behavior and subject of conversation of the clientele and staff in both diners shown in this film locate the setting as specifically North American.

¹² Mainstream knowledge of homosexual fetishization of uniforms is also cited in another more mainstream Hollywood film, Boys on the Side (USA 1995). One of the heterosexual characters, Holly (Drew Barrymore) tells another heterosexual character Robin (Mary Louise Parker) that "everybody" knows homosexuals love uniforms.

¹³ Even though the central character of Desperate Remedies shares the same name as the protagonist in George Elliot's novel Middlemarch, there is not much narrative similarity.

¹⁴ Quoted from the back of the video cover. The evil rogue is the only non-white central character in the film.

¹⁵ Free of Destiny – Nervure.

¹⁶ Even though Lawrence can be considered "rough trade", working class Englishmen in New Zealand did not have the same low social status as they did in England. British immigrants from the "home country" assume a higher social status than the native people and locally born whites in British colonies. Consequently, working class Englishmen are usually accorded similar social status as white middle-class men born in the colonies.

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CHAPTER 3:**MISCEGENATION, REPRODUCTION AND HOMOSEXUALITY.**

Although there is a fair amount of work examining the implications of heterosexual interracial relationships, there has not been much discussion about interracial homosexual ones. Young, one of the few critics to discuss the topic, argues that homosexual interracial relationships are depicted even less often than (also under-represented) heterosexual interracial relationships.

It seems that interracial sexual activity is still contentious in a racist society: if the sexual activity is homoerotic and interracial, then it is virtually unspeakable. The prohibition of this aspect of sexual behaviour is reflected in the absence or superficial nature of portrayals of such relationships on the screen.

(Young 1996:190)

She cites My Beautiful Laundrette (UK 1985) and Young Soul Rebels (UK 1991) as exceptions to this rule. However, since the release of My Beautiful Laundrette and Young Soul Rebels, other films depicting interracial homosexual relationships have been produced. They include Grief (USA 1993), Thin Ice (UK 1994), Parallel Sons (USA 1995), Bar Girls (USA 1995), When Night is Falling (Canada 1995), Work (USA 1996), The Delta (USA 1996) and The Incredibly True Story of Two Girls in Love (USA 1996). Despite their different avenues of production, countries of origin and narrative methods, these films all contain non-white homosexual central characters

depicted as sexually or romantically involved with white homosexuals. With a few exceptions, (which will be discussed in the next chapter), the non-white homosexual characters are not shown with other non-white homosexual partners.

Even though an argument can be made that the representation of homosexual interracial relationships arises from a racially liberal agenda, this thesis is complicated by the simultaneous inclusion of same-race heterosexual relationships central to the films' narratives. I suggest that the simultaneous inclusions of interracial homosexual liaisons and same-race heterosexual ones reflect the differing sexual threats they pose. Young (1995) argues that the prohibition against miscegenation applies specifically to heterosexual interracial sex, and not to homosexual interracial sex.

... same-sex sex, though clearly locked into an identical same-but-different dialectic of racialized sexuality, posed no threat because it produced no children; its advantage was that it remained silent, covert and unmarked. On the face of it, therefore, hybridity must always be a resolutely heterosexual category.

(Young 1995: 25-26)

Since the prohibition against miscegenation arises from white paranoia about non-white "limitless fertility", (that interracial heterosexual relationships will endlessly reproduce racially "impure" offsprings who confusingly erase established racial boundaries), homosexual interracial relationships are not similarly threatening because homosexual sex is non-productive. (Young 1995: 181) Nevertheless, I do not wish to

suggest that homosexuality in general is not threatening. Precisely because it does not reproduce, and provides no assistance in maintaining the heterosexual nuclear family by producing heirs, homosexuals are still marginalized.

I shall thus examine the representation of interracial homosexuality and same-race heterosexuality in relation to the general marginalization of the non-white homosexual characters in films. Although I will be referring to a number of films containing non-white homosexuals (who are almost always involved in interracial homosexual relationships), for reasons of length and manageability, I shall limit detailed discussions to only four films in this chapter. They are, She Must Be Seeing Things (USA 1987), Salmonberries (USA 1991), The Wedding Banquet (Taiwan 1993) and Boys on the Side (USA 1995). Like the films examined in the last chapter, these four encompass both mainstream Hollywood and independent productions from different countries. As well as receiving at least a limited public release in England, they have also been distributed on video, attesting to the increasing popularity of such productions. They also include non-white homosexual characters of differing class and ethnic backgrounds.

The Wedding Banquet:

I am aware that because The Wedding Banquet has a Taiwanese director, Ang Lee, and contains a predominantly Asian cast, some might argue that it is not a "Western" film. However, this position is complicated by the international mobility of contemporary film directors and universally standard filming techniques adopted by directors from many countries. Since directing The Wedding Banquet, New York University trained Ang Lee has gone on to direct the Oscar-award winning Sense and Sensibility (USA, 1995) and the critically successful The Ice Storm (USA 1997), both which are commonly accepted as Western films. The subject matter of The Wedding Banquet also makes it more difficult to argue that the film is not Western. Besides being filmed entirely in New York and receiving both financially and critically successful mainstream releases in the West, The Wedding Banquet contains central characters who often communicate to each other in English, and deals explicitly with the protagonist's experience of living in the West.

Its narrative is uncomplicated, revolving mainly around the "coming out" of Gao Wei Tung (Winston Chao), a homosexual Taiwanese born Asian American. Although Wei Tung is happily involved with a white man, Simon (Mitchell Lichtenstein), he has not yet come out to his parents. Oblivious to his predicament, they urge him to get married in order to have a grandson. Wei Tung's fear of disappointing his parents prompts Simon to arrange a fake heterosexual marriage for him and his tenant, a Chinese woman, Wei Wei (May Chin). Unfortunately, Wei Tung's parents decide to leave their home in Taiwan and come to New York to arrange a big wedding. Their arrival sets off

a chain of events. Wei Wei becomes pregnant with Wei Tung's child, causing Simon to leave Wei Tung. This in turn, leads to Wei Tung's coming out to his shocked parents. Despite the disastrous events, a happy ending results. Wei Tung is reunited with Simon, and his parent's wish to have a grandson is fulfilled.

The centrality of Wei Tung and the unusual emphasis on the masculine sexual appeal of this Chinese character is established in the opening scene. A variety of shots from different angles focusing solely on Wei Tung, depicting different parts of his body, introduce Wei Tung as an example of healthy desirable masculinity. Shot wholly within the conventional style of Western cinema (such as standard indoor lighting, steady camera work with a mixture of medium shots and extreme close-ups) and accompanied by a standard soundtrack (consisting of a voice-over), negative racial and sexual stereotypes of effeminate Asian men are nevertheless problematised. Subsequent representations of Wei Tung's relationship with Simon also problematise the stereotype that Asian men are more feminine than white men. As neither Simon nor Wei Tung are obviously more active, passive, feminine or older than the other, the film avoids invoking stereotypes of sexually passive Asian gay "houseboys" who are usually involved in intergenerational relationships with much older white men. Simon's culinary ability further problematises the assumption that the Asian man usually takes up the more domestic feminine role in an interracial homosexual relationship.

Similarly, Wei Wei's incompetence in the kitchen subverts the stereotype that Asian women can cook well to keep their husbands happy. The representation of Wei Wei as

the bold sexual initiator also calls to question stereotypes of submissive Asian women. Even though Wei Tung is depicted as the passive partner during his unexpected sexual encounter with Wei Wei, his passivity is portrayed as the manifestation of his reluctance to have sex with her.

The representation of Wei Tung as a healthy, masculine man works against conventional racial and sexual stereotypes of Chinese men which "in contemporary North American mass culture still oscillates for the most part between an asexual wimpiness and a degenerate, sexual depravity, reflecting and reproducing this unstable Masculinity". (Fung 1995b: 296) Bleys (1996:30) elaborates that since "the Far East [was] seen by many a traveler as a hotbed of sexual lasciviousness," Asians have also been negatively stereotyped as capable of practicing all forms of sexual acts, including homosexual ones. Hence, even when an Asian engages in homosexual activity, they are thought to be simply racially sexually deviant rather than specifically homosexual.

The weight of racialist discourse has thus proved considerable as the very distinction between "congenital" versus "situational" homosexuality allowed for the simultaneous upholding of an etiological model of "endemic" homosexuality when applied to non-western societies, and a "minority" model when applied to the West.

(Bleys 1996: 192)

Films such as The Last Emperor (Bernardo Bertolucci, Italy/HK/UK, 1987), M.

Butterfly (David Cronenberg, USA, 1993) and The Buddha of Suburbia (Roger Michell, UK, 1993) depict Asian men and women who engage in homosexual acts without being identified as strictly "homosexual". Instead, their homosexual practices are depicted as either a manifestation of their sexual "openness" or a symptom of their Asian sexual "decadence". In contrast, Wei Tung's homosexuality is depicted as being more than a purely sexual activity. Since gym culture and the importance of body image is generally held to be central in defining homosexual macho masculinity, the gym setting of the opening scene locates Wei Tung within a gay subcultural context easily identifiable by homosexual audiences. He is also later depicted as a self-identified homosexual happily involved in a stable long-term monogamous relationship with another man. Even when he is seduced into having sex with a woman, he resists being labelled bisexual. I suggest that Wei Tung's proclamation that he cannot be "liberated" from his homosexual identity problematises racist assumption that "sexually deviant" non-whites will have sex with anyone, male or female.

The strategic inclusion of white characters elsewhere in the film also serves to emphasise the premise that Asian characters exist within a predominantly white society where Asians are sometimes marginalized. Simon's crucial role in the small dinner scene at Old Mr Chen's restaurant after the registry wedding is an example of how a solitary white character serves to symbolise white American society in general. In this scene, the only white character, Simon, is depicted as the only person who does not understand Old Mr Chen when he refers to Asians' minority status (when he reminds the Gaos that as Chinese, they cannot afford to "lose face" in the United States). The

Chinese and white characters' different responses to Chinese speeches about surviving in white America is amplified in the wedding banquet scene. Shots of bemused white guests skeptically observing the Chinese indicate that they do not understand the sentimental speeches alluding to how difficult it has been for them, including the bride (Wei Wei), to stay in the United States and make it to the wedding banquet.

The white characters' incomprehension of the Chinese characters' plight is not attributed to linguistic difference. Even though language has often been cinematically used to signal the difference between the Chinese and white characters, linguistic barriers do not separate the white and Chinese characters in The Wedding Banquet. Bhabha (1987), Stam and Shohat (1985) suggest that language has often been used by Hollywood and other filmmakers as a political tool of oppression far exceeding its basic communicative function. (1) Chinese characters have been traditionally depicted as less educated and uncultured because they cannot speak English properly. Wat (1996: 72-3) also argues that the proposed solution to this problem - that Chinese in the West should be allowed to speak Chinese - can unfortunately result in racial essentialisation. He suggests that white insistence on evidence of racial authenticity through manifestation of linguistic ability reinforce existing racial hierarchies.

Since both white and Chinese characters speak different languages with different accents, The Wedding Banquet manages to avoid both problems of linguistic colonisation and racial essentialisation. Not only does Wei Tung speak good English (as expected) Simon speaks a little Mandarin. The hegemonic dominance of English as universal discourse is destabilised with the inclusion of other Chinese characters

who speak both Chinese and English. There is even a Chinese character, little Mao, who sings in Italian. As well as reflecting the racial diversity and enriching intercultural exchange between the characters, language is also used to great comic effect – audiences are surprised and invited to laugh when Simon's white patient and Wei Tung's parents are shocked by Simon's attempts at speaking Chinese.

The film's soundtrack similarly reflects the racially and culturally hybrid nature of contemporary New York City and the central characters' interracial relationship. Besides Taiwanese music, mainland Chinese music, North American rap music, Scottish bagpipes are featured. The celebration of intercultural knowledge is also reflected in Simon and Mr Gao's conviction that Wei Wei, (who has a comprehensive knowledge of classical Chinese calligraphy but paints in a modern Western style), will become a successful artist.

While racial difference is shown to be culturally enriching and socially acceptable, homosexuality – whether in Western or Chinese culture – is characterised as not socially acceptable to the Chinese. Although a declaration is made at the start of the wedding banquet that it is a cross-cultural event where "anything" is permissible, it becomes apparent that "anything" does not include expressions of homosexuality. Both Wei Tung and his white lover, Simon, are excluded from enjoying the celebrations. Their discomfort is indirectly emphasised by a close-up of an anonymous Chinese character somewhat cynically commenting about sexual repression amongst the Chinese to the white guests. Constrained by the unquestioned heterosexual focus of the Chinese celebrations, Wei Tung, as the only Chinese person not enjoying

the revelry, is rendered an outsider of the Chinese community because of his homosexuality.

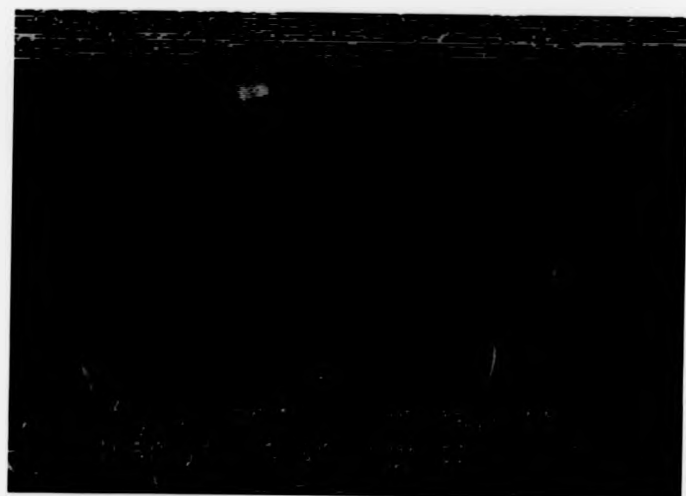
Homosexuality as "a white thing":

I have already reviewed literature which demonstrates that Western definitions of homosexuality exclude subjects that are non-white. Critics such as Parmar (1993) and Fung (1991) also argue that homosexuality is often perceived as a "white thing" within Asian communities. They often assume that Asians only become homosexuals through excessive "westernisation" or "contamination" by white people. Mrs Gao in The Wedding Banquet draws on such discourses when she suggests that her son is homosexual because Simon, a white man, has led him astray. In response, Wei Tung draws on the essentialist discourses of gay activists to argue that he was not "socially contaminated", but "born this way". Wei Tung's homosexual self-identification problematises the myth that homosexuality is an exclusively "white thing". The possibility that his homosexuality is a manifestation of his non-white sexual openness to all forms of sexual activity is refuted in a later scene. When Mrs Gao suggests Wei Tung's homosexuality could be a "passing phase", Wei Wei replies that Wei Tung is definitely a homosexual, not even a bisexual, let alone a heterosexual.

Nevertheless, despite the groundbreaking inclusion of an identifiably homosexual Asian character in the film, all the other homosexual characters in the film are white

and all the white characters in the film are either homosexual, pro-gay, or involved in some form of gay activist work. Besides Wei Tung, all other Asian characters appear to be heterosexuals. I suggest that this representation of Wei Tung's gay friends as white and his Asian friends as heterosexual colludes with the popular stereotype that to be gay is to become "more white", or at least assimilated into white culture. (2) I further propose that the representation of the Asian characters as heterosexuals relates to the role they have to play in preserving their family ties and the Chinese communities in the United States. From the opening scene of the film, heterosexual marriage is characterized as a duty that every Chinese character is required to undergo in order to ensure that the family line continues with the birth of a grandson. Even though The Wedding Banquet is a romantic comedy, romance is not central to the heterosexual relationships in the film.

Old Mr Chen's remark to Wei Tung in the Chinese restaurant explicitly reiterates this point. He tells Wei Tung that marriage is not a personal thing, but something for his family. Elaborating on the importance of not "losing face" in the United States with a small wedding, he oscillates between referring exclusively to Wei Tung's relationship with his father and using the term "we", including the entire extended Chinese community. By abruptly pointing at Simon whilst suggesting that the responsibility of filial Chinese extends beyond one's parents, the nuclear family, to include the extended "family", the entire Chinese community, old Chen indicates that Chinese people must present a united (heterosexual) front to face white Americans such as Simon. Given the importance of *reproductive* heterosexual relationships to Chinese family, it is not surprising that though Wei Tung resists getting married, he repeatedly tells his parents



he will "give them a grandson". As Mr and Mrs Gao periodically indicate, the desired child is a boy who will continue the family line. Even when the gender of Wei Wei's baby is logically impossible to predict, the Chinese characters all refer to it as a boy.

Unlike the influential Chinese family structure, the white American Western family unit is characterised as having collapsed. The scant contact Simon has with his family is typical of film representations of white homosexuals existing outside the traditional family unit. Mrs Gao relates Simon's dysfunctional family history to his homosexuality by asking if his sister is gay. Her dissatisfaction with Simon's reply indicates that she believes white people do not understand the importance the preservation of the family has to Wei Tung and other Asians. The representation of close Asian family ties and obligations is evident in films such as Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (UK 1987), The Lover (UK/France 1992), Indochine (France 1992) and Bhaji on the Beach (UK 1993).

The camera framing also favours Wei Tung's familial relations over his unsanctioned homosexual romance. Shots of the breakfast scene at Simon's house on the very first day of Wei Tung's parent's visit are an example. In this scene, the five central characters sitting at the breakfast table, Mr and Mrs Gao, Wei Tung, Wei Wei and Simon, are shot predominantly in medium shots and close-ups. Although the opening long shot reveals that the characters are sitting in equal distance to one another, the subsequent shot-reverse-shots do not reveal this. For instance, Wei Tung is consistently shot in a two or three person frame with either or both his mother or father, emphasising the centrality of the Chinese family ties. He is not shown occupying a single frame alone. Similarly, neither of his parents is framed singly. Even though Wei

Wei is not shown in the same shot as her husband-to-be, (contrary to conventional heterosexual mainstream romantic films), shots of Wei Wei contain half of Mrs Gao's back. These shots indicate that even though Wei Wei's relationship to Wei Tung is not real, her pending marriage will eventually see her included as a small but vital part of the family by carrying his child.

Finally, Simon is the only character in this scene shot sitting alone in a single frame (even though the brief opening long shot had revealed that he is actually sitting next to his lover, Wei Tung). The camera framing subtly reinforces the idea that Simon is an outsider to this family which has gathered to discuss Wei Tung's pending heterosexual marriage to Wei Wei. I suggest that despite the film's pro-gay stance, the framing sequences (where Simon is isolated from Wei Tung and the rest of the family) suggests that he does not threaten Wei Tung's heterosexual family obligations. As the audience soon discovers, despite an irreverant attitude towards heterosexual marriages, (he sees it as a chance to get a "big tax break"), Wei Tung even jeopardises his homosexual romance with Simon in his attempt to fulfil his parent's wishes.

Therefore, even though Straayer (1996: 181) accurately argues that the wedding photo at the end of the film depicting the gay men posing with the bride "mimics" and "queers" the heterosexual nuclear family, this "queered" familial image is not an entirely a subversive one. Instead, I suggest that this image of a happy family, even if a "queer" one, is the formulaic happy-ending required of all narrative comedies. Neale and Krutnik (1990: 27) have identified narrative comedies as films that consist of an exposition, a complication and finally, a resolution. Like *My Beautiful Laundrette* (UK

1985), The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Australia 1994), Go Fish (USA 1994), French Twist, Gazon maudit (France 1995) and Beautiful Thing (UK 1996), The Wedding Banquet is a homosexual comedy which contains the formulaic comic obstacles and happy ending. Given that films containing sympathetic homosexual central characters are seldom popular, the cross-over mainstream success of these films indicates that comedy, especially romantic comedy, is a genre which allows homosexuality to be humorously presented as unthreatening, even appealing.

Neale and Krutnik (1990: 149-50) also argue that the appeal of such films is related to the fact that the spectator is not threatened by comic deviations from the "norm" since such transgressions are allowed to develop "only so far". Therefore, comedy is neither inherently transgressive nor progressive. (1990: 93) The popularity of comic homosexual films (including interracial homosexual romantic comedies such as The Wedding Banquet) with white heterosexual audiences seems to affirm Neale and Krutnik's thesis that such "feel-good" films are not radically threatening either racially or sexually to mainstream audiences. Not personally implicated in the comic narratives, the spectator is able to enjoy the unfolding "fiction" assured that "all will be resolved in the end". (Neale and Krutnik 1990: 141)

However, Babington and Evans (1989) question the arguments posed by Neale, Krutnik and Seidman (1981). They argue that disruptions to the norm are often "not quite so easily confined by the closure of the narrative" (Babington and Evans: 148-149). Doty (1995: 336) concurs, suggesting that conventional endings often fail to override the moments of subversion or queerness introduced earlier in the films.

Although the comments of Doty, Babington and Evans' are applicable to some films, homosexuality, as depicted throughout The Wedding Banquet, is not subversive even though the film concludes with an image of a "queer family". The homosexual relationship never threatens the protagonist's familial heterosexual duties. To fulfil his family duty, Wei Tung abandons his homosexual lifestyle and male lover. They are only reunited when his father intervenes, asking Wei Tung's male lover to resume the relationship, but only if their homosexual relationship remains a secret and his son stays married to Wei Wei.

Other scenes further emphasise that homosexuality is secondary to reproductive heterosexuality. Shots of Wei Tung's coming out to his parents are constantly inter-cut with shots of revelations of Wei Wei's pregnancy. The coming-out to his father at the breakfast table and to his mother at the hospital occurs simultaneously with the revelation that Wei Wei is pregnant with Wei Tung's child. Similarly, the news that Wei Wei is keeping her baby is inter-cut with shots of his parents' acceptance of his homosexuality. Finally, Mr Gao's conditional acceptance of Wei Tung's homosexuality (as long as the baby is kept) indicates that the preservation of the family is necessary at all costs. Homosexuality is tolerated, but remains secondary to the task of maintaining heterosexual relations. This leads me to the significance of the racial identity of Wei Tung's heterosexual and homosexual partners.

"Like you, I am going out with a white man."

There is a crucial scene in The Wedding Banquet where little Mao confesses that she faces similar difficulties as Wei Tung because "like him, [she is] also going out with a *white* man" (my italics). Little Mao's statement suggests that interracial heterosexual relationships are as taboo as interracial homosexual relationships. Neither result in the production of an acceptable heir to continue the family line. Since the preservation of the family is depicted as the sole reason for heterosexual relations amongst the central Chinese characters, little Mao's interracial heterosexual union is prohibited because it will not produce a racially correct heir. Consequently, like Wei Tung whose homosexual relationship will also not produce the desired racially correct heir, little Mao is pressured by her family to marry a Chinese person.

Given the narrative representation of interracial heterosexuality as taboo, it is not surprising that Wei Tung chooses to marry a Chinese woman. If, like little Mao, Wei Tung became involved in an interracial heterosexual relationship, he would be no better off than he would in a gay relationship. The parallel portrayal of Wei Tung's interracial homosexual relationship alongside his same race heterosexual one suggests that the marginalization of homosexuals is based on the assumption that if homosexuals such as Wei Tung become heterosexual, they will get involved with same race partners and reproduce racially pure children.

In contrast, the racial identity of Wei Tung's boyfriend is not presented as an issue in The Wedding Banquet. In fact, the characterisation of Wei Tung's boyfriend as a white man conforms to similar interracial white/non-white representation in most films featuring non-white central characters. The consistent pairing of non-white protagonists

with white homosexual partners suggests that the non-white characters continue to exist within a predominantly white gay community and in a world where homosexuality is still perceived as "a white thing". Hence, even though interracial heterosexuality is depicted as taboo in The Wedding Banquet, arguably, Wei Tung's interracial homosexual relationship with a white man assists in the "authentication" of his homosexuality. As Wei Tung struggles with his familial obligations, Simon is depicted as his last and only connection to the homosexual world.

Unlike Wei Tung, Simon is out to his whole family and all his friends. Tired of having to hide behind the heterosexual façade, he meets up with other white homosexual men, mans the ACT UP gay AIDS awareness stand, and goes to the gay clubs, "...went out to the clubs... living what our life used to be." What interests me about the scene in which Simon asserts his right to live a homosexual lifestyle is that he simultaneously reminds Wei Tung not to forget his homosexual identity. Given Simon's openness about being gay, it is not surprising that he is visually coded as more obviously homosexual than Wei Tung. Like his similarly dressed white gay friends, Simon wears an earring, fitted Keith Haring T-shirts (a favourite with many gay men) and a leather jacket (another gay classic). By contrast, like his other male (presumably heterosexual) Chinese friends, Wei Tung is frequently dressed in suits. Rather than signifying his homosexuality in any overt way, this indicates that he is a yuppie.

In conclusion, the representation of the Asian homosexual central character problematizing several stereotypes of Asian sexuality, the contrasting depiction of all other homosexual characters as white, and Asian characters as heterosexual, suggests

that homosexuality is still considered "a white thing". The inclusion of a Chinese character who hides her interracial heterosexual relationship alongside the representation of Wei Tung's interracial homosexual relationship and his same-race heterosexual liaison suggests that the prohibition against miscegenation possibly apply specifically to heterosexual relationships. This leads me a discussion of She Must Be Seeing Things, one of the few films from which critical discussions has emerged concerning its representation of interracial homosexuality.

She Must Be Seeing Things:

Although both The Wedding Banquet and She Must Be Seeing Things (USA 1987) are set in New York, they depict very different parts of the city. Whilst the characters in The Wedding Banquet interact predominantly within the Asian community, the characters of She Must Be Seeing Things live largely within white American society. There are many other differences between the two films – such as budget sizes, the subject matter, the genre and the targeted audience. I shall not elaborate on the many pronounced differences between the two films. Instead, I am interested in looking beyond the obvious, at the way in which two apparently different films draw on similar discourses of race and sexuality. I shall start with a brief synopsis of She Must Be Seeing Things.

Directed by Sheila McLaughlin, She Must Be Seeing Things is a low budget independent film about the lesbian relationship between a black lawyer, Agatha (Sheila Dabney) and a white independent filmmaker, Jo (Lois Weaver). The film begins with Agatha reading Jo's diary which contains intimate details of her past sexual encounters with white men. These shots are inter-cut with shots of Jo flirting with a white man she meets at a cinema, further establishing Jo's heterosexual attraction to men. However, subsequent scenes reveal that she is actually sexually involved with Agatha. Not long after, Jo begins working on her film which is about a catholic nun, Catalina, who eventually becomes a lesbian. Because Jo is too busy filming to see her, Agatha starts imagining that Jo is having an affair, becoming increasingly jealous of the male colleagues on Jo's film sets. Comparisons are made between Catalina and Agatha,

when scenes of Agatha cross-dressed, stalking and fantasising about Jo, are intercut with scenes from Jo's film. After watching the final cut of a scene from "Catalina" with Jo, Agatha realises that her jealousy and fears were unfounded. She Must Be Seeing Things ends with a shot of the couple literally walking off into the sunset together.

Although She Must Be Seeing Things is fairly conventional in its narrative sequence and use of continuity editing and atmospheric music, it has been compared to realist European art cinema because it contains shots from Jo's film-within-a-film, and scenes of Agatha's fantasy sequences. Since the film was first released, such techniques have been used frequently in American films, including mainstream Hollywood ones. The "controversial" content of She Must Be Seeing Things also dates to the late 1980s. Even though She Must Be Seeing Things antagonised large sections of the lesbian-feminist community (who objected to its portrayal of bondage, voyeurism, cross-dressing, heterosexual desire and lesbian butch-femme role-playing when it was released), its subject matter is now frequently addressed in lesbian films without much controversy. Nevertheless, perhaps because of the initial outrage it caused amongst lesbian-feminist audiences, it has been widely critically discussed. Critics include de Lauretis (1991), Weiss (1992), Kuhn (1994), Quimby (1995), Wilton (1995), Schiller (1995), Ardill and O'Sullivan (1995), and Tyler (1997). Considering that it was only screened briefly within the lesbian and art-house circuit, this critical reception is remarkable.

Most discussions of the film focus on the role that fantasy, voyeurism and "the gaze" play in Agatha and Jo's relationship. Weiss (1992), Ardill and O'Sullivan (1991) argue

that psychoanalytic analyses focusing predominantly on these issues do not look at how taking Agatha and Jo's racial difference into account may alter readings of the film. Tyler's article "Queer Theory? Re-Visions of Feminist Film Theory" presented at the 1996 Annual Screen Studies Conference demonstrate that the racial difference of Agatha and Jo can be analyzed within such a framework. Nevertheless, even though She Must Be Seeing Things is one of the few films featuring a non-white homosexual character, analysis of the film's representation of racial difference remains scarce.

I am aware of arguments that such discussions are unimportant since Agatha's racial identity is not presented as a crucial factor in her relationship with Jo. However, such arguments are complicated by the portrayal of the non-white characters, all minor characters, as existing only in relation to Agatha. They include her black female colleague, her black friend Julia, the entertainers in the club Agatha goes to and several black people in the streets Agatha walks past. Agatha's non-white racial difference and identification with other racial minorities is also highlighted by her job involving support for the Guatemalan Indians in their fight for civil rights. Even though Agatha encounters white, black and Hispanic people in her daily social and working life, her lover Jo, like the other white characters, exists in a white world. Except for Agatha, she does not interact with any non-white people.

Given the centrality of race in the construction of the protagonists' lives, articles about this film which do not discuss the significance of Agatha's racial difference are not useful. I will be engaging predominantly with writings which are critically important to the object of this thesis. I am also interested in those works which examine the impact

of heterosexuality on Agatha and Jo's lesbian relationship, largely because it is this representation that enraged early audiences, leading in turn, to the proliferation of critical writing about this otherwise obscure film.

Lesbianism within a heterosexual world:

Unlike some later lesbian films such as Go Fish (USA 1994), Thin Ice (UK 1994) and Love and Other Catastrophes (Australia 1996) which portray homosexual desire as distinctly different from heterosexuality, She Must Be Seeing Things belongs to a category of film (3) where heterosexuality is depicted playing a crucial role in lesbian relationships. The importance of heterosexuality in shaping Agatha and Jo's relationship is revealed in the opening sequence. The note Jo leaves Agatha in this scene is unromantic. Instead of revealing that Agatha is Jo's lover, Jo's heterosexuality is emphasised. Agatha is depicted discovering and reading a diary dating from Jo's high school days. The long list of names Agatha reads aloud and accompanying close-up polaroids of erect white penises indicate that Jo's early sexual experiences, all heterosexual, were extensive. Inserted shots of Jo trying to control her sexual desire for a white heterosexual man, Richard, also reveal she still desires men.

Although subsequent scenes reveal that Jo is involved in a monogamous lesbian relationship with Agatha, by presenting images of heterosexuality first, lesbianism is depicted as existing only in relation to the heterosexual world. Even when Jo is later

shown lying in bed with her lesbian lover, she continues to fantasise about Richard, the man she almost had sex with. The close relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality is maintained throughout the film, via the insertion of heterosexual scenes imagined by Agatha between Jo (or her lookalike) and various white men, alongside the scenes of lesbian intimacy.

Jo's film-within-a-film about Catalina, a repressed but rebellious Catholic woman who discovers her lesbian desires after voyeuristically discovering heterosexual sex, also explores the influence of heterosexuality on lesbian desire. De Lauretis (1991) argues that Jo's fictional character, Catalina, is actually the representation of Jo's desire for Agatha. She points out that aside from their religious and sexual similarities, all the scenes of Catalina are crosscut with shots of Agatha, setting up a comparison between the two women. De Lauretis elaborates that this comparison is not only made by Jo, who directs "Catalina", but is also made by Sheila McLaughlin, the director of She Must Be Seeing Things who makes a cameo appearance in the film as Jo's lookalike.

Nevertheless, there is a crucial difference between Agatha and Catalina's respective relationship to heterosexuality and homosexuality. The "Voyeur Scene" in which Catalina acknowledges her sexual desire for a woman whilst watching a heterosexual couple have sex reveals that Catalina discovers her lesbian sexuality only after her discovery and rejection of heterosexual desire. In contrast, Agatha begins the film as a confirmed lesbian. Her preconceived ideas about the difference between heterosexual and homosexual desire are challenged only after she reads Jo's diary and comes slowly to terms with the existence of heterosexual desire in both her fantasy and real world.

Despite their differing sexual histories, both characters come to terms with their lesbianism through discovering their relationship to heterosexuality. Just as Agatha works out Jo's relationship to heterosexuality through her fantasy images, Jo negotiates Agatha's relation to heterosexuality through the experiences of Catalina. Straayer (1996: 34) argues that cinematic narratives concerning "coming-out" can be problematic because they risk perpetuating the assumption that heterosexuality is a norm from which a homosexual must "come out". She cites Butler in explaining the way in which "coming out" tends to reproduce "the closet" and its investment in the construction of a hetero/homo dichotomy.

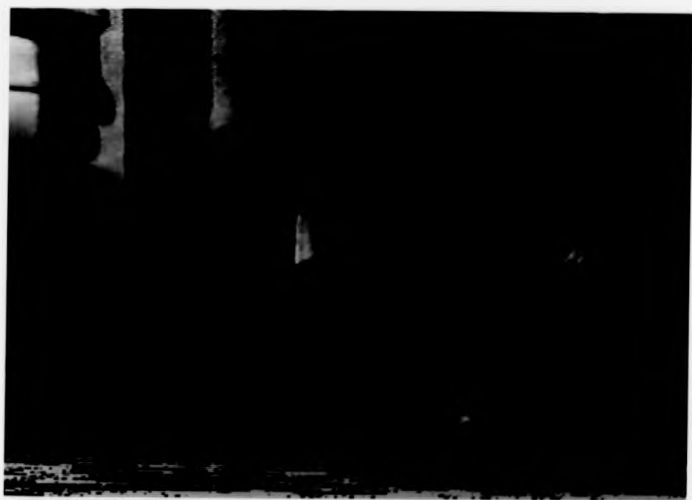
Any use of coming out to form identity therefore depends upon the sexual dichotomy of hetero/homo by which heterosexuality and homosexuality constructs itself in opposition to the other. Butler argues that an excess within the heterosexual economy implicitly includes homosexuality; heterosexuality in fact needs the oppositional category of homosexual in order to construct and uphold itself. One might similarly argue that the coming-out genre demonstrates homosexuality's equal dependence for its existence on heterosexuality. Lesbian identity, whether sexual or political, needs to refer to heterosexuality. In this scheme, recounting one's prior heterosexuality acts to confirm one's present homosexuality, rather than to challenge it.

(Straayer 1996: 34)

Despite not being a typical "coming out" film (because Agatha and Jo's first

homosexual romances are not featured), She Must Be Seeing Things revolves around the way that the protagonists' continue to emotionally "come out". Instead of calling their lesbian identities to question, their heterosexual pasts serve to mark their "coming out" process. The contrast between Jo's diary accounts of her heterosexual past and her present commitment to Agatha highlights the extent she has "come out". Similarly, Agatha's fearful fantasies of Jo having sex with men also functions to affirm Jo's present lesbian identity when they are not replicated in reality. Jo's celluloid depiction of Catalina's "coming out" experience can also be read as a symbolic affirmation of her own (Jo) and her lover's (Agatha) present homosexuality. The "Voyeur scene" of Catalina which, pivotally, draws Jo and Agatha together at the end of the film, encapsulates the way in which the two women come to terms with the impact heterosexuality has on their lives.

Two scenes centring around the "voyeur scene" see Jo and Agatha interacting indirectly with each other via Catalina's heterosexual encounter. The first occurs on the set of "Catalina". Agatha watches Jo, who is in turn watching the actress playing Catalina watch a heterosexual couple having sex. Even though Jo (the director) is not looking back at Agatha, she is doing so implicitly as the character she watches, Catalina, is based on Agatha. The second instance in which Jo and Agatha are seen both directly and indirectly observing each other, occurs when Jo is editing the voyeur scene. Here, Jo and Agatha stand side by side watching the celluloid image of Catalina watching the heterosexual couple have sex. Agatha and Jo then watch Catalina see the man having sex get murdered before running away with the woman she desires. Jo and Agatha then leave the film studio and run happily into the night together. The two



instances where Jo and Agatha watch each other watching a heterosexual couple having sex suggests that their lesbian relationship exists alongside, and only in relation to, heterosexuality. Like Catalina, it is only after they acknowledge the influence of the heterosexual norm that they become reconciled.

The butch-femme representation of Jo and Agatha's relationship:

It is not just representation of the influence of heterosexuality on lesbianism in She Must Be Seeing Things which has attracted protest. The butch-femme relationship of Jo and Agatha has also been criticised by sections of the lesbian community. As Munt (1998:16) observes, such critics have often identified "butch/femme as an essential anathema, a heterosexual mimeticism, an outsider discourse antithetical to feminism."

Like Nestle (1987, 1992), Rubin (1992), Butler (1990, 1993) and Quimby (1995), Munt argues that instead of merely seeking to replicate heterosexual gender roles, lesbian butch-femme role-playing is often a consciously constructed parody of heterosexual gender roles. The butch lesbian and her femme partner complicates the "naturalness" of heterosexual gender-dependent sexual desire by exposing the lesbian butch-femme relationship as simply a playful copy of a copy (4). Weiss (1992) suggests that outrage over Agatha and Jo's butch/femme relationship in She Must Be Seeing Things does not appear directed at *lesbian* butch-femme per se. She suggests because of Jo's problematic relationship to heterosexuality, her relationship with Agatha cannot be read simply as a *lesbian* butch-femme relationship.

'Butch-femme' has a rich erotic heritage among lesbians, and *She Must Be Seeing Things* displaces the identity of the 'femme' onto a heterosexual woman, giving it a completely different meaning and erasing altogether the already less visible part of the equation.

(Weiss 1992: 153)

Weiss argues that the difference between the lesbian "femme" and the feminine looking heterosexual woman must be distinguished. Nestle (1989: 232) further suggests that even though the lesbian femme might sometimes superficially *look* like a heterosexual woman, her desire for a butch lesbian is not a displaced desire for a man. Since Weiss and Nestle define lesbian butches and femmes as women who are predominantly (if not exclusively) homosexual, it is debatable whether Agatha and Jo's relationship in *She Must Be Seeing Things* can be read as a *lesbian* butch-femme relationship. Although the butch acting cross-dressing Agatha fantasises that she really is a man, her feminine partner Jo is depicted as a predominantly heterosexual woman. Agatha and Jo's heterosexual fantasies further imply that their lesbian relationship seeks merely to mimic heterosexual sex and recreate heterosexual gender differences.

De Lauretis (1991), Ardill and O'Sullivan (1995) offer another perspective, suggesting that it was these extensive scenes of heterosexual fantasies which upset earlier lesbian audiences, and not the issue of whether Agatha and Jo's relationship is truly *lesbian* butch-femme. By contrast, audiences viewing this film in the late 1990s are more likely to be bored than outraged. The difference in reactions can be attributed to the developments in lesbian, gay and queer discourses of heterosexuality and butch-

femme. Unlike earlier accounts of lesbian butch-femme, De Lauretis (1991), Della Grace (1993) and Judith Halberstam (1997) argue that lesbian butch-femme play with gender roles is not merely based on female models, but is drawn also from heterosexual and homosexual male ones. The portrayal of Agatha and Jo's butch-femme relationship can thus be read *in relation* to, and not *in exclusion to or opposition with* heterosexuality and masculinity.

The seduction scene in Jo's bedroom is an example of the way in which the butch-femme relationship is presented as an artificial construction of heterosexual gender roles. The scene begins when Agatha turns up at Jo's apartment to discover she is drunk and the apartment is in a complete mess. They have a fight about their different standards of tidiness, money management and their religious upbringings. Instead of resolving these differences, they are sidelined when Jo tries on the lingerie Agatha gives her. She puts on a striptease show to seduce Agatha, who watches from a chair. Immediately after the show, Jo says to Agatha, amused: "You are a big cliché". Agatha responds in kind, "And you love it!" This conversation reveals that ^{their} awareness that ~~they~~ ^{are}

enacting a butch-femme parody a typical male-female strip-tease show. Whilst Agatha (playing the role of the butch) challenges preconceived ideas of how a woman should behave, Jo subverts the assumption that feminine women direct their sexual attention solely towards men.

Ironically, it is Jo, the more heterosexual woman, who is depicted as more conscious of what Butler (1990) calls gender "performativity". Jo's exploration of gender roles is evident in her film about Catalina, which depicts the way in which a woman rebels

against her gendered position as a passive heterosexual female. By contrast, Agatha takes her "butch" role more seriously. After being accused of being a "big cliché" by Jo, Agatha elaborates, "...sometimes maybe, I'd like to be a man." Whilst Jo is eager to transgress defined sexual and gender roles, Agatha's identification as a "butch" woman appears to be fixed, and not "performative". A long scene depicting a cross-dressed Agatha spying on Jo and visiting a sex shop with the intention of purchasing a strap-on dildo accentuates Agatha's identification with heterosexual masculinity. Agatha refuses to allow Jo to see her genitals, as if the act will destroy the myth that she is not really a man. In fact, Agatha, who fits neatly into the "stone-butch" stereotype identified by Nestle (1992), only allows Jo to touch her after Jo pretends to masturbate her phantom penis.

Agatha tells Jo: "I prefer identifying with him [Agatha's father] to falling in love with him. You know I am a misogynist, the church taught me to hate women." Jo replies, "That's right, I know you love us." These two brief lines of dialogue suggest that Jo and Agatha's butch-femme relationship is modelled after heterosexual male-female relationships. By comparing herself to Jo's previous male sexual partners, Agatha reveals that she sees herself as one of them. Jo, who had many heterosexual relationships, does not take Agatha's male masquerade seriously. A possible explanation for the difference between Agatha's serious identification as a "butch" and Jo's playfulness as a "femme" lies within feminist explanations of a woman's relationship to femininity and masculinity. Irigaray (1985) argues that the feminine role played by a woman is essentially a constructed one and not one that comes naturally.

What do I mean by masquerade? In particular, what Freud calls "femininity". The belief, for example, that it is necessary to *become* a woman, a "normal" one at that... that is, has to enter into the *masquerade of femininity*.

(Irigaray 1985:134)

According to Irigaray's argument, if Jo manages to pass successfully as a heterosexual woman, she has *already* learnt to mimic a feminine woman. Hence, she is more likely to be aware that like other women, her femininity is not "natural" but is instead artificial, a learnt role. Consequently, already aware of the artificiality of heterosexual feminine-masculine, male-female gender roles, Jo should be acutely aware of the paradoxical playfulness of a lesbian butch-femme relationship that is modelled on an equally constructed heterosexual feminine-masculine model. Because Agatha chose to identify with her father, she, arguably, does not learn how to play at being feminine, and therefore, does not learn about the artificiality of gender roles. Instead, by not allowing Jo to see her genitals, Agatha denies her castration to remain a male-identified butch.

Racial Casting:

The representation of Agatha and Jo's butch-femme relationship is further complicated by their racial difference. In response to criticisms that she did not discuss their racial identity, de Lauretis (1991: 268) suggests that the film does not "lend itself to an

understanding or examination of racial difference in a lesbian relationship". After all, unlike The Wedding Banquet, homosexuals and heterosexuals are not depicted in She Must Be Seeing Things as belonging to any particular racial group. As well as Jo and Agatha, there are two other obviously homosexual characters of different races - Eric (a white gay man) and Julia (a black lesbian). Nevertheless, Julien (1991: 271) argues that though Agatha and Jo's racial difference is not presented as problematic, their racial difference should be examined since Agatha is racially depicted as a "mythologized, fetishized black subject within the narrative". Fung (1991: 270) elaborates that "by casting the role of Agatha as a person of colour, a whole cultural baggage is invoked". Tyler further suggests that the representation of race in She Must Be Seeing Things is complicated by Agatha's role as the butch partner of a white femme woman. She argues that their butch-femme relationship reflects popular stereotypes of black women, especially male-identified black lesbians, as being "hyper" masculine and stereotypes of white women, especially heterosexually identified ones, as the epitome of desirable femininity.

The wish for a penis for Jo might be indicated by Agatha's "butch" identity, which is often read as a lesbian "masculinity complex" by psychoanalysts and others, and which in this case also might be supported by fantasies of black hypervirility and a U.S. history of "true womanhood" as white femininity, which makes it difficult for black women to be perceived as feminine and heterosexually desirable.

(Tyler 1997: 38)

I concur that Agatha's racial identity cannot be examined independently of her femme lover, Jo. After all, Jo is not only white, she is also portrayed with the characteristics of the ideal feminine woman of mainstream Hollywood cinema. Besides being blonde, blue-eyed and sexually available to men, her feminine sexual appeal is highlighted by the tight skirts and high heels she frequently wears. By contrast, even though she too is well groomed, Agatha's body is more often hidden in masculine clothing - long sleeve shirts, long trousers and a man's jacket. Her masculine desire for Jo is clearly spelt out in the "stalking scene" where she cross dresses as a man to spy on Jo, whom she wrongly suspects is having an affair. This stalking scene draws upon racial stereotypes about (irrational) sexually driven black men who trail the unsuspecting desirable white female heroine. This scene also demonstrates the way in which Agatha's masculine-identification is compared to black men, who are typically portrayed as possessing the same qualities - darkness, sexual jealousy and a desire for white, blonde, women.

The belief that Black men are better in bed is mirrored in the lesbian community. Hence, many Black lesbians have been picked up by white women purely for sex.... Taking a white woman as a long-term partner may be the nearest they will get to being accepted as an honorary white. Some Black lesbians, gay and heterosexual men have fallen into the trap of thinking that only white women are beautiful.

(Mason-John & Okorowa 1995: 80)

The white lesbian and gay community have also created myths. They assume that lesbians of African descent are butch (adopting

stereotypical masculine attributes), because society has deemed us aggressive, dominating and physical.

(Mason-John & Okorowa 1995: 88)

Mason-John and Okorowa's remarks about African lesbians also accurately identify the way darker skinned Hispanic lesbians such as Agatha are depicted. (Agatha's specific ethnicity is not mentioned, she is only identified as a Brazilian). She Must Be Seeing Things is certainly not the only lesbian film to draw upon these racial stereotypes of butch and femme. Suburban Dykes (USA 1988), released by the San Francisco pro-sex lesbian group, "On Our Backs", is one of the few contemporary lesbian porn films. It contains one of the scarce pre-1990s representations of non-white lesbians. As with She Must Be Seeing Things, the Latina lesbian in Suburban Dykes is also "stone-but". Again mirroring stereotypes of black butch-white femme couples, her femme partner is a white, feminine, blonde. Although there is another white butch in the film, she is less butch than the Latina butch. Unlike the Latina stone-but who remains unpenetrated, the white butch ends up being fucked by the Latina butch with a strap-on.

A different, though equally controversial, racial stereotype is also drawn upon in Julien's short film, The Attendant (UK 1993). This film features a black security guard getting turned on by images of black slaves in bondage. Even though such images of interracial top-bottom relationships risk reinscribing the history of racial oppression and perpetuating racist stereotypes, Julien (1993) argues that they should continue to be shown because "politically incorrect" fantasies of interracial relationships should not

be disavowed. Chowdhury (1995: 143) also suggests that "positive images" (constructed in opposition to stereotypes) are often "as deadening a stereotype as any other". Moreover, (as I shall elaborate in the following chapters), the reverse relationship of "positive" images to negative stereotypes suggests that they are still dependent on, and subject to, the limits of representation laid out by the stereotypes. Dyer (1993) further argues that stereotypes themselves are not necessarily negative. He suggests that it is more important to examine how, and to what effect, such images are used.

The position behind all these considerations is that it is not stereotypes, as an aspect of human thought and representation, that are wrong, but who controls and defines them, what interests they serve.

(Dyer 1993: 11-12)

Consequently, She Must Be Seeing Things should not be dismissed as a "racially incorrect film" solely because Agatha and Jo's relationship is stereotypically butch-black/white-femme. It is crucial to also examine the way their individual economic backgrounds and personal relationships are depicted.

Class:

The representation of Agatha and Jo's differing economic backgrounds and contrasting personal habits subverts the racial stereotype of black people as poorer and less

financially organised than their white partners. Agatha is presented as different from Jo not only in her appearance, but also in her sexual attitudes and personal habits. Their first argument about Agatha being tired of tidying up after Jo emphasises Agatha's neatness and Jo's messiness. A later argument about Jo's poor handling of money highlights their contrasting economic backgrounds. Contrary to racist stereotypes of poor blacks, Agatha comes from a better economic and more socially respectable background than Jo. She is a white-collar worker, an executive, possibly a lawyer. The audience is told that Agatha's father is an influential Brazilian lawyer. By contrast, Jo, whose grandmother does not have expensive jewellery, has a working class background. Though filmmaker Jo is an artist/intellectual, she is also a blue-collar worker. She works as a security guard and is often chastised by Agatha for her money mismanagement.

Agatha and Jo's sexualities are also consistent with the different social classes that they come from. Contrary to racist stereotypes of black women (as sexually indiscriminate), Agatha is less sexually promiscuous than Jo. Agatha's middle-class values are reflected in her sexually moral attitude. Jo, on the other hand, to Agatha's despair, is more casual in her sexual liaisons. Whilst Jo is occasionally represented in negative sexual terms, (Agatha calls Jo a slut for being sexually promiscuous), Agatha is not.

Interracial relationship:

Jo and Agatha's differences in economic background, behaviour and sexual habits are

depicted as the reason behind their arguments and subsequent estrangement. Their racial difference is not presented as an area of conflict within their relationship. Even though the depiction of Agatha and Jo's black butch-white femme relationship reflect the racist stereotype that black butches often desire romantic involvement with white femmes, since the racial identities of Agatha's other sexual partners are unknown, it cannot be established that Agatha is attracted only to white women. Jo's sexual history with white men also suggests that her attraction for Agatha is not part of a racial fetish for a black lover. Jo's knowledge of her lover, and vice versa, is not situated within an ethnic or racial context. Their racial difference is not discussed by them, or by any other characters.

Instead, despite their different racial identity and family backgrounds, the cultural and religious similarities between Agatha and Jo are frequently emphasised. Even though Jo is not herself a Roman Catholic, she is obsessed by Agatha's Catholic upbringing. Besides being a popular Latin American religion, Catholicism is also a white North American religion with which Jo can easily identify. Her interest in exploring the impact that Catholicism has on restraining female sexuality drives the narrative of her film about Catalina. Tyler (1997) argues that Catholicism is used to create a mythical, shared, white history in the film. Even though the character Catalina is based on Agatha, Jo has cast a white woman to play the role of Catalina, thereby ignoring Agatha's racial difference.

Through the lens of Jo's film (her gaze), Agatha must see herself in white people of early modern Spain, displacing her postcolonial present

by the coloniser's past (Brazil is metonymically linked with Portugal, and through it to Spain, which also has colonial ties to other South American countries bordering on Brazil.... Jo interpellates Agatha as white, a whiteness unmarked by the history of imperialist and racist oppression, which is displaced on to the Church's oppression of women and lesbians.

(Tyler 1997: 41)

Through emphasising the commonality of their cultural religious experiences, ethnic and historical differences are disavowed. I further suggest that the consistent characterisation of Jo's male lovers as white indicates that race is more important than the apparently "colour blind" representation of Jo and Agatha's relationship suggests. The significance of Jo's racially consistent choice of heterosexual partners is also stressed in the sex shop scene where Agatha enters cross-dressed as a man. After asking for a "realistic looking dildo", Agatha chooses to examine a white dildo. This incident demonstrates Agatha is aware of Jo's preference for white dicks, and therefore, white men. This in turn, also indicates that Agatha is aware of her own racial difference. Although she attempts to pass for a man by cross-dressing, she cannot attempt to pass for a white man. Even when she is shown a black dildo (more similar to her own skin colour), she ignores it, knowing Jo's preference for white ones, or same-race heterosexuality.

I thus suggest that despite the lack of discussion, Agatha's non-white racial identity cannot be irrelevant when the racial identities of Jo's heterosexual partners are

repeatedly underscored by visual images of white penises and dildos. The seemingly random street scene where a Hispanic man sexually harasses Agatha further emphasize the consistency of same-race heterosexual pairings in the film. Given that this Hispanic character does not develop or add to other aspects of the narrative, this scene seems solely inserted to demonstrate that, like Jo, Agatha is picked up by men of her own race alone. The contrasting representation of same-race heterosexuality and interracial homosexual leads me to the conclusion that Agatha only becomes Jo's sexual partner because their relationship is homosexual, and hence not reproductive. The importance of reproduction in heterosexual relations is established by Jo's diary accounts of her heterosexual liaisons complete with her fear of aborted pregnancies and unborn babies.

In the beginning of this chapter, I cited Young (1995:25-26) in arguing that interracial homosexual and interracial heterosexual relationships are in different ways, both taboo. The social marginalization of homosexuals is exemplified by the beach scene in which heterosexual families stare horrified at the lesbian couple's affection. However, the lack of discussion concerning the interracial nature of Jo and Agatha's relationship implies that their racial difference does not exaggerate the taboo nature of their homosexual relationship. By contrast, because same-race heterosexual relationships are depicted as the norm, interracial heterosexual sex would render them taboo as well.

Salmonberries:

Salmonberries, directed in 1991 by Percy Adlon, was popular in lesbian circles as a k.d. lang vehicle. The director is well known within art house circles and the film was successful enough to receive a video release. Filmed mainly in Alaska, North America, a portion was filmed in Berlin. It's filmic style is typical of new German cinema (5), slow paced with few "action" scenes, with many long shots of dark scenery with low or natural lighting. The romantic song "Barefoot" (sung by k.d. lang) is played repeatedly, often followed by long silences and monologues. Continuity is supplied by a linear time frame. Its conventional structure ensures that the story remains accessible.

The narrative revolves predominantly around an orphaned Eskimo, Kotzebue (k.d. lang) (6), an androgynous looking woman who passes for a boy by hiding her gender beneath layers of baggy clothing. While searching for her birth parents, she reveals her true gender to the local librarian of the town of Kotzebue, Roswitha (Rosel Zech), for whom she develops an attraction. Roswitha resists her affections but Kotzebue persists until they become friends. A friendship develops as they share stories about their life, especially during their visit to Berlin after the fall of the Berlin wall.

During this trip, Roswitha visits her ex-husband's grave, meets her brother for the first time in decades, and finally accepts the death of her husband years ago. They celebrate Roswitha's emotional recovery by going to a Berlin bar, where Kotzebue makes her first and last declaration of being an Eskimo. When they return to their hotel room, Kotzebue announces her love and desire for Roswitha. They kiss briefly before

Roswitha rejects her sexual advances - suggesting they remain platonic friends. Kotzebue refuses to accept her terms of friendship and they fly sullenly back to Alaska. Upon their arrival, Roswitha takes Kotzebue to meet Noayak and Chuck in the bid to learn more about her parentage. Kotzebue's Eskimo heritage is complicated by her discovery that Bingo Chuck is her father. The film finally ends with a scene in which Kotzebue appears to knock at Roswitha's front door, hinting that even though their romantic relationship remains unresolved, she wishes to remain close to Roswitha.

k.d.lang as Kotzebue:

Although the most physically intimate scene between Kotzebue and Roswitha is only a brief kiss, lack of sexual consummation has not deterred lesbian viewers from viewing their unresolved relationship in lesbian terms. This can largely be attributed to the common knowledge that Kotzebue is played by lesbian icon, k.d. lang, a pop star. Using lesbian subcultural codes, Kotzebue's disguise as a man who works in a male-only mine, can be interpreted as k.d. lang playing the part of the "butch dyke". Kotzebue is also shown dragging Roswitha's sledge through the snow and catching fish to impress her - acts which position her as the butch, masculine-identified half of a butch-femme couple (7). Even though Kotzebue's attempts to woo Roswitha are clumsy and not romantically successful, she is generally viewed sympathetically by lesbian audiences who do not believe that Kotzebue, "who is really k.d. lang", (now re-marketed as a sexually desirable "1990s designer dyke"), would finally be rejected.

The romantically unresolved ending not only leaves open the possibility that Kotzebue and Roswitha's mutual affection might eventually lead to a lesbian relationship, it also develops k.d. lang's appeal as an unattached androgyne who remains single, potentially available for the affections of her fans. Although since this film's release, k.d. lang has been generally identified as openly gay, much of her earlier appeal was shaped by her marketing and personal image as a solitary, androgynous singer who crossed the boundaries of gender and genre (pop and country music). The racially ambiguous representation of k.d. lang as a mixed race (♂) orphan in *Salmonberries* is consistent with her image as a cross-over musician who is also gender transgressive. Despite being thought of mainly as a white North American singer, k.d. lang's part native American/Canadian ancestry started being mentioned in publicity material around the release of this film. Presumably, this would arouse her audience's empathy and add some authenticity to her portrayal of Kotzebue.

The cover of her subsequent album, "All You Can Eat", (which contains several Chinese characters and a picture of k.d. lang holding a pair of chopsticks in front of her face), also plays on her racial ambiguity. Although the chopsticks that frame her eyes emphasise their slightly oriental shape, her pale face reassuringly confirms her "whiteness". Depicted as both the white consumer of the popular "Chinese takeaway" (as suggested by the title "All You Can Eat") and the exotic object itself (as suggested by open chopsticks ready to pick up her "edible" eyes), k.d. lang becomes both the exotic foreign object (which her largely white audience is invited to consume) and the white subject (with whom the same audience is invited to identify). Therefore, even when presented as the exotic "foreign" object, k.d. lang's racial identity is never far

from "whiteness". Just as her oriental looking eyes are framed in a white face on the cover of her album, so too, when her film character, Kotzebue, starts looking for her Eskimo heritage, she eventually finds her white ancestry, her white father. The search for her parentage is then abandoned. Kotzebue does not attempt to locate her Eskimo mother. Instead, the film ends with Kotzebue knocking on the door of Roswitha, whom I shall argue, performs the role of a surrogate white mother.

From the beginning of the film, the contrasting characters of Kotzebue and Roswitha are developed alongside one another. In the few scenes where they do not appear together, shots of Kotzebue are intercut with shots of Roswitha to highlight their racial, gender, educational, cultural and age difference. In the opening scene where the characters are introduced simultaneously, Kotzebue is depicted as an illiterate, violent, brash young "man" whilst Roswitha is educated and sternly controlled; an ageing beautiful woman. Kotzebue is shown trying unsuccessfully to gather information about her family ancestry by angrily turning the pages of a book she cannot read. When confronted by Roswitha, Kotzebue responds by throwing the book across the room. Intercut alongside slow motion shots of the book flying across the room are lingering close-ups of Kotzebue's sneering angry face. Frightened by Kotzebue, Roswitha responds by calling the police. She (rationally) cancels the call for help when Kotzebue rushes out of the library.

The soundtrack also highlights the characters' differences. Whilst the library returns to a calm stillness after Kotzebue leaves, Kotzebue runs to a noisy chaotic outdoors scene. k.d. lang's poignant, emotional theme song of unrequited love (of one woman for

another), "Barefoot", is played strategically throughout the film - as in this scene - to verbalise the romantic feelings which her character Kotzebue is unable to express to Roswitha. Intercut with the shots of Kotzebue running frantically towards a noisy departing plane are shots of a tied-up wolf howling frantically, directing the audience to a comparison between Kotzebue and the angry trapped beast. The soundtrack in this sequence furthers this analogy. The sound of the howling wolf is heard over "Barefoot" which accompanies these images. As howling wolves are often used to signify loneliness, Kotzebue's lonely and confused state of mind is emphasised. While Roswitha exists in calm, serene and friendly working and living environments, Kotzebue lives and works in a noisy mine with brash, working-class men. Despite the proximity of their bunks, Kotzebue's lack of communication with the other miners reveals her loneliness. Roswitha is the only person she reaches out to, initially for information about her German parents.

The barking of the wolves is used again to express Kotzebue's confusion and loneliness the second time when Kotzebue appears in the library looking for Roswitha. In this scene, Roswitha calls Kotzebue a "boy" twice whilst reprimanding her for throwing books - revealing her obvious misconception. Instead of verbally correcting Roswitha, Kotzebue remains silent. Only the amplified sound of barking wolves is heard. This long shot ends only when the wolves stop barking. As if having made a decision, Kotzebue walks away and returns to stand naked in front of a surprised Roswitha. In a later scene, Kotzebue is shown on a rooftop howling in symphony with the wolves, again revealing her inability to communicate through human speech.

The comparison between Kotzebue and the wolf is continued through the first half of the film. In the scenic sledge scene where the snowmobile breaks down, Kotzebue resorts to pulling Roswitha back to town on her sledge. The shots of youths who tease Kotzebue by shouting: "Mush, Mush, Mush!" suggest that she appears like a wolf dog. The representation of an illiterate Kotzebue expressing herself like an animal draws on the popular cinematic stereotype that Eskimos are "closer to nature". Like other native American characters in television programs and films such as Pocahontas, Star Trek Voyager and Northern Exposure, Kotzebue is depicted as more expressive, passionate and in touch with her emotions than the white characters. This racial stereotype is not necessarily a negative one. It is, after all, Kotzebue's "more natural" and persistent desire to discover her past, and her ability to take physical action, which enables her to move Roswitha out of the fantasy realm. Kotzebue's expressive physicality complements Roswitha's calculated intellect. As their friendship develops, Roswitha learns to be more physically expressive whilst Kotzebue becomes increasingly verbal. It is at this point that the comparison between Kotzebue and wolves cease.

Race and lesbian butch/femme:

Before examining the lesbian dynamics of Kotzebue and Roswitha's butch-femme relationship, I shall first consider the way in which Roswitha's feminine character is shaped by Rosel Zech's persona. Despite being relatively unknown amongst the English-speaking audiences of Salmonberries, Rosel Zech is an established German actress who has appeared in numerous German television series and films (9). She is

perhaps best known internationally as an actress who plays ageing femme fatales, such as the character Veronika Voss, the faded 40s movie star of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's award winning (10) last film, Veronika Voss (Germany, 1982).

Rosel Zech is again cast as an ageing beauty in Salmonberries. The age difference between her character and k.d. lang's is augmented by the narrative characterisation of the latter as barely out of her teens - though k.d. lang looks much older. The characters' age difference facilitates the suggestion that Kotzebue desires Roswitha as a maternal figure in several scenes. The first such scene takes place in the library where Roswitha imparts her *academic* knowledge of Kotzebue's supposedly German familial origins. Later, she helps Kotzebue discover her *personal* Eskimo origins and her true biological father. She then figuratively "gives birth" to a new Kotzebue by giving her a new nickname.

The contrasting physical appearances of the two characters thwart the assumption that Kotzebue's desire for Roswitha is merely maternal. The androgynous and femme personas of the two actresses assist in highlighting their characters' contrasting butchness and femininity. Just as images of white heterosexual couples typically characterise the white men with darker skin and their white female partners as fairer (Dyer 1997: 41-81), Kotzebue, the butch, is darker than her fairer femme, Roswitha. Stacey (1995) suggests that the contrasting lightness and darkness of female protagonists in lesbian films draws on conventional heterosexual romance films to create the romantic tension of difference (which is perhaps less evident due to the lack of heterosexual gender difference). De Lauretis (1991: 262), on the other hand, argues

that the assumption that lesbian relationships are constructed around the desire to replicate heterosexual gender differences is heterosexist. Interpreting representations of racial, sexual or other differences within homosexual relationships as replacements of the absent gender difference do not take into account the way in which heterosexuality too, is socially constructed.

Despite accurately identifying heterosexual gender difference as a social construction (as Butler (11) has already argued), de Lauretis does not account for the way films containing lesbian central characters often feature dark butches who have fair femme partners. By contrast, Stacey's thesis usefully identifies the way in which the image of racial difference and racial sexual stereotypes has been used to heighten romantic tension in homosexual relationships. Consistent with the black-but/white femme interracial lesbian stereotype identified by Mason-John and Okorowa (1995: 88), the darker non-white lesbians in almost all films containing such characters, including those discussed here, are denoted as more "butch" than the fairer white women they pursue.

It is racially significant that same-race heterosexual liaisons are frequently featured alongside the representations of interracial lesbian romances. Like the feminine white women involved in interracial lesbian romances in She Must Be Seeing Things and Boys on the Side, Roswitha in Salmonberries was involved in a same race heterosexual relationship prior to her interracial romance with Kotzebue. The only interracial heterosexual relationship in Salmonberries, between Chuck and Noayak, is characterised as infertile and unhappy. I have already mentioned (in relation to The

Wedding Banquet and She Must Be Seeing Things) that for reproductive reasons, heterosexual unions are frequently characterised as same race. Perry (1995: 177) and Young (1995: 104) also identify arguments made by certain racial purists that interracial unions dilute the purity of white blood, eventually rendering such liaisons non-productive. As Kotzebue and Roswitha's homosexual relationship is obviously non-productive, their racial difference does not render their already taboo relationship more threatening.

Roswitha's fairness and racial difference from Kotzebue and other darker Eskimo characters is emphasised by the mise-en-scene in Salmonberries. Even when the indoor scenes are shot predominantly in low light to reflect a bleak Alaskan winter, source lighting is used selectively to light up Roswitha's appearances. During Roswitha first appearance in the library, her face, in particular her blonde hair, is brightly lit by a focused, narrow beam of light from a lamp behind a row of bookshelves. A pair of glasses which she does not wear elsewhere in the film draws attention to her position as the librarian of the town's only library, a place of learning and culture. In contrast, Kotzebue and another Eskimo character, Butch, remain indistinguishable in the shadows of the room. The dialogue works in tandem with the lighting to confirm Roswitha's status as a beautiful, desirable and feminine woman. Butch, whose monologue opens this scene, calls Roswitha "angel" and follows her around whilst she is bathed in a pool of light.

The soundtrack in this scene also marks Roswitha's difference from the other Eskimos - Butch, Noayak and Kotzebue. Whilst most of the scene consists of a mixture of

dialogue and diegetic sound, Beethoven's "Spring Sonata" starts playing whenever Roswitha appears in a shot. The music stops whenever she disappears out of the frame, returning to a diegetic track - largely an oppressive silence. The other characters stand around in this silent darkly lit room waiting for Roswitha to appear again - at which time, the cheerful music starts playing once again. The audience later discovers that this piece of music was a favourite of her deceased German husband, a respected classical musician.

The Sonata fulfils the dual function of maintaining narrative continuity and her status as an émigré woman of high culture, in many ways alien to the cold and uncouth Alaskan town. The music suggests that even though she now lives in the culturally barren backwater of Alaska, she maintains her sense of family history and tradition, even if only by listening to music or picking salmonberries to bottle every year. Her life is depicted as one of tradition, order and civilisation. By contrast, Kotzebue's bewildered fascination with Roswitha's numerous bottles of salmonberries and delicately arranged ornaments indicates that they are foreign to her. Unlike Roswitha whose music and possessions reveal a traceable refined cultural history, Kotzebue's past is limited to being found in a cardboard box in the wild.

In addition to her vastly different cultural and ethnic background, Roswitha is also sexually different from Kotzebue. Though she is middle aged, the soundtrack, lighting, close up camera angles and narrative all serve to emphasise Roswitha's desirable blonde femininity. She wears delicate slips while the masculine-looking Kotzebue tells her how beautiful she is and how nice she smells. The scene in which Roswitha asks

Kotzebue to help unzip her black dress is reminiscent of a stereotypical heterosexual seduction scenario. As Roswitha and Kotzebue are in fact two women, a butch-femme scenario is set up instead.

Despite such intimate moments, Roswitha appears unaware of Kotzebue's sexual attraction to her. She responds to Kotzebue's attention by confiding her heterosexual history, her longing for her now deceased husband. Noayak, the Eskimo librarian, on the other hand, had identified Kotzebue's crush on Roswitha by her second appearance in the library. Roswitha's insensitivity to the sexual tension could be read as an example of the way in which female friends can be physically intimate without being thought to deviate from a heterosexual norm. However, the awkward Berlin hotel room scene suggests that Roswitha, in fact, is not in touch with her own sexuality. She intellectualises instead of responding physically or emotionally to Kotzebue declaration of love and sexual desire. Even when Roswitha finally admits her love for Kotzebue, she is unable to express this love physically. By this time, Kotzebue is faint with exhaustion and confusion. Roswitha's decision to repress her own feelings and deny Kotzebue sexual intimacy is depicted negatively as placing strain on their friendship.

Therefore, even though the selective use of music and lighting in earlier scenes highlights Roswitha's German background as a *positive* emblem of cultural refinement and expansive knowledge, the Berlin hotel room scene demonstrates that the same cultural baggage has also stifled her sexually. It is, therefore, unsurprising that as her friendship and love for Kotzebue develops, Roswitha realises that her home is no longer in Germany, but in Alaska. In retrospect, by the end of the film, the breaking of

the bottles of salmonberries during Kotzebue's first visit to Roswitha's house signals the beginning of Roswitha's severing of ties with Germany. The incident when Kotzebue was poisoned by salmonberries preserved many years earlier, can also symbolise Roswitha's need to let go of the past and the rigid German traditions that had led to an inability to enjoy her present life in Alaska.

Difference and sameness:

Roswitha's detachment from the lives and culture of the Eskimo people amongst whom she lives is particularly evident in the scene at the community centre. In her attempt to escape from Kotzebue, Roswitha becomes trapped in a room with a group of Eskimos doing a traditional dance. Initially retreating to a corner, she emerges to stand awkwardly amongst them. As with the first scene in the library, Roswitha's racial difference is highlighted via the use of selective lighting. She is consistently bathed in bright white light whilst the Eskimos dance in the darkness. Kotzebue, similarly, lurks in dark shadows, or is bathed in red light.

Although contrasting lighting appears to perpetuate a racial distinction where those in white light are "good" and those in red light or dark shadows are "bad", the characters are not portrayed as binaristically "black/white", or "negative/positive". Instead, as I have already argued, lighting is used to emphasize Kotzebue's butch darkness and Roswitha's femme fairness. The narrative development in which Kotzebue and Roswitha learn from one another as they grow closer (a standard model of an ideal of

heterosexual romance) also suggests that their relationship is that of butch-femme based on a heterosexual model. The systematic erasure of their initial cultural and sexual differences - Kotzebue becomes more eloquent whilst Roswitha becomes less physically repressed - can thus be read as a form of cultural exchange, and as part of the learning process of becoming a "couple". However, a similarly positive interpretation of the eventual erasure of Kotzebue's Eskimo racial identity is complicated by the depiction of "whiteness" as a more desirable and superior race than native American. The inferiority of the colonised "native Americans" is established in the opening scene, where Kotzebue goes to the library to learn more about her ancestors, whom she believes are the Russian discoverers of the town they live in - "Kotzebue". She is offended when Roswitha abruptly asks if she is "native", perhaps "Inuit".

Kotzebue is standing silently in the library when Roswitha enters. Roswitha walks over to the bookshelf to give her a book. She walks away from Kotzebue, returning to her desk across the room. Kotzebue remains silent, immobile.

Roswitha: Thank-you, you're welcome, my pleasure.

Kotzebue remains silent.

Roswitha: You don't talk very much I guess.
You're an Inuit, or what?

Kotzebue: Russian.

Roswitha: (Surprised) Oh.... What is your name?

Kotzebue: Kotzebue.

Roswitha: (surprised) Your name is Kotzebue?

Kotzebue: (spreads her arms wide, cocky expression)
MY people discovered this place.

Roswitha: (starts walking towards Kotzebue with an

expression of disbelief) *YOUR* people!
 (Laughs) Now listen to me. Kotzebue is a
 German name. I myself...

Kotzebue: (interrupts by throwing books on the floor)

Roswitha: I hate your kind of jokes...

Kotzebue's angry response to the suggestion that she might be native American, and Roswitha's disbelief that she might be related to Kotzebue, whom she believes is native American, suggests that being "native American" is not as desirable as being a "white" German or Russian. Roswitha's skepticism of Kotzebue's white Russian-German descent is repeated three more times – in their next library scene, outside Roswitha's house, and in Berlin. Despite her initial offence, Kotzebue eventually believes Roswitha. Significantly, their friendship starts developing only after Kotzebue accepts Roswitha's assertion that she is native, perhaps Inuit. Kotzebue's now established racial difference is conveniently employed to account for the cultural and educational differences between the women. Stacey (1995) argues that such differences are often depicted as barriers that heighten the romantic tension between the characters. As non-white people have sometimes been depicted as sexually attractive, even if morally and culturally inferior, Kotzebue's racial difference serves to heighten the romantic tension between the characters. However, since native Americans are characterised as socially inferior in the film, it is not surprising that Kotzebue's racial difference is erased once Roswitha returns her affections. Stacey elaborates that in order to produce an affirmative lesbian film, obstacles such as social or racial differences, cannot be insurmountable since lesbian relationships have traditionally been characterised as unfulfilling.

One by one, then, all the usual problems for the central female characters in a lesbian romance are solved.... The absence of 'gripping moments' and 'exciting tension' might, then, be read as an outcome of the affirmation of the lesbianism which nonetheless enthused lesbian audiences everywhere.

(Stacey 1995:102)

Stacey writes specifically about Desert Hearts, but her argument about the relatively easy removal of obstacles arising from racial, cultural and sexual differences in that film, is equally applicable to Roswitha and Kotzebue's romance in Salmonberries. Although Kotzebue's non-white racial identity is continually emphasised in the earlier part of the film, her white racial parentage is foregrounded after her affection for Roswitha is reciprocated. The scene in which Kotzebue is told by the white German bar patrons that "we are all Eskimos" hints that Kotzebue might not be racially different from them or Roswitha. Kotzebue subsequently discovers that Chuck, a white man, is her father. The film effectively ends on the note that Kotzebue, like Roswitha, is "white". No attempt is made to locate Kotzebue's Eskimo mother. Allen (1995) argues that the racial depiction of Kotzebue, and her relationship with Roswitha, reinforces the popular representation of white female sexuality as the romantic ideal.

Dyer has exemplified how, in popular culture, the ideal woman is white and blonde, and we can see how Roswitha is desired because she is just this. It also appears that Kotzebue's desire for Roswitha is bound up with a desire for white identity, and more specifically, for a white *lesbian*

identity.

(Allen 1995:79)

She suggests that by casting Kotzebue as mixed race, the film selectively plays with the signifiers of racial difference to facilitate the white lesbian audience's identification with Kotzebue without addressing the social and political implications of such a representation. Consequently, even though an argument can be made that the characters' heated arguments about racial identity reflect the film's critique of the erasure of native American histories through white Russian/German colonisation, a sympathetic reading is complicated by the film's own erasure of Kotzebue's native American parentage.

Besides racial difference, the sexual difference between the two characters is also gradually eroded. Roswitha puts her heterosexual past behind her after visiting Berlin, in the first instance by symbolically covering her husband's grave with dead leaves (whilst Kotzebue sits watching). They then go to a pub as if to celebrate their new life together. When they return to their hotel room, they kiss for the first time and declare their love for each other. Although they do not go beyond kissing in the film, the kiss and exchange of love declarations signifies a major step away from Roswitha's heterosexual past. She has become sexually similar to Kotzebue. Roswitha and Kotzebue's sexual differences are further erased when Kotzebue "comes out" as female to Chuck and his wife. As they become women who love each other, Roswitha and Kotzebue's sexual differences, so pronounced in the beginning of the film, have been minimised. Even though their lesbian romance remains platonic, the film's ambiguous

ending and k.d. lang's personae facilitates lesbian audiences' hope that the characters Kotzebue and Roswitha might eventually become lovers.

Boys on the Side:

As in Salmonberries, the more masculine-looking lesbian character in Boys on the Side (USA 1995) is non-white, whilst the apparently heterosexual femme she falls in love with is white. Like the former, the lesbian romance here remains platonic. Despite these superficial narrative similarities, the visually glossier, Hollywood produced Boys on the Side is very different from the independently produced Salmonberries. As the only Hollywood film discussed in this chapter, it is also the only one containing major Hollywood actresses. Jane, a black lesbian musician, is played by Whoopi Goldberg; Robin, the "whitest woman in American", by Mary Louise Parker; and Holly, a young blonde flirtatious heterosexual mother, by Drew Barrymore. The three vastly different character types - a black lesbian, an HIV positive white woman and an unmarried pregnant woman - can be read as part of Hollywood's attempt to appeal to a racially and sexually diverse female audience. The generally positive representation of these socially marginalized characters also reflects the film's employment of politically correct discourse about minorities.

Nevertheless, Boys on the Side was not marketed as a movie about "HIV/AIDS", or homosexuality, even though they are both central to the narrative. It was publicised as a "woman's movie" in the same genre as Thelma and Louise (USA 1991) (to which reference is made in the film). The narrative revolves around the developing friendship between the three women as they hide from the law after Holly accidentally murders an abusive boyfriend. Their journey on the road ends in Arizona when Robin falls ill. Fortunately for Robin, Jane, who has fallen in love with her, looks after her

until she dies.

As they had each previously played a similar role in earlier more successful films, each of the three actresses have been safely and appropriately cast as caricatures of the vastly different types of American women portrayed in Boys on the Side. Drew Barrymore (Holly) replays the "sexual wild child" roles that she refined in earlier films such as Gun Crazy (USA 1992) and Batman Forever (USA 1994). Initially introduced as the sexually driven woman who has to be rescued from her abusive boyfriend by her female friends, Holly is also characterised as an unmarried pregnant woman on the verge of being a single mother. Although glamorised unrealistically, the notions of single motherhood, and female sexual desire, manage to be depicted positively.

Whoopi Goldberg repeats her role as the strong female, often the only black amongst whites, made popular in films such as Sister Act (USA 1992) and Made in America (USA 1994). She is also well known for her role as the potentially lesbian character in the award winning film, The Color Purple (USA 1985). Although her character's lesbianism is only hinted at, it is well known that Alice Walker's book (on which the film is based) explicitly situates Goldberg's character in a lesbian relationship. As Jane (the black lesbian who does not have sex), Goldberg again plays a character whose lesbianism is known, but not seen. The familiarity which most audiences have with the sympathetic and harmlessly comic characters Goldberg often portrays also render the homosexual and racial difference of her character in Boys on the Side less sexually political, less racially radical and generally less threatening to these audiences.

The woman that Goldberg's character falls in love with is played by Mary Louise Parker. Like her character in Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café (USA 1991), Mary Louise Parker's character in Boys on the Side is a middle-class decent white American woman who has been let down by men, and is pursued and rescued by boyish male identified women. Both characters played by Parker die after developing intense platonic relationships with lesbian friends who nurse them through their illness. Even though Boys on the Side is a rather bland Hollywood take on contemporary social issues such as homosexuality, racial difference and AIDS, Parker's character, Robin, is groundbreaking for being one of the few representations of HIV positive heterosexual women in Hollywood films. Something to live for: the Alison Gertz Story (USA 1992) aka Fatal Love, a based-on-a-true-story, made for television film, is another. It stars Molly Ringwald as a twenty-two year old white heterosexual woman who becomes infected with the HIV virus during a one night stand (during which she also possibly loses her virginity).

HIV is still generally perceived within the American mainstream to be a disease contracted only by gay men, drug users, haemophiliacs and non-white people. Consistent with the popular belief that white heterosexual women do not become HIV positive, the publicity material and the few reviews fail to mention Robin's HIV status even though it is central to the narrative. Instead, the reviews focus on Jane's black lesbianism perhaps because the inclusion of homosexual characters in mainstream films has become topical in the mid-1990s after the financial and critical success of Philadelphia. Another reason for the sensational emphasis on the black lesbian character is related to the marketing of the film as a women's film influenced

by feminist discourses. Even though black lesbians are not common in women's films, they are perceived by the misogynistic heterosexual public as stereotypical characters in feminist films.

Finally, the emphasis on Jane's lesbianism (both by the film's reviewers and within the film narrative itself) serves to contain the sexual threat posed by the HIV positive character, Robin. Alongside the popular belief that the sexual transmission of the HIV virus occurs predominantly amongst homosexual men, non-whites and promiscuous heterosexuals, is a popular conception that lesbian sex is the one form of sexual activity safe from HIV transmission. The sexually fraught relationship that Robin has with the bartender, the only man who expresses a romantic interest in her, demonstrates that a fulfilling heterosexual relationship is no longer a possibility for her. Thus, the emphasis on the lesbianism of Jane, Robin's primary love interest, draws on the popular perception that lesbian sex is safe and assuages the fear that Robin will continue to spread the HIV virus to future heterosexual partners.

Jane, the lesbian of colour:

As well as being the only African-American character, Jane is also the only lesbian in Boys on the Side. As I have already mentioned, despite being a lesbian, Jane is not shown to be sexually involved throughout the film. Young's discussion of the representation of the black lesbian protagonist in Mona Lisa is applicable in analysing why Jane is characterised as an asexual lesbian.

The potential danger involved in a sexual union across racial boundaries is averted by suggesting that Simone is a lesbian.... This also serves to contain Simone's fertility - which constitutes the racists' ultimate fear that black people will reproduce uncontrollably, either with other black people or with white people - since her lesbianism and prostitution mean that her body though useable for sexual gratification is not used for reproductive purposes.

(Young 1996: 168-169)

When her friend Holly asks if "there must be something beyond sex", Jane immediately responds: "Yeah, me." As if to prove the truth of her statement, she soon falls in love with an unattainable heterosexual woman who ends up dying. I have already argued that Jane's emotional relationship with Holly minimise the threat of HIV sexual transmission Holly supposedly poses to heterosexual men. Drawing on Young argument's, I now suggest that Jane's lesbianism also functions to avert the possibility of interracial sexual intimacy with her many white male friends.

Jane's lesbian identity is mentioned repeatedly throughout the film by the other white characters. Jane's heterosexual friend, Holly, suggests that Jane does not become involved with other homosexuals because she is a "homophobic homosexual" who does not like to acknowledge or talk about her lesbianism. Consequently, the scenes where her male friend mentions her recent break-up with an unseen female lover and where Holly talk about her lesbianism are crucial. There are no other indications that

Jane, who lives in an exclusively white heterosexual environment, is not heterosexual. Unlike her visually obvious racial identity, it is more difficult to discern Jane's lesbianism.

Since Jane does not talk about her own lesbianism, does not take a female lover and does not live an easily identifiable lesbian lifestyle, her lesbianism is safely unthreatening to both the other heterosexual characters in the film and the assumed heterosexual mainstream audience. In the article "Experimental Desire: Rethinking Queer Subjectivity", Grosz develops Butler's theory of performative sexualities to suggest that the threat of homosexuality varies according to the way in which the homosexual individual lives. She argues that "liberal" heterosexuals (whom I suggest are the targeted audience of this film) find it easy to accept lesbians and gay men as long as they restrict their homosexual practises to the privacy of their own home. A lesbian, homosexually active or otherwise, who is not publicly sexually radical and/or political, is not threatening to the heterosexual institution.

So simply *being straight* or *being queer*, in itself, provides no guarantee of one's position as sexually radical: it depends on how one lives one's queerness, or one's straightness, one's heterosexuality as queer.

(Grosz 1994:143)

Grosz further argues that the threat posed by queers (in this context, queers who engage in "homosexual activity") is uniquely different from that posed by other social minorities. Unlike oppressed groups such as people of colour or women who find it

harder to "pass" (for white or as men), homosexuals can "pass" for heterosexuals if they do not "come out". Therefore, the homosexual person is only considered sexually "radical" or threatening if his/her sexual practises becomes known – either directly through knowledge of his/her sexual activities or inferred by their queer/homosexual political position.

Thus, despite the frequent narrative conflation of Jane's blackness and lesbianism as a single entity – "a black lesbian" – which is equally threatening (or acceptable) to the other characters, the threat posed by her lesbianism has to be disentangled from that presented by her racial difference. There are occasional brief moments in the film in which the different ways Jane's lesbianism and blackness present themselves are evident. Even though Robin's mother is shocked to discover that her daughter has been living with a *black* lesbian, none of the other characters react negatively to Jane's black racial identity. It is her lesbian identity which some of the white heterosexual characters are initially uncomfortable about. Jane, described as a "self-hating homophobic lesbian", also appear uncomfortable about her own homosexual identity. By contrast, she is characterised as proud to be African-American, perhaps because racial difference is now generally accepted as a normal part of a racially and culturally diverse America. Instead, in a move typical of Goldberg's films, instead of highlighting blackness as a marked racial category - a discursive phenomenon noted by Dyer as commonly used in most Western films (1993: 142) – Robin's white racial identity is emphasised instead.

Jane: I don't think we match at all. I am sure that somebody else will
want to go cross-country with the whitest woman in the face of

America....

Boys on the Side (USA 1995)

Nevertheless, like her "proud to be black" character in Made in America who eventually falls in love with the white protagonist she is initially reluctant to befriend, Goldberg's character in this film ends up falling in love with Robin. Music is used to demarcate their racial differences and the development of their relationship. Even though Jane calls Robin the "whitest woman" because she listens to the popular white group, The Carpenters, as her love for Robin grows, she starts singing Carpenters love songs, indicating that Jane's changing preference in music is directly related to her acceptance of Robin's racial difference. Blackman suggests that the image of black lesbians existing within an interracial community is often used to create a fantasy of racial harmony even when the community in which they live is still based predominantly on white culture.

The lesbian interracial couple is used as a visual symbol to uphold this racially harmonious fantasy. The interracial image is used in publicity photographs, demonstrating that events are welcoming to women of all races. It may be used in a film to illustrate the diversity of lesbian women.

(Blackman 1995: 190)

As Robin is not shown learning any of the "black music" Jane supposedly prefers (even though Jane starts singing "white music"), their relationship can be read as an example

of an interracial one based on white culture. Despite remaining platonic, there are many references throughout the film suggesting that Jane and Robin's friendship can be read as an interracial relationship. Their intense friendship is almost romantic, often transcending the sexual bond which exists between men and women – a situation found in a number of mainstream films about female friendships (12). Jane's emotional attachment to Robin also draws upon a heterosexist stereotype of lesbians, that is, that sex is an unimportant aspect of lesbian relationships. (13)

Interracial relationships:

Like lesbian sexuality, interracial heterosexuality is not depicted on-screen either. The appearance of a mixed race baby at the end of the film is a narrative surprise. The mother of the baby, Holly, is white, so the colouring of the child suggests the unseen father is black. Instead of glossing over Holly's interracial transgression, the different characters' shocked reactions emphasise the miscegenation taboo. In a comic scene, the camera pans over several white babies whilst Abe and Jane search expectantly for Holly's baby. When they finally see a non-white baby bearing Holly's name, the surprised Abe immediately turns to look accusingly at Jane, who is standing next to him. Since Jane is the only black character in the film, Abe's stare simultaneously reveals that his unhappy realisation that his stepchild's biological father was black, and that as the only black person shown in Holly's life, Jane is positioned, even if impossibly, in a fatherly role. Jane's rapid denial: "Don't look at me!" further comically highlights the non-reproductivity of homosexual relations.

Jane is again positioned in a fatherly role in the next scene when Holly returns home from prison carrying her mixed race child. Robin is also implicated as a participant of the illicit liaison which produced this baby. In a scene reminiscent of *Philadelphia*, where the HIV positive Beckett is shown carrying his sister's baby (demonstrating that HIV is not transmittable through casual contact), Robin is shown holding Holly's child. As Robin holds the baby in her arms, Jane stands protectively behind whilst Holly stands beside her. The three women are first shown in the same frame looking down at the baby. Then a shot of Jane and Holly looking lovingly into each other's eyes is inserted – again hinting at Jane's vital role in the birth of the child. This is followed by a shot of Jane turning to look down at Robin carrying the baby. At this point, the baby starts crying. Jane immediately tells both Robin and the baby, "Push, baby, push." The remarkable similarity of this strange phrase to what Holly was told when she was in labour sets up a direct comparison between the two scenes. Robin is symbolically positioned as the white mother giving birth to the mixed race child. Jane, who looks on encouragingly, continues to be positioned as the "father".

Therefore, despite the characterisation of Jane as an asexual lesbian, and without any on-screen representations of lesbian sex, the strategic placing of the mixed race baby between Robin and Jane suggests that their intense friendship is actually a romantic lesbian relationship. Moreover, other characters' strange reactions around Holly's mixed race baby imply that it is the product of an interracial homosexual union between a white woman and a black woman - in the first instance, between Holly and Jane; and in the subsequent scene, between Jane and Robin. In my earlier discussions

of The Wedding Banquet, She Must Be Seeing Things and Salmonberries. I argued that the representation of interracial homosexuality is less threatening than interracial heterosexuality because it is non-reproductive. However, the unexpected appearance of a mixed race child to symbolise Jane and Robin's interracial homosexual relationship suggests that just as some form of prohibited interracial heterosexual union has occurred off screen, some kind of interracial homosexual activity may have also possibly taken place. The mixed race baby indicates that Boys on the Side is more radical in its handling of racial issues than it initially appears. Despite being the only type of sexual relationship consummated on screen, the same-race heterosexual liaisons do not produce any children on-screen. A mixed race child is introduced in place of a white one.

Conclusion: same-race heterosexuality and interracial homosexuality.

Whilst analysing the way in which non-white homosexuals are represented, I discovered that such characters are almost always paired with white homosexual partners. As suggested in the last chapter, since homosexuality is often depicted as "a white thing", the white lovers of non-white homosexuals function as an affirmation of their homosexual identity. At the same time, the popularity of films containing interracial homosexual liaisons can also be read as reflecting the negative stereotype that white homosexuals are as sexually degenerate as non-white people. However, citing Stacey (1995), I argued that such representations are probably popular because the racial difference of the non-white homosexual is often used to heighten the romantic tension of homosexual relationships.

I also found that same-race heterosexual relationships are consistently featured alongside the interracial homosexual ones. The simultaneous preoccupation with same-race reproduction in these films led me to suggest that the miscegenation taboo is a specifically heterosexual one. Although homosexuals continue to be considered threatening to the heterosexual norm - as homosexual relationships are not biologically productive - the depiction of interracial homosexual relationships is no more taboo than that of same race homosexual ones. Hence, when Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Australia, 1994) was re-done by Hollywood as To Wong Foo, Thanks For Everything, Julie Newmar (USA, 1995), it is not surprising that one of the white homosexual characters is replaced by a non-white homosexual character.

Endnotes (Chapter 3):

1. cf. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." by Homi Bhabha. October no.28 p125-133, Boston: MIT Press, 1987; and "The Cinema after Babel - Language, Difference, Power" by Ella Shohat & Robert Stam. Screen 26:3-4 May-Aug 1985. p54.

² This stereotype has been noted in various English language anthologies about being an Asian homosexual - including Witness Aloud (Ed. Chi Tsang, 1993) and A Lotus of Another Color (Ed. Rakesh Ratti, 1993).

³ Such films include Personal Best (USA 1982), Desert Hearts (USA 1986) and Claire of the Moon (USA 1992) which feature central characters who have been engaged in heterosexual relationships/lifestyles before becoming involved in lesbian liaisons.

⁴ Cf. Butler's Gender Trouble (London: Routledge, 1990) for an elaboration on the way in which heterosexuality is always already simply a copy of what it aspires to be. According to Butler's thesis, homosexuality, including lesbian butch-femme, is not any more or less "original", or artificially constructed than heterosexual male/female gender roles.

⁵ Cf. New German Cinema by Thomas Elsaesser, Rutgers University Press, 1989; The New German Cinema by John Sanford, Da Capo Press; New German Cinema by James Franklin, Twayne Publications, 1983; and Women and the New German Cinema by Julia Knight, Verso Books, 1992.

⁶ Kotzebue is described as an "Eskimo" in Salmonberries. I shall use both "Eskimo" and the more politically correct term "Native American" in my analysis of the film.

⁷ Cf. Kennedy and Davis (1992), Nestle (1987, 1989, 1992) and my earlier discussion of butch/femme lesbian relationships in my section on She Must Be Seeing Things.

⁸ I use the terms Eskimo and mixed race interchangeably to describe Kotzebue as she is depicted as both Eskimo and mixed-race at various stages of the film. As I pointed out in my introduction chapter and review of literature, black critics argue that the specific ethnicity of non-whites, including mixed race people, are often ignored in Western discourses. Cf. JanMohamed's account of Jim Crow laws and 1983 Phipps case in "Sexuality on/of the Racial Border" in Discourses of Sexuality Ed. Stanton. USA: University of Michigan, 1992. 97-99. Also see Dyer (1997: 25).

⁹ Her filmography includes films and television programs such as Der Pott (1971), Der Knapp-Familier (1981), Lola (1981), Geschwister Oppermann (1983), Der Angriff der Gegenwart auf die übrige Zeit (1985), Bertinis, Die (1988), Rote Vogel (1993), Dicke Freunde (1995), Kriminalpsychologin (1997), Terror im Namen der Liebe (1997) and Die Letzte Rettung (1997).

¹⁰ Winner of the "Golden Berlin Bear" award at the 1982 Berlin International Film

Festival.

¹¹ Cf. Endnote 4.

¹² Such films include Steel Magnolias (USA 1989), Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café (USA 1991), Thelma and Louise (USA 1991), Passion Fish (USA 1992) and Set It Off (USA 1995). Also see Dyer 1997b: 9 for a discussion of the way female friendships have been depicted in a number of European (including British) art films.

¹³ Cf. de Lauretis 1991: 262.

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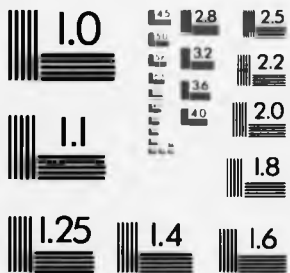
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**DEVIANT INTERSECTIONS:
Interrogating Discourses of "Race", Sexuality
and Non-white Homosexuality in
Contemporary Films.**

Volume 2 (of 2)

Ling-Yen Chua

**A Thesis in the Joint School of Film and Literature, Faculty of Arts, submitted in
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
University of Warwick, England.**

September 1998.

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CHAPTER 4:**GO FISH AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION.**

In the last chapter, I attempted to look beyond the commercial feasibility of featuring non-white characters with white lovers, to put forward alternative reasons for the frequency of such representations. The first is that racial difference is a popular cinematic device used to heighten romantic tension. The second, that since homosexuality is commonly perceived as "a predominantly white thing" (both within the white communities and communities of color), pairing the non-white homosexual with a white partner conveniently situates him/her within a homosexual subculture, serving to "authenticate" the homosexual identities of the non-white characters. These attempts to "authenticate" the homosexual identities of the non-white characters deflect negative racist assumptions that their homosexual practices result from their non-white racial perversity. The significance of the consistent pairing of non-white homosexuals with white homosexuals is highlighted by the fact that films containing only white homosexual characters illustrate that the reverse (where their homosexualities have to be "authenticated" by the presence of non white homosexuals) is not common.

It is not surprising therefore that I have, to date, come across (1) only one feature length film, *Go Fish* (USA 1994), containing a non-white homosexual central character with another non-white same-sex partner. This chapter is an analysis of the way in which this unusual relationship is depicted. Given that *Go Fish* was released in the mid-1990s when politically correct racial and sexual representations became increasingly commonplace in mainstream cinema, its impact on the film's unusual

racial representation cannot be overlooked. The influence of such discourses on films featuring lesbian and gay people of colour in general will also be discussed.

The "cross-over" success of *Go Fish* (USA 1994):

Directed by Rose Troche, *Go Fish* was released in 1994 and billed as a "hugely entertaining... fresh hip comedy" (Variety magazine). The publicity blurb elaborates, "*Go Fish* picks up where every other coming-out movie leaves off. The film follows the lives of five women as they go on dates, have fashion crises, oversleep, wish for and deal with love.... *Go Fish* moves the audience to laughter and invites them to explore the lesbian world." (Video Cover, Mainline Pictures, UK) The focus on the lives of lesbians who have already "come out" is probably one of the reasons for the film's popularity with lesbian audiences tired of watching lesbian films predominantly about the angst and problems they face in heterosexual society.

This shift away from depicting the homophobia of the heterosexual world also appeals to heterosexual audiences, albeit for different reasons. Unlike the publicity material of earlier lesbian films (2) which targeted lesbian and art-house audiences, the distributors (3) of *Go Fish* appeal to the mainstream heterosexual audience by inviting them "to explore the lesbian world". Even though the lesbian characters focus on issues important within the lesbian community, scenes of debate are constructed without acrimony towards heterosexuals. As Davis and Smith (1997: 135-136) suggest, heterosexual audiences are indirectly offered an inclusive position as "we", as part of

the world in which the lesbian characters live. Davis and Smith (1997: 133-138) further argue the popularity of Go Fish reflects the recent shift in dominant constructions of race and sexuality.

Cinematic cultural space has been created in which African Americans and other non-white performers are presented in specific ethnic terms whilst also inhabiting centralised narrative and identificatory positions. Crossovers into mainstream Hollywood groups are apparent in the increasing number of women directors and in the increased visibility of multiple kinds of male homosexual and, to a lesser extent, lesbian identities on screen. Simultaneously, some of the more overtly patriarchal and white supremacist images of the Reagan era have become poor box office.

(Davis and Smith 1997: 2)

Its success with heterosexual audiences led to Go Fish becoming one of the few queer films to play in a mainstream London West End cinema. Although films about gay men, such as My Beautiful Laundrette (UK 1985), The Wedding Banquet (Taiwan/USA 1992) and Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Australia 1994), have already achieved popularity with heterosexual audiences, Go Fish is one of the first lesbian films to attain similar crossover success. As I argued in chapter three, the success of these comic lesbian and gay films with mainstream heterosexual audiences indicate that laughter effectively defuses the heterosexual anxiety that may arise from viewing scenes featuring non-heterosexual lifestyles. The employment of happy endings in such

films draws on cinematic conventions of traditional heterosexual romance (4) such as conflicted desire, romantic awkwardness, contrasting persona and the eventual erasure of internal and external barriers blocking the pathway to true love, arousing a "feel-good" factor amongst heterosexual audience. The primary emphasis on the romantic concern of the films' homosexual characters and the scant narrative focus on homophobic discrimination and radical separatist queer politics also incites feelings of empathy from the heterosexual audience.

Unlike the publicity and reviews geared towards the heterosexual audience, Go Fish's reliance on (and occasional subversion of) romantic comedy conventions is not emphasised in reviews by the gay and lesbian press. The montage sequence of Ely's return home after her first night with Max, for instance, parodies classic heterosexual romances where the elated sexually satisfied male protagonist is usually shown congratulated by his peers for successfully seducing the female protagonist. Daria's sleaziness and clichés pickup lines are further examples of the way in which stereotypes from heterosexual romances, in this case, the confident male casanova, are drawn upon. The extensive use of lesbian "in-jokes" (such as highlighting lesbian knowledge of the extensive range of herbal teas available, fingernail cutting as preparation for lesbian sex and the practise of psychoanalysing details of one's relationships with other lesbian friends) are not mentioned either. Instead, lesbian and gay reviews tend to focus on Go Fish's status as one of the first lesbian films to be considered a queer film. Since most other so-called queer films have largely concerned gay males, for example Looking for Langston (GB 1988), Swoon (USA 1992) and Grief (USA 1993), this accolade is not insignificant.

One reason Go Fish is considered queer may relate to its depiction of lesbian sexuality, which, influenced by "gay male" discourses, is not threatening to heterosexual female audiences. The film's sexually inexplicit family-oriented focus on monogamous romantic love and its emphasis on platonic female friendships (5) is ideologically unthreatening to heterosexual male *and* female audiences. Whilst a more sexually explicit film such as Bound (USA 1996) is popular with sections of heterosexual male audiences, heterosexual female audiences (6) are threatened by its narrative, which features a female character making a dramatic transition from living as a heterosexual woman to coming out as a lesbian. Heterosexual women are not, however, implicated by Go Fish's narrative, which remains consistently focused on intra-lesbian issues, such^{as} the impact that "queer" and/or "gay male" discourses have had on the different sexual practices of the lesbian characters. Before further discussing the queer representation of lesbian sexuality, I shall provide a brief synopsis and discussion of Go Fish's narrative style.

Narrative Style and Synopsis:

Although "arthouse" influenced multi-narrative and filming techniques are now frequently employed in mainstream Hollywood films, the low budget grainy look of the black-and-white Go Fish distinguishes it as an "independent" film. Whilst most other lesbian films (7) produced on low budgets strive for an overall "glossy" polished look (though sometimes drawing on arthouse narrative styles and cinematic technique), Go

Fish remains visually located within the "indie" tradition. Out of focus grainy frames of talking heads cut off midway are mixed with extreme close ups and shots of unrelated fragmented objects and bodies. The use of black and white film is reminiscent of other feature-length and short films (8) by queer directors. Nevertheless, Go Fish's use of sounds remains relatively conventional. Its extensive reliance on monologue and dialogue to explain narrative events, and an emotive soundtrack to connect the more experimental camera shots, ensures that mainstream audiences can easily understand and enjoy the film despite its use of "alternative" filming techniques.

Like the independent gay film, Young Soul Rebels (UK 1991) (9), Go Fish follows the lives of several different characters, dividing screen time amongst them, possibly to present a diversity of opinions and lifestyles within the homosexual communities. As a result, none of the characters is developed in much detail. Moreover, as the characters in Go Fish singularly represent only one specific aspect of lesbian life, they risk becoming caricature "types" or its subcategory, stereotypes. Dyer (1980: 28) explains that types are "simple, vivid, memorable, easily-grasped and widely recognised characterisation". Although the inclusion of different character types often arises from an admirable politically correct motivation, they are limited narratively to being representative of certain traits; racial, sexual, class, generational or other. Chatman (1978: 119) posits that "a viable theory of character should preserve openness and treat characters as autonomous beings, not as mere plot functions." He suggests that this "openness" will allow the audience to "reconstruct" the character according to that which is explicitly depicted, or implicitly communicated by the discourse. Such "open" characters can evolve alongside the narrative as they are able to acquire new, varied



"traits". However, such fluidity of character development is not evident in films that use "types" of character to convey certain narrative functions.

Kaplan (1978: 2-3) and Kuhn (1994: 34-35) also suggest that employing "stereotypes" to represent certain ideologies or "truths" often results in an incoherent "excess" which threatens to expose their artifice. However, Kaplan and Kuhn's arguments apply specifically to the representation of women in Hollywood cinema. Because lesbian and gay people differ from other social groups (including women) in being identifiable only through their sexual practises, or by "coming out" (see Grosz 1994: 151), critics such as Perkins (1979: 153) and Dyer (1993: 20) suggest that stereotypes offer a way for homosexuals to communicate their gayness. Consequently, even though the narrative development is limited by a reliance on stereotypes, lesbian audiences have been delighted to identify with the different lesbian "types" depicted in Go Fish.

The five central characters in Go Fish are Ely (V.S. Brodie), Max (Guinevere Turner), Kia (T. Wendy McMillan), Evy (Migdalia Melendez) and Daria (Anastasia Sharp). Except for Kia (who is African-American), Evy (who is Latina) and several unnamed extras who appear briefly, all the characters are white. One of the main narratives follows the development of Max and Ely's relationship after they are set up on a date by their flatmates Kia and Daria. The audience is privy to Max's inner thoughts as she reads aloud from her diary, re-evaluating the qualities she deems necessary in an ideal girlfriend. The film is also shot from Ely's point-of-view. She is shown hesitantly breaking up a long-term long-distance relationship with Kate, getting a new haircut and flirting with Max before finally becoming her lover.

Alongside Max and Ely's developing romance are narratives involving the other characters named above. Each individually symbolising a particular lesbian "type," they collectively present a stereotypical overview of the different personalities and lifestyles present in the lesbian community. Max is cast as the "typical" lesbian who is driven by finding a girlfriend. Ely is representative of the slightly older lesbian who suffers from "lesbian bed death". Daria, emblematic of the "new" 1990s sex crazed lesbian into lesbian "serial monogamy", has relationships which sometimes only last one night. The only two lesbians of colour, Kia and Evy, are new lovers enjoying a monogamous and stable relationship.

Being a sexually "queer" film:

Besides the queer influenced filmic style, Go Fish is considered a "queer" film because it was produced by Tom Kalin and Christine Vachon, respectively the director and producer of Swoon (USA 1991), a well known queer film. Another possible explanation for Go Fish's "queer" status relates to its frank discussion of issues specifically relevant to the contemporary 1990s lesbian and gay community. Unlike many earlier lesbian films where the impact of HIV/AIDS discourses has on the lesbian communities is not examined, such issues are highlighted in several scenes of Go Fish. The first occurs as a fantasy sequence when Daria is confronted by a group of lesbians and questioned about sleeping with a man. She retaliates by asking them when the last time they had safe sex was. This draws together discussions of lesbian sex and

HIV/AIDS influenced safer sex discourse. Later in the film, before Ely departs for her big date with Max, Daria again reinforces the message by giving her a safe sex kit.

Arroyo (1993) and Edelman (1994: 96) argue that queer and HIV/AIDS discourses are connected through their preoccupation with the death of the subject. Although Go Fish concerns neither HIV positive gay men nor "mourning", the danger of sex is foreground in safer sex discourses. Whilst most lesbian films do not draw on safer-sex discourses because lesbians are perceived as the group with the lowest risk of HIV infection (10), such discourses demonstrate that the lesbian communities in Go Fish exist alongside gay male ones even though they are not featured in the film. The discussions about different sexual practises - such as non-monogamy and sex with men - further emphasise the influence of gay male communities on contemporary lesbian communities.

In contrast, women-centred issues such as unfulfilling heterosexual marriages and female relationships are often exclusively foregrounded in earlier lesbian films such as Cass (Australia 1981), Lianna (USA 1982) and Desert Hearts (USA 1985). Davis and Smith (1997: 137-8) argue that Go Fish also problematises mainstream discourses of compulsory heterosexuality and female oppression in the extended sequence where the lesbian characters try on and discard wedding gowns. However, scenes where previously (frequently underrepresented) "taboo" issues (such as casual sex, sex with men and one night stands) are discussed, challenge the hegemonic anti-sex discourse of 1970s lesbian-feminism.

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Lesbians who had come out in earlier decades were not the only ones who had difficulties with 1970s lesbian feminism. Lesbian identity was expected to subsume all others. Other aspect of identity, which were of at least equal importance to many women, were seen as diversionary and divisive, and as attributes of the patriarchal systems which divided us against ourselves and would be swept away. Examples are being black, working class, disabled, socialist, femmy, distressed, rich, upper class, sexually adventurous or sexually outspoken.

(Ainley 1995: 72)

The shift in influence from lesbian-feminism to gay male subculture on contemporary lesbian identity is exemplified by Daria, who complains about being watched by "big sister", the "lesbian police" when she is confronted by a group of lesbians after having sex with a man. Daria defends herself by arguing that her homosexuality would not be questioned if she were a gay man sleeping with a woman. As they do not question Daria's comparison of lesbian sexuality with gay male sex, her lesbian attackers appear to understand her sexual and political identification with gay men.

The shift from the 1970s lesbian rhetoric of gender oppression (being a woman) to contemporary 1990s lesbian preoccupation with issues of sexuality (being a homosexual) is exemplified by the contrast between the "older" (Kia and Ely) and "younger" (Max and Daria) lesbians. Jokes about the "bad" dress sense and hairstyles of the older more traditionally feminist lesbians and the glamorisation of the younger lesbians (especially Max, played the co-writer, Guinevere Turner) both textually and in

the publicity photo stills demonstrate that queer (as opposed to feminist) identified lesbianism is privileged.

The filmmakers' personal identification with a queer identity is demarcated in the scene in which Max and Ely debate the importance of positive queer representation after returning from a movie. Although the film they had just seen was directed by a gay man, Max and Ely's discussion reveals their own identification as queer, emphasising the commonality of gay male and lesbian experiences in the 1990s. Ely, who is elsewhere presented as a more feminist-influenced lesbian, uses the term "queer" instead of "lesbian" to identify herself in this scene. Her remark, "We expect queer filmmakers to take the responsibility to represent the entire community and I think that's really a lot to ask anyone", mirrors the argument made by the director of Go Fish (Troche's 1995: 13-14). Directors of other queer films (Julien 1992: 266, 1993a, Parmar 1993 and Fung 1995: 129) similarly argue that they should not be expected to undertake the responsibility of depicting all sections of the lesbian and gay communities. As they are not set up as representative of a particular lesbian community, the racial and sexual diversity of the characters in Go Fish should not be read as an attempt to accurately portray such a community. Instead, the racially diverse lesbians of different ages, debate different sexual practises and the expressions of anger at compulsory heterosexual marriage, all aspects of queer discourse, problematise the idea of a community based on an essentialised lesbian identity.

"Queer" in relationship to "race":

Whilst the sexual identities of the lesbian characters are extensively interrogated, their racial identities are barely discussed. To examine the way race is represented, I shall begin with an analysis of the first scene, where the central non-white lesbian character, Kia, is introduced. This scene begins with a female voice (later identified as Kia's) asking for names of known lesbians. A brief camera pan around a classroom follows an opening medium shot of an African-American man wearing an earring. Rapid close ups and medium shots of various racially diverse young men and women giving names of possible lesbians are inserted. This scene ends with a close-up of an African-American woman standing by the blackboard. Her role as class tutor is established when she explains the purpose of speculating about the sexual identities of famous women.

As well as introducing the lesbian subject of the narrative, this opening sequence reveals the influence that contemporary discourses of "multiculturalism" and race have in Go Fish. After the opening image of an African-American man's face, and the introductory dialogue by an African-American woman, the panning camera reveals that the students, the first characters shown in this film, are carefully composed of an assortment of races. There is an African-American man, an African-American woman, a white man, a white woman, a Latina woman and other students of varying racial origin. However, contrary to popular cinematic representations of groups of predominantly non-white people gathering to discuss racial issues alone, this group does not talk about race. Instead, lesbianism and the different histories of sexuality are discussed. Racial difference is similarly depicted throughout the rest of the film. The inclusion of non-white homosexual characters, particularly minor ones, whose racial

differences are not characterised as a problem is an increasingly common of feature of recent films containing homosexual subjects. Examples include Bar Girls (USA, 1995), First Wives Club (USA 1997), Chasing Amy (USA 1997) and High Art (USA 1997).

Such representations reflect the shift in discourses of race and sexuality within contemporary mainstream and homosexual communities (Hall 1988, rpt in 1996: 444). In the attempt to be more historically and culturally specific, homosexuals are no longer always characterised as white and middle class in film and literary texts. Moss (1995), the president of the Australian Gay and Lesbian Research Centre at the University of Sydney, argues that as a canonical body of literature about the homosexual subject has already been established by pioneering homosexual theorists/filmmakers, its white homogenising tendencies should now be problematised. She suggests that the reflection on what has so far been established and what has yet to be done should not be interpreted negatively. This critical moment should instead be seen as a sign of the maturity of the study of sexuality.

Lesbian and gay men of color have contested the meaning and experience of a unitary gay subject and the idea that the meaning and experience of being gay are socially uniform. Indeed, they argue that a discourse that abstracts a notion of gay identity from considerations of race and class is oppressive because it invariably implies a white, middle-class standpoint.

(Seidman 1993:120)

Seidman (1993) also elaborates on the way homosexual discourses have been taken to task for universally applying white middle class models of homosexuality instead of being more historically and socially specific in examining the construction of homosexual identities. Nevertheless, even though there are now more films containing non-white homosexuals and agreement amongst critics that racial difference must be taken into account, there is still little consensus on the way race should be depicted. The racially, politically correct, opening scene in *Go Fish* is a reflection of this critical moment of undecidability. Similarly, the non-white lesbians' "Westernised" dress codes and consistent use of American-English can be interpreted negatively as reflecting the necessity of adopting white cultural codes to assimilate with predominantly white homosexual communities, or read positively as a timely portrayal of non-white lesbians who are naturalised Americans.

Although the merits of portraying non-white characters as similar to white ones are debatable, Kia's silence on the issue of race while emphasising the shared experiences common to all homosexuals (in the opening scene) suggests that a lesbian identity continues to be privileged. The depiction of an African-American character who is committed to a common lesbian history but not preoccupied with her racial identity, reflects the narrative attempt to be racially inclusive without allowing racial difference to threaten the cohesiveness of the lesbian community. The contrasting lack of censorship about the lesbian characters' differing sexual practises indicates that sexual difference, unlike racial difference, does not threaten the individual and collective identities of the lesbian characters or queer communities in which they live.

The different portrayal of race and sexuality in Go Fish mirrors the unresolved debate (mentioned in the Review of Literature) concerning the ability of queer theories to extend existing lesbian and gay theories in order to take account of racial difference. (11) Jagose argues that the queer project, which developed from the work of lesbian and gay activists/theorists (1996: 1-71), problematises "traditional identity-based forms of political organisation and engaged in a radical denaturalisation of all identity categories" (1996: 125). However, because queer theory has not laid out a framework as to how the intersections of race, gender and sexuality can be explored, some critics suggest that it encodes a Eurocentric bias "which makes it insensitive to the largely identity-based politics of ethnic communities" (Jagose 1996: 99).

Moreover, as queer theories "tended to occupy a predominantly sexual register," they have been subject to criticism for being insensitive to axes of identification other than sex and gender (Jagose 1996: 99). Even though queer theories have managed to free sexual practises from being defined in a rigid binaristic hetero/homosexual manner, queer discussions of racial difference remain fixed within the binaristic categories of white/non-white. In contrast to the queer reworking of sexuality as unfixed, deviant and fluid, racial identities are seldom problematised within queer discourses and racial identities continue to be essentialised in many queer films, including Go Fish. Consequently, just as the inclusion of non-white characters is an identifying aspect of queer films, the lack of discussion and rather "unqueer" essentialisation of their racial identity is also typical.

The representation of Kia:

Kia, the first non-white character introduced, is not differentiated from the white characters by camera technique or soundtrack. Bobo (1995) and Winston (1996) argue that a negative representation of black people has sometimes been perpetuated through the use of improper lighting. Winston further suggests that colour film stocks have been manipulated to give white subjects a more pleasing skin tone than they would have in reality. However, the development of colour film, which reproduces Caucasian skin tones as a culturally acceptable "white shade of white", results in "stocks which are not readily manipulated to give good black skins tones." (Winston 1996: 56-57) Consequently, as colour film do not render black skin tones as easily as they do white, "when filming blacks, it is often necessary to augment lighting, by bouncing reflected light back into the face from a low angle, for instance, so as not to lose details." (Winston 1996: 41)

Although Kia is sporadically cast in shadow, similarly lit white characters suggest such lighting is racially indiscriminate. An interesting play with the light and shadows runs through different scenes in Go Fish. Different body parts and portions of the set are periodically cast in shadow. The occasional employment of unusual camera angles and out of focus shots suggest that the sometimes inadequate lighting could be the combined result of low budget filmmaking and the stylistic "look" of the film. Although Kia's skin colour contrasts with Evy's during their brief loving making scenes, their racial difference is neither narratively commented upon nor emphasised in lingering shots. The only instance when the camera rests on Kia's skin colour occurs

during a brief shot where she is shown holding hands with an unidentified lighter skin person. Their clasped hands and entwined fingers are presented as a positive symbol of racial harmony. This particular image was used in some publicity posters and is reminiscent of a scene in Young Soul Rebels (UK 1991) where the contrasting skin colour of black character Caz and his white lover are used to make a positive statement of interracial love, diversity and black-white unity.

Despite, or perhaps because Kia's racial difference is visually obvious, it is not narratively emphasised. Although Kia is characterised as the darker butch partner of a lighter skinned femme, her relationship with Evy cannot be read as a typical "black butch/white femme" partnership because Evy is Latino. Her academic position further subverts the stereotypical representation of African-American characters as less economically self-sufficient than their fairer skinned (white) lovers. Kia is also popular and confident, with ready answers to any problems the other characters have. This generally positive representation is consistent with the often "safe" and "politically correct" portrayal of non-whites in queer films. Unlike the more "risqué" depictions of sexuality, traditional racist stereotypes of socially or sexually disempowered African-Americans are assiduously avoided in such films.

The only moment where Kia is placed in a potentially negative situation occurs during a brief scene in which an unseen male harasses her. As Kia walks along the street of Chicago, briefcase in hand, a male voice screams off camera, "What a Fuckin' dyke!" However, her immediate response, "Fuck you!" reinforces the image built up in earlier scenes that Kia is an admirably strong character who can handle any situation.

Nevertheless, this scene parallels one in Totally Fucked Up (USA 1994) where the sole African-American gay character is also the only one subjected to homophobic abuse. I wonder if the similarity of the threat the characters face is somehow related to the fact that both films are produced in the United States within a year of each other. As well as being shot in black and white with similar camera techniques, they are both heralded as queer films predominantly concerned with the issues of homosexuality, relationships and safer sex in the 1990s. They also contain five young, predominantly white, homosexual central characters.

Totally Fucked Up is more narratively shocking and "in your face" than Go Fish because its characters is beaten up whilst Kia is only verbally abused. The differing extent to which the African-American homosexuals are harmed possibly relates to the fact that the Japanese-American filmmaker of Totally Fucked Up is less concerned with portraying the non-white character in a "politically correct" manner since he is, himself, racially "other". In contrast, the less disempowering position experienced by Kia suggests that the filmmakers of Go Fish are more careful about non-white representations, as one of them is white (12) and therefore open to criticism from non-white groups. Moreover, even though it distances itself to some extent from lesbian feminism narratively, with lesbian filmmakers, Go Fish is probably more influenced by feminist discourses of racial oppression than films by gay men.

For this reason, it is curious that Kia, like the African-American homosexual in Totally Fucked Up, is the only character threatened onscreen with homophobic abuse from strangers. Also interesting, is the fact that the African-American homosexuals in both

films are abused because of their homosexuality, and not their racial difference. At the risk of making too much of what may be mere coincidence, I wonder if this abuse is somehow related to the African-Americans being more "obviously detectable" than the other homosexual characters. Although neither character is more camp or gay/lesbian looking than the white homosexual characters, perhaps, it is because they are both black *and* dressed in an obviously homosexual style, that they become obvious targets for homophobic abuse. One can further infer that because the "homosexual" dress code is an identifiably "white middle-class" one, any non-white character carrying the "code" is possibly homosexual. Their homosexual "cross-dressing", therefore, is signalled through their "cross-racial" fashion.

Another explanation for the homophobic abuse of the African-American homosexuals relates to the possibility of a narrative attempt to problematise the racist assumption that non-white people cannot adopt a specifically "homosexual" identity (because they are considered already sexually deviant). The homophobic abuse of the two African-American homosexuals can thus be interpreted as a political gesture indicating that non-white homosexuals can be identified as specifically *homosexual*. Such representations indicate that their homosexuality is not limited to sexual practise, but is an identity they carry into their lives and onto the streets.

Evy and the Latino family:

As mentioned earlier, Evy is the only other non-white central character in the film.

Kia's desirable femme girlfriend, she is also fancied by two other central characters, Daria and Max. Like the other four main characters Evy shares screen time with, she is a rather one-dimensional character. Daria is defined by her sexuality, Kia by her wisdom, Max by her naivety and Ely by her hippiness, and Evy is shaped by her relationship with Kia and her family. The family of Kia (the other non-white central character) is not foreground, perhaps because African-Americans are usually depicted as an integral part of American society so is considered culturally similar to the white characters. In contrast, Evy's Latino ethnicity is featured in a brief scene where Evy's mother discovers her lesbianism. As the only scene where racial difference is highlighted in the film, Evy's "coming out" can be read as the film's tentative attempt to explore homosexuality and the Latina family structure.

In the documentary Khush (UK 1991), several homosexuals of Asian descent talk about the different role that the traditional family unit plays in the lives of white and non-white homosexuals who live in the West. They suggest that non-white homosexuals need the support of their traditional family units more than white lesbian and gay men who are not subjected to racist attacks. Mercer also argues that the predominantly white homosexual community is not a viable replacement as it does not provide the necessary source of support against racism.

The marginalization of issues of race in the gay community in Britain has been highlighted by the Black Gay Group (1982) article, which questions the ethnocentric assumptions behind the exhortation to "come out," regardless of the fact that the families of black gays and lesbians



provide a necessary source of support against racism.

(Mercer 1994: 132)

Although Mercer writes specifically about the position of non-white homosexuals in Britain, his remarks contextualise Evy's distress at being "outed". As I mentioned in chapter one, homosexuals are seldom accepted in non-white communities. (13) The scene where Evy is shown dismissing Max's suggestion that all lesbians face similar problems when they "come out" further suggests that Evy's familial expulsion is culturally specific, and should not be read as "typical" of families of *all* homosexuals. Like most gay and lesbian films, the white homosexual characters in *Go Fish* appear to exist outside the traditional family structure. As none of the other lesbian characters are shown "coming out" to their families, Evy's Latino family becomes the only characters characterised as homophobic. The suggestion that her family's homophobia derives from their ethnic and religious Latino background conveniently distances white heterosexual audiences from being implicated as homophobic.

However, apart from her "coming out" scene, Evy's racial difference, like that of the other non-white lesbians, is not emphasised elsewhere. Although the contrast between Kia and Evy's loving relationship and Daria's promiscuous ones can be read as resulting from a "politically correct" impulse not to draw on negative sexual stereotypes of non-white people, this interpretation is complicated by the depiction of other non-white lesbians speaking in favour of non-monogamy. The scene in which Daria is confronted by a group of women after having sex with a man, features minor lesbian characters of different races engaging in a heated debate about lesbian sexuality

and identity. Since their differing views are not presented along racial lines, Daria's promiscuity and Kia and Evy's monogamy are similarly not set up within the narrative to be representative of all black and Latina lesbians.

There does not appear to be any racially motivated difference in the way Kia and Evy dress, speak, live or relate to one another. Apart from several remarks about generational difference, the characters' differences are not negatively highlighted through the use of mise-en-scene, camera angles, framing techniques or the soundtrack. Their differing ethnicities, ages, styles, attitudes and body sizes function to depict diversity within lesbian communities. Fuchs (1994) and Keogh (1996) suggest that the non-hierarchical, non-didactic, open-ended representation of the characters' differing opinions contributes to *Go Fish*'s popularity with lesbian audiences.

Lesbian and gay critics of colour such as Parmar (1993: 10), Fung (1995: 128) and Takagi (1996: 22-23) also argue that, paradoxically, the over-emphasis on racial and/or sexual differences reinforces their minoritization. By focusing on the "multiple identities" of people of colour or homosexuals, the "multiple identity" of the white middle class man is left unacknowledged. This in turn leads to an imbalanced "counting" of who is more oppressed, without examining whom this assessment benefits.

While many minority women speak of "triple jeopardy" oppression - as if class, race, and gender could be disentangled into discrete additive parts - some Asian American lesbians could rightfully claim quadruple jeopardy oppression - class, race, gender, and sexuality. Enough

counting. Marginalization is not as much about the quantities of experiences as it is about qualities of experience.

(Takagi 1996: 22-23)

Weir (1996: 31) concurs that the valorisation of the marginalized homosexual has lead to the unhelpful creation of "positive" stereotypes that are "as cliched as anything the religious right might dream up". Because the racial identities of the non-white lesbians are not valorised in Go Fish, the filmmakers are not imposed with the burden of representing them "positively". Similarly, as Kia and Evy are not set up to be representative of all non-white lesbians, they do not have to voice a particular ideological position.

Nevertheless, the influence of "politically correct" discourses of race is evident in the way Kia and Evy, the only two central lesbians of colour, are characterised as lovers. Evy's relationship with Kia is shown becoming more intimate after the loss of her Latino family. Later scenes where Evy consistently appears with Kia suggest that the lesbian household run by Kia actually become Evy's alternative family. Though Evy initially rejects the suggestion that a white lesbian community can be a viable replacement of her Latino family, the presence of her African-American lover Kia indicates that the lesbian community is racially diverse enough to understand Evy's loss of familial support against racism. This brings me to the wider implications of the Evy and Kia's ethnicities, and their interracial relationship.

On separatism:

In earlier chapters, I argued that non-whites have frequently been "othered" as different in Western discourse in order to deter interracial heterosexual relationships. I now suggest that the discourse against interracial sexual relationships and platonic friendships is not unique to white Western society. hooks (1994), for instance, elaborates on the way certain groups of black people and communities advocate an apparently similar racially separatist position.

Simon Watney was talking about marginalized communities who will protest certain forms of domination (like the notion of "exclusion/inclusion" whereby they are excluded) but then invent their *own* little group wherein the same practices determine who is allowed into their "community." We see that happening now with the recent return to a black cultural nationalism where a new, well-educated, cool, chic, avant-garde group of black people (who perhaps five years ago had lot of white friends or mixed friends) now say, "I really want to associate *only* with black people or black people and people of color."

(bell hooks 1994: 233)

The desire for racial separatism amongst black people who wish to rebel against white hegemonic domination is similarly prevalent within certain groups of black lesbians. Mason-John and Okorowa suggest that the split amongst black lesbians about whether to remain separatist can be identified by their attitudes towards interracial friendships

and romantic relationships with white women. Some lesbians of color accuse non-white lesbians who date white women of "selling out".

African, Caribbean and Asian women only make up part of the Black lesbian community, and even among ourselves there are numerous different racial and class groupings. ...some Black lesbians have chosen to have white women as lovers, and as intimate friends. This can and does arouse extreme suspicion, as it is believed that such women are colluding in racist ideas. Accused of betraying their Black sisters and of selling out on their culture, they are labelled as confused and out of touch with their Black identities.

(Mason-John & Okorowa 1995:84)

However, their opposition to interracial relationships is only limited to those with white women. There is seldom any opposition against interracial relationships amongst other non-whites of different races, whether they are of African, Caribbean or Asian descent. As the category "black", like the category "people of colour" (more frequently used in the US), includes non-whites of different races, a separatist black lesbian generally remains "politically sound" if she is interracially involved with another woman of colour.

Couples in a mixed race white and non-white relationship are susceptible to cultural prejudices and racist attitudes due to the objective differences in life experiences and power relationships in a

white-dominated society.... But when two minorities struggle to forge a relationship, the obstacle of race does not become an issue.

(Mangaoang 1996: 109-110)

Even though the belief that all non-white people have a similar understanding of racism within a white society can be criticised as idealistic rhetoric, such beliefs are popular amongst many black separatists. Herein lies the difference, too, between black separatist rhetoric and white separatism. As long as the black person is not involved with a white person, involvement with any persons of color, of whatever racial or ethnic origin, can still be considered "politically correct". Whilst critics such as Young (1995: 104), Young (1996: 48), Bhabha (1986, rpt in 1990a: 71-88) and Hall (cf. Morley and Chen 1996: 12) accurately identify white separatism as partially arising from a desire for racial purity, their remarks are not applicable to black separatism. Black separatism does not appear to stem, as hooks (1994: 233) suggests, primarily from a desire for racial purity, but more as part of an oppositional discourse, as a reactionary political statement.

Calls for unity among lesbians of colour were widely publicised in the North American and British lesbian magazines (and other media) around the time Go Fish was produced. Therefore, the relationship between the only two non-white central characters should be read as a positive attempt to realise such politicised racial discourses. Consequently, Evy and Kia's racial difference from one another is not merely politically "acceptable", it can even be seen as a "desirable" manifestation of the way in which two lesbians of color, from different races, can develop a harmonious

relationship that excludes white participants. However, the film's representation of racial separatism does not extend to depicting the way in which certain reactionary sections of the heterosexual black communities use similar separatist discourses to argue that non-white lesbians should be excommunicated. Perhaps resulting from a different sort of reactionary politics against assimilation, many communities of color have labelled black lesbians and gay men as traitors because of their homosexual identification. Critics such as Hammonds (1994), Mercer (1994) and Parmar (1993) argue that contemporary political culture makes it possible for black lesbians to be cast as "traitors to the race" (Hammonds 1994:137).

There have been and always will be lesbians and gay men in the black communities, but our existence is denied by a conservative sexual morality and a set of overly rigid attitudes which have developed amongst some black people as an "overcompensation" against racist myths of slackness and depravity.

(Mercer 1994:158)

The differing separatist discourses of race within the non-white lesbian community and separatist discourses against homosexuality within non-white communities have left many lesbians and gay men of color caught in the difficult position of having to negotiate their varying racial and sexual affiliations. (Parmar 1993:5) I suggest that despite their contradictory agendas, both separatist groups (the former calls for lesbians of colour to form a supportive community by politically uniting whilst the latter calls for them to be expelled from the non-white communities) originate from the same

impulse – the desire to distance themselves from white cultures. However, in order to prevent alienating its predominantly white lesbian audience, *Go Fish*'s representation of such contemporary separatist discourses is limited to the relatively unthreatening (to white audiences) image of non-white lesbians as lovers. The low regard in which lesbians are held within communities of colour (because they are thought to pollute the "race" with "white" contamination) is not represented in this generally light-hearted comedy.

Just as lesbian audiences are not alienated by anti-lesbian images, so images which might offend separatist white and separatist black audiences are excluded. Like certain white purists, some black separatists dislike images of white/non-white interracial relationships, although as I have already established, for different reasons. Dyer suggests that due to the history of racial oppression and scarcity of images of black male couples, the implication of two black men looking at one another vastly differs from the image of a white man and a black man interacting. His remarks are equally applicable to representations of black women.

Yet the moment one acknowledges the history of black subjection to white, any merely textual equality of treatment (were it there) evaporates. A white man subjugating a black man always gives off a different odour, intended or otherwise, from the reverse or two men of the same colour.

(Dyer 1990:88)

Like many contemporary cinematic representations of lesbian and gay men of color, the filmmakers of Go Fish have been caught in a difficult moment where almost any form of representation can be criticised for being either too separatist, or not separatist enough, reactionary, or not political enough. It becomes difficult for such films to depict non-white homosexual characters with either white lovers or non-white lovers because both representations can be criticised for being over or under representative. Consequently, while the representation of the white/white and non-white/non-white lesbian relationships can be criticised for maintaining politically safe images of racially non-threatening relationships, a defence can equally be made that since images of black homosexual couples are rare, they are themselves politically progressive.

Images of Black couples are rare, and are assumed to address Black women only. They are seldom used to demonstrate diversity in the lesbian community, because White lesbians who cannot see their Whiteness reflected back at them do not related to these images. A Black lesbian without a White lesbian is invisible to, avoided and feared by White lesbians.

(Blackman 1995:190)

Since Go Fish was made during the time when conflicting separatist and non-separatist racial and sexual discourses were widely circulating, the pairing of the only two central lesbians of color with one another as well as the white lesbians with each other, is perhaps contradictorily both the "safest" and most racially radical representation possible.

Sign of the Times:

Running alongside the attempt not to distance audiences with interracial white/non-white romantic relationships is the slightly contradictory endeavour to depict a multicultural world where one is not judged according to race. Although the only relationships that the non-white characters have on screen are with each other, the audience later finds out that Evy has had a sexual relationship with at least one white lesbian, Daria. The revelation that Max, the white heroine, also fancies Evy suggests that these characters are not racially separatist. Similarly, Evy's lover, Kia, cannot be racially separatist, as she lives with white lesbians and has white friends. Such racially inclusive narratives "tone down" the racially separatist on-screen representation of Kia and Evy's sexual relationship and serves as another signature of a queer film. Queer "knows" the contemporary separatist political discourses of sexuality and race, but it does not itself espouse a separatist position. Instead, it is more *carefully* inclusive than separatist. The representation of Evy's history with white lovers, and her current on-screen lover as non-white, can be read as simultaneously straddling the political position advocated by racial separatists whilst striving to present a queer non-separatist view of racial difference.

Like the film's carefully "safe" representation of racial difference, the representation of homosexual differences, specifically intra-homosexual (not inter-gender) issues, is equally self-aware. This self-reflective interrogation by the filmmakers is further

exemplified by the scene in which Max and Ely discuss the burden of responsibility faced by queer filmmakers when their homosexual audiences demand positive images. Their brief debate draws on work by critics such as Dyer (1990), Julien (1992) and Mercer (1994) which examines the impossibility of fulfilling the desire for affirmative lesbian/gay films.

The project of producing positive images is an impossible one. Though it may have the best intentions of redressing imbalances in the field of representation, it is bound to fail as it will never be able to address questions of ambivalence or transgression.

(Julien 1992: 261)

Despite the lack of conclusion concerning the necessity and possibility of perpetually "positive" queer representation, later scenes in Go Fish contain "happy" scenes of well-adjusted lesbians. These include scenes of happy lesbian households, satisfying lesbian sex, a lesbian party and successful of lesbian relationships. The creation of a "realistic" yet utopic positive lesbian world is facilitated by the stereotypical representation of the five central characters, easily identified by lesbian audiences as particular lesbian "types" or people they know from real lesbian subcultures. The characters have little complexity, serving as mouthpieces, each representing only one aspect of lesbian existence and airing the different opinions which are important to the lesbian community. However, as the characters never let their differences splinter the various lesbian households, Go Fish ends on a positive note, becoming itself a positive queer films, just as Ely and Max had hoped for.

Though the marketing strategies target the mainstream heterosexual audience, the narrative concerns of the film indicate that its primary audience is a lesbian one. Ironically, in marked contrast to the often-alienating agenda of queer politics, because the film is influenced by queer discourses of sexual diversity and racial inclusiveness, it has become a crossover success with the mainstream audience. This success is probably assisted by the fact that the film is a romantic comedy. Heterosexual audiences are invited to laugh along and rejoice with lesbian characters who are neither racial separatists nor intolerant of non-lesbian sexual practices. Additionally, because the narrative of Go Fish is predominantly about queer lesbian lifestyles, little screen time is spent interrogating the role which heterosexuals play in homosexual oppression. As I suggested earlier in the chapter, such a representation does not implicate heterosexual audiences, and at the same time, provides a refreshing change for homosexual audiences.

Endnotes (Chapter 4):

¹ Despite searching through numerous publications such as Andrea Weiss' Vampires and Violets: lesbians in the cinema (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), Raymond Murray's Images in the dark: an encyclopaedia of gay and lesbian film and video (USA: TLA Publications, 1994) and Jenni Olsen's The Ultimate Guide to Lesbian and Gay Film and Video (London: Serpent's Tail, 1996) as well as the current and back catalogues of the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, besides Go Fish. I could find only one other feature length contemporary Western film where the non-white homosexual character also has a non-white lover: Zero Patience (Canada 1993). However, I will not be looking at this film since the two Black male lovers in the latter film are only marginal characters who only appear in a few brief scenes together.

² These films include Desert Hearts (USA 1985), She Must Be Seeing Things (USA 1987) and Salmonberries (Germany/USA 1993).

³ Although Samuel Goldwyn eventually bought the film, hence facilitating the mainstream publicity and widespread distribution in mainstream cinemas throughout the world, Go Fish started as an independent project (with limited assistance from the queer producers Christine Vachon, Tom Kalin and John Pierson).

⁴ cf. Neale, S. and F. Krutnik. Popular Film and Romantic Comedy. New York: Routledge, 1990. 132-173.

⁵ I have already mentioned in relation to Bovs on the Side that depictions of intense female friendship are now commonplace in mainstream cinema. Even though some earlier heterosexual-feminist and lesbian-feminist discourses, such as Adrienne Rich's (1980) pioneering article "Compulsory Heterosexuality", argue that women-centered relationships ranging widely from sexual lesbian ones to platonic heterosexual female bonding similarly threaten the institution of heterosexual patriarchy, the relatively large number of male dominated Hollywood funded films featuring female bonding narratives indicate that this is not necessarily so. Critics such as Calhoun (1994) and Chua (1994) suggest that the similarity of the threat to heterosexuals posed by platonic female friendship, however close, and explicitly sexual lesbianism is over emphasized by the earlier feminist accounts.

⁶ During my three different viewing of Bound at different mainstream cinemas in London and Coventry, I noticed members of the audience who walk out of the screening during the explicit lesbian sex scenes are always women. Even though it is hard to accurately determine one's sexual identity from physical appearance alone, my lesbian friends who accompanied me during to these shows agree that the women "look heterosexual".

⁷ Examples include Desert Hearts (USA 1985), Forbidden Love (Canada 1992) and Claire of the Moon (USA 1992).

⁸ These include Swoon, Looking for Langston, Can't You Take A Joke? (Australia 1989), She Don't Fade (USA 1991), The Attendant (UK 1993), Twilight of the Gods/Te Keremutunga o Nga Atua (NZ, 1995) and The Watermelon Woman (USA

1997).

⁹ Although funded by Channel 4 on a relatively big (for UK) budget, the director, Isaac Julien, is well known as an independent whose work is considered consistently technically and narratively unconventional.

¹⁰ As I suggested in relation to Boys on the Side, there is a correlation between the recent mainstream popularity of "cross-over" lesbian films, the creation of "lesbian chic" and the renewed demonizing of gay men as inflicted HIV/AIDS carriers. Although not substantiated by a statistical survey, I believe that since the advent of the AIDS epidemic in the late 1980s, lesbians have to some extent replaced gay men as the token "harmless but entertaining gay friend/pet/hairdresser" in mainstream films of the 1990s.

¹¹ For critical references and a more detailed account of these arguments, please refer to the section on "Discourse surrounding the sexual representation of lesbian and gay subjects in film texts" in my review of literature chapter.

¹² I only discovered the Latino ancestry of the other co-writer/director (Rose Troche) after reading a draft essay, "Simple Pleasures: Lesbians, Humor and Go Fish", by Lisa Henderson of the Department of Communication at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Her ethnicity is not mentioned in any of the publicity material and interviews I read.

¹³ In particular, see Moraga (1996: 298).

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CHAPTER 5:**DISCOURSES OF HYBRIDITY IN *FRESH KILL*.**

Like Go Fish, Fresh Kill reflects the impact that contemporary discourses of race and sexuality have on the cinematic representation of non-white homosexuals. However, whilst queer discourse of sexuality is privileged in Go Fish, it is only one of many anti-essentialist discourses running through Fresh Kill. "Politically correct" discourses of race, retained in Go Fish, are discarded in Fresh Kill. All forms of identity politics are interrogated, including racial ones celebrated by racial separatists and contradictorily held by some supposedly anti-essentialist queer activists. Consequently, in addition to examining the influence of queer discourses of sexual diversity in Fresh Kill, I shall draw on contemporary discourses of racial hybridity to discuss the way in which racial essentialism is problematised in the film.

I shall begin by suggesting that by drawing on discourses of racial hybridity, we are able to move beyond the impossible debate centering around images of non-white homosexuals in film, and whether they are positive or negative, authentic or stereotypical. The work of filmmakers and theorists such as Bhabha (1994, 1996), Hall (1996a, 1996b, 1996c), Trinh (1990), Mercer (1993, 1994), Julien (1992, 1996) and Fung (1995) is particularly useful in moving us beyond binaristic good/bad debates. Although these critics do not use the term "hybridity" consistently, their definitions of "third space", "in-between" and "border crossing" are remarkably similar, referring to subjects or representations that are politically useful in resisting racial essentialism because they defy classification. Therefore, for reasons of manageability, I will review

such theories using only the term "hybridity".

The second part of this paper is a discussion of the film Fresh Kill (USA 1994) in relation to discourses of racial hybridity and queer sexual diversity. I shall argue that Fresh Kill's representation of a world populated by people of different races and sexualities displaces the white heterosexual subject as the "norm" against which all "others" are measured. Consequently, questions about whether traditionally sexually or racially marginalized characters (such as Shareen, the non-white homosexual central character) are depicted "authentically", whether positively or negatively, are rendered redundant. Finally, I suggest that Fresh Kill, though very different from Go Fish, is also part of an emerging group of films containing non-white homosexuals reflecting the shifting representation of traditionally marginalized racial and sexual "minorities".

Hybridity:

Discourses of hybridity are considered useful when discussing marginalized subjects for two central reasons. Firstly, since hybridity avoids organising differences in binaristic categories around an authoritative centre, traditionally minoritized subjects are no longer defined as the negative binary "other". Bhabha argues that "the hybrid strategy" becomes a point from which such subjects begin the process of re-negotiating their positions of marginalization.

In my own work I have developed the concept of hybridity to describe

the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity. Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the 'authoritative', even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign. At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalised knowledge or a normalising, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration.

(Bhabha 1996: 58)

Bhabha emphasises the point that the hybrid negotiation of traditional hegemonies is not inversion - where the previously marginalized outsider occupies the position of privilege. This leads me to the second related point. Since hybridity problematises all identities based on binaristic categories of difference, the identity politics of *all* groups are called to question, including those of oppositional activists. Critics such as Trinh (1990), Bhabha (1996) and Hall (1996a) have pointed out that all identities, even minoritized ones, contain their silenced "other" or "centre". Likewise, activist groups formed to contest the process of their own marginalization can often end up privileging some minority groups over others. Consequently, their calls for more "positive" or "authentic" forms of representation can be problematic. Someone is always excluded.

hooks (1992) warns that the repeated marginalization of an essentialised "other" can also be the result of an essentialist call for more "authentic" representation. She argues that "celebrative" positive images of an authentic racial "other" often reinstate

contemporary white society's desire for difference (hooks 1992: 26). The recent proliferation of American films featuring sympathetic homosexual characters has emerged alongside overwhelming public support for anti-homosexual legislation and suggests hook's argument is also useful in explaining the way in which homosexuals continue to be marginalized (even when their sexual difference is celebrated as "interesting"). This selective celebration of racial and sexual minorities has in turn led to frequent competition amongst marginalized groups about who is the more "oppressed" and who deserves more attention or funding. Mercer (1993: 239) suggests that hybrid discourses avoid such problems because identities are not thought to be mutually exclusive. This approach avoids binaristic opposition and minorities (such as non-white people and homosexuals) cease to be defined solely in opposition to an established white heterosexual norm.

The move away from binaristic categories is crucial in distinguishing discourses of hybridity from discourses of multiculturalism and liberalism. Before I elaborate on definitions of and differences between these, I shall draw on Grossberg to briefly explain the pivotal distinction between the theories of "difference" and theories of "otherness" underlying the three discourses mentioned above. Grossberg (1996: 93-4) argues that theories of "difference" take difference itself as a given - as able to exist positively in its own place and independently of any *specific* relation. However, theories of "otherness" assume that difference is itself a historically produced economy, imposed by modern power structures. Therefore, "the other" refers to that which is defined by its negative binary relation to the hegemonic centre.

Although discourses of liberalism favour "assimilating" social minorities whilst discourses of multiculturalism emphasise celebrating their "otherness", they both rely on binaristic notions of "otherness". Instead of one set of "binaries", multiple identities consist of many sets placed together. The same problems arise, such as who is more oppressed, since the negative half of the binary opposition continues to be focused upon. Fung (1995: 128) has pointed out that even though no-one's identity can be more multiple than another's, discussions of "multiple identities" are normally thought to refer to "oppressed" subjects alone. In contrast, the middle-class white heterosexual man is rarely thought to possess a multiple identity. These discourses of multiculturalism, Bhabha concurs, remain unhelpful in political terms as they are based on discriminatory definitions of multiple identities.

[In] multiculturalism... the identificatory language of discrimination works in reverse: 'the racial/cultural identity of "true nationals" remains invisible but is inferred from... the quasi-hallucinatory visibility of the "false nationals" - Jews, "wops", immigrants, *indios*, *natives*, blacks'.

(Bhabha 1996: 55)

Bhabha (1996: 56) argues that like multiculturalism, discourses of liberalism do not adequately problematise the process of marginalization. Even though both discourses of multiculturalism and liberalism appear to draw attention to the marginalized position of groups like non-white homosexuals, their usefulness continue to be limited since racial, sexual and other differences remain defined in binaristic opposition to an unproblematised white heterosexual norm. The "otherness" of racial, sexual and/or

other minorities continues to be negatively highlighted despite the liberal or multicultural arguments which are made for their social tolerance, acceptance, celebration or assimilation.

By contrast, discourses of hybridity do not see difference in binaristic terms, thereby eschewing notions of an essentialised timeless "other" measured against a predetermined (usually white heterosexual) norm. While it does not ignore the differences between people in terms of race, sexuality, gender, class or culture, hybridity does not seek to think in terms of identities which are fixed in a binaristic "otherness" producing discourse. Generally theorised as that which eludes rigid categorisation, (that is, the fluid space between identities), an attempt to fix and categorise "hybridity" risks a definition contrary to its ethos. Perhaps for this reason, though they have been invoked by a number of critics, discourses of "hybridity" have not been extensively theorised. I shall draw on existing discourses of hybridity to examine the way binaristic racial and sexual categories are eschewed in the representation of non-whites and/or homosexuals in Fresh Kill.

Fresh Kill:

Fresh Kill was written by Jessica Hagedorn and directed by the Taiwanese born, New York based video artist, Shu Lea Cheang. (USA 1994/80 mins). Funded by various North American organisations such as the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Rockefeller Foundation, New York State Council for the Arts, National Asian American Telecommunication Association and the American Film Institute, the feature length film was screened predominantly in film festivals. The interest of arthouse theatres in screening the film is probably due to its avant-garde, MTV and Post-Warhol influenced style, and the appearances of well-known North American performance artists Ron Vawter, Karen Finley and Kate Valk. Additionally, because two of the central characters are involved in a lesbian relationship, the film was screened in various International Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals. Fresh Kill was also broadcast in Britain on BBC's Channel Two "Dyke TV" in 1995, indicating that it has been taken up by lesbian programmers.

Briefly, the film consists of a variety of narratives set mainly in New York City during the 1990s. Seemingly unrelated political issues such as environmental pollution, the politics of nuclear waste disposal, the power of the American government and big multinational companies are intercut with scenes depicting the relationship between Shareen Lightfoot, her lover Claire Mayakovsky, and their daughter Honey. Although Honey goes missing for a number of days, the mystery of her disappearance is not the dominant narrative of the film. Other narratives are given similar screen-time, including those depicting the lives of other characters, the public protest against the

dangerous disposal of toxic nuclear waste by irresponsible governments, and the issue of class-based society ruled by multinational corporations.

The opening sequence introduces the global backdrop in which the multinational corporations operate. The film begins with a stationary medium shot of a Polynesian-looking canoe bobbing in the ocean. The following shot consists of a blue computer screen which fills up the entire frame. "Island for Sale" is printed in big type on this blue screen. The words "Call 0800-555-DUMP" flash next. A sudden cut is then made, to an extreme long shot of Manhattan Island overshadowed by a heavy reddish black sky. Rapid techno music starts playing in the background. The camera zooms jerkily across the ocean towards an apocalyptic cityscape. As Manhattan Island starts to fill the screen, a cut is made again. A medium shot reveals a South Asian woman in her late twenties standing in a Manhattan street looking annoyed. After she exclaims: "Oh no, not some more," a cut is made to an open air squat in Manhattan filled with rubbish and peopled by homeless characters who quotes poetic verses. A camera pan reveals numerous television screens stacked together followed by close ups of a television broadcasting "ACC" news. The location then shifts from Manhattan to the Pacific. Medium shots of a Pacific Island woman watching TV and a young Asian boy hitting an abandoned TV screen on a tropical beach fill the screen. A sudden cut returns the audience from the Pacific to New York City. Extreme close-ups of a fish are intercut with the interior of a trendy inner-city sushi bar filled with well-heeled professionals.

This entire sequence lasts just three minutes. In that short space of time, the camera has jumped from shots of homeless squats in New York City, coastal scenes in Taiwan, the

Pacific Ocean and back to the interior of a sushi bar in New York City. The cinematic techniques employed in these first three minutes continue to be evident throughout the film. The use of rapid edits to depict many unexplained and apparently unrelated scenes, in unidentified global locations, mean the plot is not presented as a linear narrative according to a temporal time frame. Although employment of apparently incoherent MTV-like unrelated short scenes is just a style of filmmaking, the decision to employ such filming techniques can be read as a stylistic hybrid refusal to create a centre.

The narrative and stylistic foregrounding of "film as film" (arguably a standard postmodern style employed in "alternative" filmmaking), can be read as the film's refusal to pretend to be an unmediated representation of "reality". This in turn suggests that the issue of representation - of who and what is represented - is questioned rather than naturalised in the manner of films which seek to "mirror" the "real world". References are made within the film narrative to the prevalence of technology in the characters' lives and the crucial role it plays as both a liberatory tool, and a means to control "the people". The numerous television sets and computer screens shown in the opening scene of the film hint at their (later) central role in influencing and changing the characters' lives. Close-ups of security cameras also reveal that unsuspecting citizens, including Miguel, an increasingly paranoid character, are constantly monitored.

These technological tools, security cameras, computers and television sets are represented as conduits through which government-sponsored multinational

corporations, such as the "ACC", can broadcast capitalist and homophobic propaganda into both public places and private spaces/homes. Many different shots accentuate the fact that people of all races, nationalities and economic backgrounds, (ranging from the homeless Americans who live in squats, middle-class American executives and poor Pacific Islanders), watch ACC television broadcasts. However, Fresh Kill is not a typical "anti-technology" film. Instead of merely emphasising the way in which people's private lives are involuntarily invaded by technology, its narratives suggest technology can also be a useful tool for subversive anti-capitalist activism. Public access television and the internet for example, are presented as technological tools which allow activist groups to unite globally against the capitalist American government.

Shots of anti-establishment public access television broadcasts fronted by Mimi, (the racially unidentified "black-looking" "mother" of the apparently white and possibly lesbian character, Claire), are intercut with the scenes of ACC broadcasts. Similarly featured are shots of internet sites disputing the "official" news given in ACC broadcasts. Jianbin, who surfs the internet constantly, also hacks into ACC sites in an attempt to stop a shipment of toxic waste to Africa and to forge political alliance with activists from the African Unity Network. His subversive use of the internet reflects arguments made by critics such as Tsang (1996) and Wakeford (1997). They argue that the internet is seen as a utopic place where minoritized individuals of different races, sexualities and political allegiances can communicate without being easily monitored by one central controlling body (be it the national government, the mainstream press or other big corporations). To date there are few means by which governments and

organisations can impose internet censorship. It is commonly perceived therefore to be a useful protest site giving voice to excluded members of society.

The soundtrack of Fresh Kill also underscores the importance of technology. Techno-rap music accompanies many shots of internet surfing, resembling the rhythms of furious television channel switching. The crucial role which both the internet and technology play in the film is further highlighted by breaks in the soundtrack for techno-noises - static, modem connections, and telephones redialling. The importance of the internet and technology is further emphasised through the use of lighting. The entire film is shot in sumptuous, nuke-glo colour and some scenes in Fresh Kill appear as close ups of Jianbin's similarly lit computer screen. The illusion is created that the audience is watching a giant computer screen, hinting at a narrative allegiance with internet surfers - people of diverse race, nationality and sexuality. The presence of technology and multimedia in the film is thus both literally and symbolically subversive. As multimedia technology is foregrounded, it acts as a symbolic refusal of centre, be it nationalistic, racial or sexual; an important aspect of discourses of hybridity.

As well as establishing the importance of the use of technology, the opening sequence reveals an unspecified relationship between the Pacific Islands and Manhattan Island. This relationship is made more explicit by a lingering close-up of a fish in a trendy New York City sushi bar towards the end of the first three minutes. Since this shot follows one of Pacific Islanders in a canoe, the audience is invited to conclude that Pacific Islanders caught the fish. However, the assumption that New York City

inhabitants are all rich diners who profit off the toil of Pacific Islanders is complicated by intercuts of homeless people in New York City. The bored and strangely dissatisfied Pacific Islanders mingling with better dressed fellow Islanders further problematise another popular misconception, namely, that life is idyllic in the Pacific where wealth is equally distributed. In fact, these shots suggest there is a Third World within every First World, and, reciprocally, a First World within the Third World.

The center is itself marginal... For, how possible is it to undertake a process of decentralization without being made aware of the margins within the center and the centers within the margins?

(Trinh 1990: 330-331)

Scenes set in "First World" USA, where characters of diverse race are shown living in squats and eating at a yuppie sushi bar, demonstrate that wealth is not divided along racial lines. The representation of both homeless and rich men and women also suggests that wealth is not drawn along gender lines. Similarly, traditional racial stereotypes are called to question by the depiction of rich and poor people of different races. I shall defer discussion of the way race is represented to first examine the questioning of sexual norms.

Homosexual Difference:

Despite being interracial and homosexual, Shareen and Claire's relationship is not

presented as a problematic deviation from a white heterosexual norm. The central character, Shareen, is played by the well-known South Asian actress, Sarita Choudhury, who starred in two popular films. The first, Mississippi Masala (USA 1991), directed by Mira Nair, is a racially and politically controversial film about an interracial heterosexual relationship between an African-American man (Denzel Washington) and an Indian woman born in Africa (Choudhury). In the second, Kama Sutra (USA/India 1997), also directed by Nair, Choudhury stars as a spoilt princess who develops a strong emotional and slightly sexual bond with another woman. This film was banned for sometime in India, the country where it is set, for its explicit representation of taboo inter-caste and gender transgressive sexual acts. Choudhury's role in Fresh Kill, produced in the period between Nair's two films, sees her starring in an equally sexually and interracial transgressive role, as the female lover of the character Claire Mayakovsky, who is played by a white actress, Erin McMurdy. As young co-parents of a girl who is kidnapped, Shareen and Claire become caught up in protests against the irresponsible disposal of industrial waste, and contaminated radioactive sushi.

At this stage, it is necessary to point out that even though I use the term "homosexual" and "lesbian" to describe Shareen and Claire, they are not specifically (verbally) labelled as such within the film (despite the inclusion of two explicit sex scenes between them). Neither is their relationship singled out as different from the other (presumably heterosexual) characters -narratively or via the soundtrack, camera framing and mise-en-scene. Clayton, the only character whom the women fear might disapprove of their relationship, eventually accepts their relationship and child. They

are not presented as particular lesbian types who are largely defined by their homosexuality, unlike Go Fish and most other films whose central characters are homosexuals. As I have already argued in the Review of Literature and Chapter Four, such "typifying" representations are often complicated by questions of "authenticity". Mercer (1994: 92) argues even positive stereotypes frequently and paradoxically lead to the re-marginalization of the minorities they depict.

Hall (1996c: 449) suggests that the representation of characters who cross racial and sexual "boundaries" is more useful in problematising negative stereotypes than in developing stereotypically positive ones. Shareen and Claire are complex characters neither racially nor sexually stereotyped, so the problems of re-marginalization (through positive, negative or authentic representations) are avoided. The vast majority of screen time is devoted to developing the non-sexual non-racial aspects of their characters, such as their suspicion of capitalist politics and nuclear waste disposal. The lack of emphasis on a specifically lesbian identity is not the same as "assimilation" into a heterosexual norm. Instead, a comparable lack of discussion about other characters' sexual identities functions to displace heterosexuality as the norm against which all sexualities are measured.

Just as Shareen can only be presumed to be homosexual or bisexual and not a heterosexually identified woman involved with another heterosexual woman, it follows that the (hetero)sexual identities of other characters can only be assumed. There are few clues in the dialogue to help reveal the sexual identities of characters in Fresh Kill. Their sexual preferences are not disclosed visually either. Jianbin's

ambiguous sexuality, for instance, is reinforced through the use of unusual camera angles. The bathtub scene, the only time he is shown with a lover, is framed in a way which avoids exposing his lover's gender.

As characters are not binaristically identified as heterosexual or homosexual, and since "hybridity" is generally characterised as that which is not locked into binary oppositions, the representation of a world of sexual diversity can be read an example of sexual hybridity. These sexual representations can also be considered queer. Though sexual politics and identities are not highlighted in Fresh Kill as they are in other queer films, the displacement of heterosexuality as the norm renders the film's sexual representation queer. As I have mentioned in previous chapters, queer sexuality is usually theorized as encompassing all sexually transgressive acts, including heterosexual ones that do not assist in establishing a heterosexual "norm". Consequently, the numerous non-heterosexually identified characters in Fresh Kill can be considered queer.

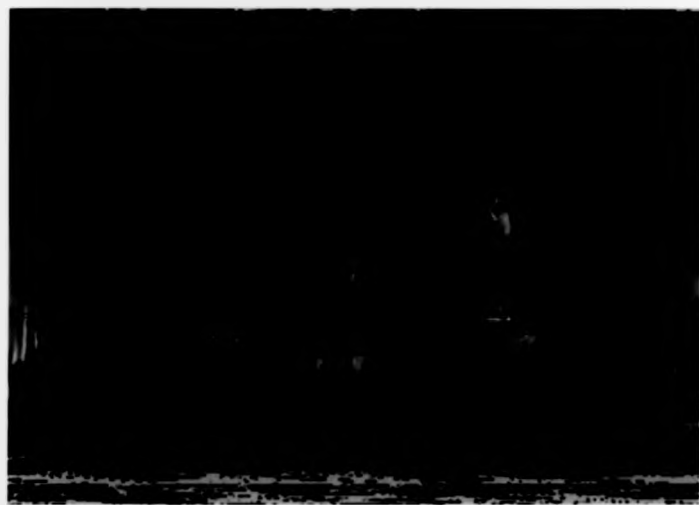
Strategically placed scenes depicting instances of homophobia further point to the influence of queer discourses on Fresh Kill's narrative. Even though Shareen and Claire's lesbian relationship is not predominantly characterised as a "problem", scenes of homophobia demonstrating that evidence of heterosexism can be attributed to the influence of queer activist discourses. These are also the few moments where the world of sexual hybridity - depicted through most of the film - risks reverting to that of the binaristic "heterosexual versus homosexual". However, the characters' response to homophobic situations reveals their resistance to a binaristic placement

opposite a heterosexual norm.

The first scene illustrating this occurs during a counselling session after Honey turns green from radioactive toxic poisoning. The female consultant tells Claire and Shareen that Honey's affliction is the result of lacking a "strong male role model". Although the scene is brief, the pronounced effect of the consultant's homophobic remarks is seen in the next shot where Claire is replaced by Shareen's "pretend husband", Jianbin. Claire's substitution by Jianbin is emphasised by the identical *mise-en-scene* and positions taken by the sitting characters in both scenes. Claire's abrupt replacement by Jianbin also demonstrates that Claire and Shareen acknowledge the consultant's subtle homophobic disavowal of their relationship and their ability to raise a child properly. However, although Claire, Shareen and Jianbin do not verbally protest, the incongruous comic appearance of an ineffectual Jianbin, bored Shareen and uncured Honey, suggest that the consultant's heterosexist view is incorrect.

The next instance of homophobia occurs in the parking lot where Shareen has been playing a game of pool with male friend, Billyboy. A medium shot depicts Shareen trying to rub off some graffiti next to the graphic lesbian sign that the women had spray painted on her truck. Billyboy stands by watching silently. The scene does not contain any dialogue, music or diegetic sound. Despite the lack of disclosure, either verbal or visual, revealing the nature of the graffiti, Shareen and Billyboy's upset expressions combined with a close-up of the lesbian sign, suggest it is anti-lesbian.

A third and more virulently homophobic attack on the lesbians is made significantly by



a white upper-middle class heterosexual man, the chief executive of ACC, (the company guilty of selling radioactively contaminated products to the public). A rare extended scene, it begins with a close up of a television broadcasting a statement by an ACC chief executive. After rambling on about Shareen and Claire being unsuitable parents because of their homosexuality, he concludes defensively that despite possible accusations of homophobia, he did not kidnap Honey. Once again, Shareen, Claire and their friends do not respond to the executive's homophobic taunts. It is rather the unflattering camera angles of the executive which undermines the traditionally authoritative position he occupies as a white heterosexual man.

The three scenes described above epitomise the way homophobia and lesbianism are represented in the film. Despite the lack of vocal protests, visual images are used to ridicule the heterosexism of the consultant, graffiti painter and executive. The lesbian characters are aware and silently resistant of the homophobic abuse they are subjected to. Shareen and Claire's lack of overt opposition, therefore, can be read as a refusal to explain or justify their homosexuality - a refusal to be defined sexually in binaristic opposition to a heterosexual norm.

Shareen's unexplained reluctance in telling her father about her relationship with Claire exemplifies further the lack of verbal explanation concerning "typical" problems faced by lesbians. While lesbian audiences might assume Shareen fears her father's negative reaction, this assumption is not supported by textual evidence. The lack of narrative explanation about the lesbian characters' reactions and the absence of arguments or justification for why lesbians should have equal rights, or should not be discriminated

against, are not typical of films containing homosexual central characters. For some lesbian and gay audiences used to polarized negative or idealistically positive representations of homosexuality, this simultaneously unapologetic and non-advocatory representation of lesbianism is refreshing. Fresh Kill's approach operates on the assumption that the audience is already knowledgeable about homosexual films and the instances of homophobia faced by their characters. Fresh Kill does not attempt to depict a representative lesbian community to either a straight or queer audience.

Race:

The traditionally normative white subject is also decentered by the representation of a world populated by racially and culturally diverse characters of East Asian, South Asian, Native American, Hispanic, Pacific Island, African and white European descent. Instead of presenting non-whites as racial "others", racial diversity is depicted as the "norm" in present day New York City, where the film is predominantly set. However, because racial diversity is emphasised and specific racial identities are characterised as irrelevant, the film's racial representation has been criticised as utopic with an unpoliticized representation of racial difference. (1) Although such criticisms accurately identify how depicting a non-separatist, racially diverse world (where interracial relationships are presented as normal) leads to the natural inclusion of characters whose diverse racial origins appear mixed or undefined, such a representation is not necessarily unpoliticised. The inclusion of racially hybrid characters challenges naturalised notions of race. It also problematises the process of racial othering based

on binaristic white/non-white categorisation of racial purity. The racial identities of Claire, Shareen and Honey's parents, for example, appear different from theirs.

Shareen, the lesbian of colour, is played by a well-known South Asian actress. Instead of being South Asian as well, Shareen's father is characterised as Native American (2) - Clayton Lightfoot. Her mother is not featured, so her racial origin cannot explain why a Native American man has a South Asian daughter. Again, there is no racial correlation between Claire and her mother, Mimi. Although Claire is obviously white, she has a black mother. Their shared last name, Mayakovsky, offers no clue to their specific racial origins. Their black mother/white daughter racial difference upsets notions of naturalised raciality in questioning the assumption that black mothers do not have white daughters.

The obvious explanation for Claire and Shareen's surprising racial difference from their parents is that they have been adopted. However, the film is not concerned with tracing family lineages or explaining parentage. Honey's biological parents are not clearly identified. Honey looks as if she is of African descent, though co-parents Claire and Shareen are, respectively, white and South Asian. Her double-barrelled surname "Mayakovsky-Lightfoot" does not reveal her father's identity. The ACC reporter's speculation that Jianbin could be her birth father remains unconfirmed. By not explaining specific racial origins, the process of racial marginalization is disrupted and negative cultural stereotypes about the way groups of non-white people should behave cannot be fulfilled. However, some film distributors become worried about buying, promoting and screening films which do not specifically depict and target an

identifiable racial group. (3) The seemingly random racial casting can also be misread as "colour blind" casting.

Straayer (1996) argues that colour-blind casting is often problematic because the prevalence of filmic racial and sexual stereotypes is not adequately interrogated. The solution for white filmmakers is not to recede into whiteness by using all-white casts. Unlike films such as Bar Girls, Stonewall and To Wong Foo where all the white and non-white characters speak in an identical *white* American manner, the characters in Fresh Kill speak with varying accents, highlighting the racial diversity of contemporary America and the characters' different degrees of white "Americanisation". Since these characters do not conform to a homogenous white American ideal, it seems unlikely that the featured and apparently random racial group is the result of colour blind casting.

The diverse socio-economic backgrounds of the characters also suggests that wealth is not divided along the lines of race or sexuality. Although the narrative carefully restrains from demarcating rigid boundaries between black/white, homosexual/heterosexual, characters of all races and sexuality are depicted as existing only in two classes - rich and poor. It appears there are no middle class people in the film's harsh capitalist world. This polarized representation of upper and under classes contrasts with the film's hybrid representation of race, gender and sexuality. The negative portrayal of the "upper class" cuts across race and gender, but the "under class" characters who rebel against the moneyed multinationals, powerful governments and the upper class, are depicted sympathetically.

In Fresh Kill, rich capitalists and poorer residents of different races are depicted existing both within and outside the USA. Economically disadvantaged residents of Staten Island in New York (First World) and Orchid Island residents in the Pacific (Third World) suffer similar toxic side effects as both places are dumping grounds for nuclear waste from the richer parts of the USA and Taiwan. The depiction of non-racially dependent class division reflects arguments by Trinh (1990) and Hall (1996c) that the current trend of globalisation and diasporization has shifted socio-economic boundaries beyond the old racial and colonial paradigms of black=poor/oppressed, white=rich/powerful. It also problematises essentialised notions of racial authenticity. Critics such as Mercer (1994), hooks (1992, 1996) and Young (1996) argue that trying to determine who is more racially "authentic" by judging their socio-economic status, heterosexuality or racial purity often leads to the exclusion of groups within black communities. Young (1996: 87) suggests that the monitoring of black sexuality within black communities in the pursuit of an ideal racial purity risks mirroring the agendas of white nationalist groups.

However, as I argued in the last chapter, the separatist rhetoric of racial minorities arises from a different impulse from white nationalist groups. In order to rally against one's oppression, it is important to maintain a fixed essentialised identity for political organisation. However, the politically strategic adoption of such an identity should not be confused with the assumption that everybody's identities are fixed. Morley argues that calls for a racially separate community based on rigid definition of racial "purity" do not reflect the hybridised cultural climate.

The conventional model of cultural imperialism presumes the existence of a pure, internally homogeneous, authentic, indigenous culture, which then becomes subverted or corrupted by foreign influence. The reality, however, is that every culture has ingested foreign elements from exogenous sources, which gradually become 'naturalise' within it.... As many authors have noted (for example Appadurai, 1990; Bhabha, 1983 and 1994; Hall, 1990) cultural hybridity is increasingly the normal state of affairs.

(Morley 1996: 331)

Like Morley, Julien (1992: 271) argues that rather than examining blackness as a unitary fixed category, it can be more usefully thought through in relation to hybridity. The prolific representation of interraciality in Fresh Kill can be read as such a rejection of racial purity. A scene between Jianbin and a white woman at the sushi bar suggests that interracial relationships are better than same-race ones. The white woman, who has rejected the sexual advances of a white man, tries persistently to pick up Jianbin with a speech espousing the wonders of interracial union. She claims that "hybrid" children are a splendid mixture combining the best of both races. A faintly comic character, the accuracy of her beliefs is nevertheless echoed by the glamorisation of Claire and Shareen's relationship, and the film's sympathetic portrayal of mixed race characters. Fresh Kill differs from most films (as discussed in Chapter Three) which feature same-race liaisons or highlight racial differences as obstacles to interracial relationship in that it promotes interracial homosexual *and heterosexual* relationships as desirable.

Fresh Kill and "politically incorrect" sex:

"Political correctness" is popularly regarded as the "safe" representation of minorities, including subjects disadvantaged racially, sexually or economically, and often translates as the cinematic insertion of "token" stereotyped characters, supposedly representative of an entire homogeneous minority community. As the racial identities its characters are denaturalised and do not represent any particular racial group, Fresh Kill cannot be considered a "politically correct" film. In fact, its representation of females and lesbian sexuality is "politically incorrect". A slightly violent sex scene between Shareen and Claire begins with Claire crying because her daughter has been kidnapped. Instead of sympathising, Shareen slaps her. They then proceed to have sex. Although the violence is limited to a slap, the relatively tame act marks the difference of this scene from sex scenes in other films. Whilst gay male sex scenes have always been subject to different avenues of representation and influence, to date, lesbian sex scenes can be broadly divided into three main categories.

The first is in heterosexual mainstream or pornographic films. Lesbian sex scenes, more often than not, are inserted solely for the supposed sexual titillation of the male characters within the narratives, and the heterosexual male audiences. Such scenes are generally consistent with rest of the film; visually explicit and narratively unromantic. The second category is made up of widely circulated lesbian, gay and queer produced films such as Desert Hearts (USA 1985), Claire of the Moon (USA 1992), Desperate

Remedies (NZ 1993) and Go Fish (USA 1994). The lesbian erotic scenes featured is generally romantic and pleasant, filmed using soft focus lenses. Romantic music in these erotic, not always sexual scenes, is often used as atmospheric background music. Sexual violence between women is rarely depicted.

The third category consists largely of lesbian sex videos made by lesbians or queers (primarily for a lesbian audience although the filmmakers have acknowledged that heterosexual men buy these videos too). Such films include Suburban Dykes (USA 1990), Safe is Desire (USA 1993) and Blood Sisters (USA 1995). Like most pornographic films and videos, there is often little narrative development beyond the central sexual activity and its bedfellow clichéd dialogue. Needless to say, like the films in the first category, anything thought to stimulate sexual arousal, including violence, is included in these films. The involvement of many of the directors and producers in queer sadomasochistic (SM) communities or queer lesbian subculture influenced by SM or gay male representations explains their willingness to depict acts of violence. However, the absence of male actors distinguishes the films in this category from those in the first.

Because Fresh Kill is a feature length film with major lesbian characters directed by an "out" lesbian, it appears to fall into the second category of lesbian films. However, its representation of lesbian sex is not typical of lesbian feature length films. Firstly, unlike the other films, the sex scene between Shareen and Claire, which takes place after an unexpected slap, is not romantic. Unflattering close-ups reveal that Claire is crying whilst Shareen appears angry. In contrast to other films where sex is characterised as

evidence of emotional harmony between the characters, Shareen and Claire's respective emotional states do not alter even after they start having sex. The absence of romantic atmospheric music further heightens the tension between the women. Further, unlike films in the third category, the violence between the women is not depicted to encourage sexual stimulation. Although no verbal explanations are offered, earlier scenes suggest that the instance of violent physical contact aptly reflects the emotion of the characters, translating the scene into an intensely poignant and sexual one. Despite not being safely "politically correct", therefore this the lesbian sex scene sensitively conveys an aspect of lesbian sexuality seldom seen in cinematic representations.

Fresh Kill's explicit and non-judgemental depiction of female sexuality, including heterosexual female pleasure, is refreshing. Film representations featuring autonomous non-monogamous sexual pleasure are limited largely to lesbians, gay male, heterosexual male or bisexual characters. If heterosexual sex is shown on screen, it is normally filmed from the perspective of the male. Non-monogamous, relationship based heterosexual female sexual desires, on the other hand, are usually depicted as threatening or deviant. It is therefore unusual that a heterosexual-looking woman talks about autonomous female pleasure whilst displaying dildos on Mimi's television show in Fresh Kill.

Conclusion - hybridity and the suspicion of identity politics:

The margin of hybridity, where cultural differences 'contingently' and

conflictually touch, becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experiences. It resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups, sipahis and sahibs, as homogeneous polarized political consciousness. The political psychosis of panic constitutes the boundary of cultural hybridity across which the Mutiny is fought.

(Bhabha 1994: 207)

Bhabha suggests that hybrid discourses provide the space for a form of self-actualisation and analysis that simple deconstructive discourses based on binaristic racial, sexual or other oppositions do not allow. As Fresh Kill's representation of racial hybridity and sexual diversity is not binaristically constructed, neither is it narratively preoccupied with the oppression of non-whites, homosexuals and women. As a result, white heterosexual characters become displaced as the yardstick "norm" against which non-white, homosexual and female characters have traditionally been measured. Furthermore, they do not become marginalized or "guilt-tripped" as sometimes happens in homosexual films or films featuring non-white cultures or sympathetic non-white central characters. Since the "normalisation" of racial or sexual minorities is not attempted through "celebrating" their "otherness", their traditionally marginalized status is not emphasised. Thus, a scene depicting heterosexual female desire from a female point of view becomes possible.

The suspicion of identity politics extends beyond that of race, sexuality and gender to include environmental politics. Fresh Kill's ironic ending reveals that one of ACC's despised shareholders (who profit by selling nuclear contaminated products) becomes

poisoned after eating radioactive raw fish in a New York City restaurant. He reacts by starting an eco-friendly company, selling "Green" products. However, his nasty laugh and evil looks suggest his change of profession - from nuclear profiteer to environmentalist - is not the result of a sincere "change of heart". In a scene where he is shown advertising "green" products, his face glows "green" from nuclear poisoning. The next shot contains the large flashing words: "GREEN=GREED", identifying the economic drive behind the "Green" movement.

Endnotes (Chapter 5):

1. In an extended discussion on the "Asian-Pacific Lesbian" internet mailing list, Fresh Kill was criticized by subscribers for ignoring the specificities of racial identity.

² Certain viewers have picked up (perhaps in politically incorrect terms) that even though Shareen is South Asian and Clayton is Native American, their tenuous racial connection is that they are both "Indians". (cf. Film review of FRESH KILL by Max Hoffman, 1994, Published over the Internet, web page: fkreview.html at spartan.tamu.edu.)

³ Cf. Lawrence Chua's interview with Fresh Kill's director Shu Lea Cheang and scriptwriter Jessica Hagedorn. BOMB magazine. New York City, 1995.

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CHAPTER 6:**CONCLUSION.**

This thesis began by discussing the emergence of films featuring non-white homosexual central characters. Because an established canon of these films did not exist, I had to create my own list. This task has been time consuming as reviewers and programmers do not normally mention the characters' racial identities. As well as looking through numerous film festival programmes, film databases and lesbian and gay film guides, I joined a number of internet mailing lists which discuss issues concerning homosexuals of African, Asian or Latino origins. These assisted with useful information about obscure films containing non-white homosexuals. As I could only discuss a limited number of films in this thesis, a more comprehensive list is provided in the appendix.

Similarly, due to the scarcity of literature about lesbian and gay people of colour, I have had to draw from the fields of lesbian and gay studies, gender studies, post-colonial and "race" criticism to provide a proper definition and theoretical framework for the subject of this thesis. These led me to argue that lesbian and gay subjects of colour expose an intimate relationship between the construction of discourses of racial and sexual difference. As well as drawing on critical literature about the cinematic representation of homosexuals and non-white people in general, I have also presented many crucial concerns of lesbian and gay communities of colour to contextualise my discussion of the film representation of non-white homosexuals. The scarcity of critical studies concerning this subject meant that I had to undertake the initial deconstructive project

of identifying why there were previously few films containing such characters, before discussing the way they have generally been depicted, both in the past and in the present.

I started by arguing, in Chapter two, that the scarcity of such characters in the past was related to negative sexual stereotypes of non-whites and white homosexuals. To illustrate this, I examined the analogous but non identical depiction of sexual deviancy in Desperate Remedies (NZ 1993), Philadelphia (USA 1994), The Adventure of Priscilla. Queen of the Desert (Australia 1994) and Pulp Fiction (USA 1994). The representation of non-white characters in these films mirrors historically constructed racist assumptions that non-whites are naturally sexually deviant. Their homosexual actions are usually interpreted as an example of their loose morality, rather than as an indication of non-heterosexual identity. Few films have featured identifiably homosexual people of color. By contrast, white subjects who engage in homosexual practises are usually accorded a lesbian or gay identity and located within a specifically (white) homosexual subculture.

Consequently, the mere inclusion of identifiably homosexual non-white characters problematise the assumption that homosexuals are white and non-whites are heterosexuals. However, films containing non-white homosexual central characters employ different ways of presenting their racial and sexual difference from the white heterosexual norm. For instance, the racial difference of the lesbians of colour in She Must Be Seeing Things (USA 1987) and Salmonberries (USA 1991), and the lesbianism of the black protagonist in Boys on the Side (USA 1995) are not

highlighted. Instead, the racial and cultural "sameness" they share with their white partners is emphasised. Despite this, racial and sexual stereotypes identified in Chapter two continue to be perpetuated by the characterisation of black butch/white femme lesbian relationships.

In contrast, such stereotypes are problematised in The Wedding Banquet (Taiwan 1993). The tension between the racial and homosexual identities of the Asian homosexual character is central to the film's narrative. Despite the groundbreaking representation of the non-white homosexual character, the non-white homosexual character in this film, like those in the other films discussed in Chapter three, is paired with a white homosexual partner. I have argued that as homosexuals are typically depicted as white, the white homosexual partner functions to "authenticate" the homosexual identity of the non-white character. The consistent inclusion of same-race heterosexual relationships alongside interracial homosexual relationships in these films here also resulted in my suggestion that the prohibition against miscegenation is a specifically heterosexual one.

Since the prohibition against miscegenation arises from white paranoia about non-white "limitless fertility", that is, the notion that interracial heterosexual relationships will reproduce racially "impure" offsprings which confuse established racial boundaries, homosexual interracial relationships are not threatening in the same way as they cannot be reproductive. However, this does not mean that homosexual relationships in general are not threatening. I argue that white homosexuals have been marginalised because of a sexual threat they pose to white heterosexual society, albeit

different from the threat posed by interracial heterosexual relationships, namely, their inability to reproduce.

However, the recent mainstream popularity of films featuring homosexual characters, both white and non-white, suggests that they are now perceived to be less threatening. Since many of these successful films are comedies, I suggest that comedy, especially romantic comedy, is a genre which allows homosexuality to be humorously presented as unthreatening, even appealing. Giddens' (1992: 27) argument about "artificial sexuality" offers another possible explanation for why mainstream audiences are now more accepting of films featuring homosexual characters. He argues that advances in reproductive technologies - where conception is now "artificially produced, rather than artificially inhibited" - has enabled sexuality to at last become fully autonomous.

The 'sexual revolution' of the past thirty or forty years is not just, or even primarily, a gender-neutral advance in sexual permissiveness. It involves two basic elements. One is a revolution in female sexual autonomy - concentrated in that period, but having antecedents stretching back to the nineteenth century. Its consequences for male sexuality are profound and is very much of an unfinished revolution. The second element is the flourishing of homosexuality, male and female. Homosexuals of both sexes have stalked out new sexual ground well in advance of the more sexually 'orthodox'.

(Giddens 1992: 28)

As reproduction can now occur in the absence of sexual activity, traditional prohibitions against female promiscuity, miscegenation and homosexuality become increasingly redundant. The activist work of homosexuals and non-white people has also facilitated the changing public perception of previously "taboo" representations. Hall (1996c : 445) argues that it is pertinent for critics to move away from the old binaries of race, gender and sexuality since these categories also shift according to the political and social climate. He suggests that changing cinematic representations featuring a diversity of racial and sexual differences reflect the contemporary process of diaspora-ization and globalisation (Hall 1996c: 447).

The end of the essential black subject also entails a recognition that the central issues of race always appear historically in articulation, in a formation, with other categories and divisions and are constantly crossed and recrossed by the categories of class, of gender and ethnicity.... To me, films like Territories, Passion of Remembrance, My Beautiful Laundrette and Sammy and Rosie Get Laid, for example, make it perfectly clear that this shift has been engaged; and that the question of the black subject cannot be represented without reference to the dimensions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity.

(Hall 1996c: 444)

The crossover success of the lesbian film, Go Fish (USA 1994), discussed in Chapter four, reflect the shift in audience expectations identified by Hall. Its representation of two lesbians of colour as lovers, and sexually experimental lesbians, also reveals the

influence of "queer" and "politically correct" discourses of racial and sexual diversity. I further argue, in relation to Go Fish extensive employment of different lesbian stereotypes, that despite the importance of analysing the way such stereotypes have been used to maintain heterosexuality as a norm, recognisable lesbian and gay "types" are crucial in the development of a politically organised approach to homosexual identity. However, the politically strategic adoption of an identity organised around particular stereotypes should not be confused with the assumption that stereotypes can accurately depict all homosexuals of diverse age, ethnicity, economic background, sexual and other experiences.

Unlike Go Fish, Fresh Kill (USA 1993), the film discussed in Chapter five, does not feature any stereotypical lesbian characters. This means that debate concerning the necessity of positive/negative or authentic/inaccurate images, "political correct" representations and the accompanying burden of representation is avoided. I suggest that the film's depiction of a world of racial and sexual hybridity displaces white heterosexuality as the norm. As cultural, ethnic, class, gender, sexual and other differences are neither binaristically nor hierarchically categorised according to a white heterosexual norm, the marginalized position of non-white homosexuals is also problematised. However, as all forms of essentialist identity are called to question, discourses of hybridity do not allow for the formation of political groups organised around oppositional identities of race or sexuality.

The continued emergence of different film types depicting non-white homosexuals in different ways, suggests that there is no consensus on the "correct" way to represent

such characters. Whilst stereotypes continue to be employed in some films, others feature racial hybridity and sexual diversity. This thesis has examined the reasons why there have previously been few films containing non-white homosexual characters and why there are now more such films, as well as identifying the way in which their characters are depicted. This cannot however, be a definitive study as films featuring non-white homosexuals continue to emerge. However, I hope that it has created a framework for discussion and contributed to the on-going debate concerning the film representation of racial and sexual minorities. I also hope that some issues raised but not developed here because they are beyond the scope of this thesis, will be taken up in other projects that examine the shift in the representation and inclusion of non-whites and/or homosexuals in films.

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- As Is (Michael Lindsay-Hogg, USA, 1986, 86 mins, narrative)
- Attendant, The (Isaac Julien, UK, 1993, 8 mins, experimental)
- Bar Girls (Marita Giovanni, USA, 1995, 95 mins, narrative)
- Basic Instinct (Paul Verhoeven, USA, 1992, 127 mins, narrative)
- Batman Forever (Tim Burton, USA, 1994, 126 mins, narrative)
- Bhaji on the Beach (Gurinda Chadha, UK, 1993, 101 mins, narrative)
- Blood Sisters (Michelle Handelman, USA, 1995, 75 mins, documentary)
- Bound (Larry Wachowski and Andy Wachowski, USA, 1996, 108 mins, narrative)
- Boyfriends (Neil Hunter and Tom Hunsinger, UK, 1995, 85 mins, narrative)
- Boys on the Side (Herbert Ross, USA, 1995, 117 mins, narrative)
- Boyz in the Hood (John Singleton, USA, 1991, 112 mins, narrative)
- Buddha of Suburbia, The (Roger Michell, UK, 1993, 240 mins, narrative)
- Butterfly's Kiss (Michael Winterbottom, UK, 1995, 85 mins, narrative)
- Car Wash (Michael Schultz, USA, 1976, 98 mins, narrative)
- Cass (Chris Noonan, Australia, 1982, 90 mins, narrative)
- City on Fire (Ringo Lam, HK, 1987, 89 mins, narrative)
- Chasing Amy (Kevin Smith, USA, 1997, 105 mins, narrative)
- Chinese Characters (Richard Fung, Canada, 1986, 22 mins, documentary)
- Cinema of Unease, The (Sam Neil and Judy Rymer, NZ, 1995, 52 mins, narrative)
- Claire of the Moon (Nicole Conn, USA, 1992, 90 mins, narrative)

- Closing Numbers (Stephan Whittaker, UK, 1993, 95 mins, narrative)
- Color Purple, The (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1985, 152 mins, narrative)
- Cruising (William Friedkin, USA, 1980, 106 mins, narrative)
- Crying Game, The (Neil Jordan, UK, 1992, 112 mins, narrative)
- Delta, The (Ira Sachs, USA, 1996, 85 mins, narrative)
- Desert Hearts (Donna Deitch, USA, 1985, 90 mins, narrative)
- Desperate Remedies (Stewart Mains and Peter Wells, NZ, 1993, 93 mins, narrative)
- Die Harder (Lam Yee Hung, HK, 1992, 88 mins, narrative)
- Different For Girls (Richard Spence, UK, 1996, 97 mins, narrative)
- First Wives Club (Hugh Wilson, USA, 1996, 104 mins, narrative)
- French Twist/La Gazon Maudit (Josiane Balasko, France, 1995, 105 mins, narrative)
- Fresh Kill (Shu Lea Cheang, USA, 1993, 80 mins, narrative)
- Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe (Jon Avnet, USA, 1992, 130 mins, narrative)
- Full Contact (Ringo Lam, HK, 1992, 91 mins, narrative)
- Go Fish (Rose Troche, USA, 1994, 85 mins, narrative)
- Grief (Richard Glatzer, USA, 1993, 85 mins, narrative)
- Gun Crazy (Tamra Davis, USA, 1992, 97 mins, narrative)
- Hard Boiled (John Woo, HK, 1992, 89 mins, narrative)
- Heavenly Creatures (Peter Jackson, NZ, 1994, 100 mins, narrative)
- High Art (Lisa Cholodenko, USA, 1997, 101 mins, narrative)
- Ice Storm (Ang Lee, USA, 1997, 113 mins, narrative)
- Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love, The (Maria Maggenti, USA, 1996, 93 mins, narrative)
- Indochine (Regis Wargnier, France, 1992, 158 mins, narrative)

- Jackie Brown (Quentin Tarantino, USA, 1997, 155 mins, narrative)
- JFK (Oliver Stone, USA, 1991, 189 mins, narrative)
- Jungle Fever (Spike Lee, USA, 1991, 132 mins, narrative)
- Kama Sutra (Mira Nair, USA/India, 1997, 117 mins, narrative)
- Khush (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1991, 24 mins, narrative)
- Killer, The (John Woo, HK, 1989, 94 mins, narrative)
- Killing of Sister George, The (Robert Aldrich, UK, 1969, 138 mins, narrative)
- Kiss of the Spider Woman (Hector Babenco, Brazil, 1985, 119 mins, narrative)
- L.A. Confidential (Curtis Hanson, USA, 1997, 137 mins, narrative)
- Last Emperor, The (Bernardo Bertolucci, Italy/China, 1987, 164 mins, narrative)
- Lianna (John Sayles, USA, 1983, 110 mins, narrative)
- Longtime Companion (Norman Rene, USA, 1990, 99 mins, narrative)
- Looking for Langston (Isaac Julein, Sankofa, UK, 1988, 40 mins, experimental)
- Lover, The / L'Amant (Jean-Jacques Annaud, UK/France, 1992, 115 mins, narrative)
- Love and Other Catastrophes (Emma-Kate Croghan, Australia, 1996, 80 mins, narrative)
- M. Butterfly (David Cronenberg, USA, 1993, 97 mins, narrative)
- Made in America (Richard Benjamin, USA, 1993, 110 mins, narrative)
- Mala Noche (Gus Van Sant, USA, 1985, 78 mins, narrative)
- Melinda (Hugh A. Robertson, USA, 1972, 88 mins, narrative)
- Midwives Tale, The (Megan Siler, USA, 1995, 75 mins, narrative)
- Mississippi Masala (Mira Nair, USA, 1991, 113 mins, narrative)
- Mona Lisa (Neil Jordan, UK, 1986, 104 mins, narrative)
- Morgue (Josef von Sternberg, USA, 1930, 97 mins, narrative)

Most Desired Man, The / Der Bewegte Mann (Sonke Wortmann, Germany, 1994, 93 mins, narrative)

Mr Johnson (Bruce Beresford, USA, 1990, 101 mins, narrative)

My Beautiful Laundrette (Stephen Frears, UK, 1985, 97 mins, narrative)

Northern Exposure (Peter O'Fallen and Rob Thompson, USA, 1991/2, 47 mins, narrative)

Osaka Story (Toichi Nakata, UK, 1994, 75 mins, documentary)

Out of Season (Jeanette Buck, USA, 1998, 98 mins, narrative)

Parallel Sons (John G Young, USA, 1994, 93 mins, narrative)

Paris is Burning (Jennie Livingston, USA, 1990, 70 mins, documentary)

Paris Was A Woman (Greta Schiller, UK, 1995, 75 mins, documentary)

Parting Glances (Bill Sherwood, USA, 1986, 90 mins, narrative)

Passion Fish (John Sayles, USA, 1992, 134 mins, narrative)

Passion of Remembrance, The (Maureen Blackwood, Sankofa, UK, 1986, 80 mins, experimental)

Personal Best (Robert Towne, USA, 1982, 124 mins, narrative)

Philadelphia (Jonathan Demme, USA, 1994, 119 mins, narrative)

Piano, The (Jane Campion, Australia/NZ, 1993, 120 mins, narrative)

Pocahontas (Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg, USA, 1995, 80 mins, narrative)

Poison (Todd Haynes, USA, 1991, 85 mins, narrative)

Pulp Fiction (Quentin Tarantino, USA, 1994, 153 mins, narrative)

Purple Rain (Albert Magnoli, USA, 1984, 111 mins, narrative)

Red Dawn (John Milius, USA), 1984, 114 mins, narrative)

Rope (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1948, 80 mins, narrative)

Safe is Desire (Debi Sundahl, USA, 1993, 10 mins, narrative)

Salmonberries (Percy Adlon, Germany/USA, 1993, 94 mins, narrative)

- Sammv and Rosie Get Laid (Stephen Frears, UK, 1987, 100 mins, narrative)
- Savage Nights/ Nuit Sauvage, La (Cyril Collard, France, 1993, 126 mins, narrative)
- Sense and Sensibility (Ang Lee, UK, 1995, 135 mins, narrative)
- Set It Off (F. Gary Gray, USA, 1997, 120 mins, narrative)
- Shakti (Sonali Fernando, UK, 1992, narrative)
- Shaft (Gordon Parks, USA, 1971, 100 mins, narrative)
- She Don't Fade (Cheryl Dunye, USA, 1991, 23 mins, narrative)
- She Must Be Seeing Things (Sheila McLaughlin, USA, 1987, 85 mins)
- She's Gotta Have It (Spike Lee, USA, 1986, 84 mins, narrative)
- Showgirls (Paul Verhoeven, 1995, USA, 131 mins, narrative)
- Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme, USA, 1990, 119 mins, narrative)
- Sister Act (Emile Ardolino, USA, 1992, 100 mins, narrative)
- Sixth Happiness (Waris Hussein, UK/India, 1997, 97 mins, narrative)
- Slaughter (Jack Starrett, USA, 1972, 90 mins, narrative)
- Something To Die For: The Alison Gertz Story (Fatal Love) (Tom McLoughlin, USA 1992, narrative)
- Star Trek Voyager (Cliff Bole and LeVar Burton, USA, 1995, 60 mins)
- Steel Magnolias (Herbert Ross, USA, 1989, 117 mins, narrative)
- Stonewall (Nigel Finch, UK/USA, 1995, 99 mins, narrative)
- Suburban Dykes (Debi Sundahl, USA, 1990, 30 mins, narrative)
- Swoon (Tom Kalin, USA, 1992, 80 mins, narrative)
- Territories (Isaac Julien, Sankofa, UK, 1984, 25 mins, narrative)
- Thelma and Louise (Ridley Scott, USA, 1991, 129 mins, narrative)
- Thin Ice (Fiona Cunningham Reid, UK, 1994, 88 mins, narrative)

To Wong Foo, Thanks For Everything, Julie Newmar (Beeban Kidron, USA, 1995, 108 mins, narrative)

Tongues Untied (Marlon Riggs, USA, 1990, 55 mins, documentary)

Totally F***ked Up/Totally Fucked Up (Gregg Araki, USA, 1993, 85 mins, narrative)

Trading Places (John Landis, USA, 1983, 116 mins, narrative)

Twilight of the Gods/Te Keremutunga o Nga Atua (Stewart Mains, NZ, 1995, 15 mins, narrative)

Veronika Voss (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Germany, 1982, 104 mins, narrative)

Virgin Machine (Monika Treut, Germany/USA, 1988, 85 mins, narrative)

Volunteers (Nicholas Meyer, USA, 1985, 106 mins, narrative)

Watermelon Woman, The (Cheryl Dunye, USA, 1997, 90 mins, narrative)

Wedding Banquet, The (Ang Lee, Taiwan/USA, 1992, 106 mins, narrative)

When Night is Falling (Patricia Rozema, Canada, 1995, 93 mins, narrative)

Work (Rachel Reichman, USA, 1996, 90 mins, narrative)

Young Soul Rebels (Isaac Julien, UK, 1991, 103 mins, narrative)

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FILMS CONTAINING LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE OF COLOUR:

A Darker Side of Black (Isaac Julien, UK, 1993, 55 mins, documentary)

A Litany For Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde (Ada Gay Griffin & Michelle Parkerson, USA, 1995, 90 mins, documentary)

A Place of Rage (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1991, 52 mins, documentary)

A Short Film About Us (Rita Smith, UK, 1996, 7 mins, documentary)

Absolutely Positive (Peter Adair, USA, 1991, 85 mins, documentary)

Ad, The (Jennifer Tate, USA, 1995, 13 mins, narrative)

Affirmations (Marlon Riggs, USA, 1990, 10 mins, experimental)

After the Break (Mary Guzman, USA, 1992, 13 mins, narrative)

AIDS in the Barrio (Peter Biella and Frances Negron, USA, 1991, 30 mins, documentary)

Al Margen del Margen (Beyond Doubt) (Ivan Arocha and David Hernandez, Cuba, 1992, 35 mins, documentary)

Aletheia (Trang Tran T. Kim, USA, 1994, 16 mins, experimental)

Alicia Was Fainting (Nuria Olive-Belles, USA, 1994, 37 mins, narrative)

All Over Me (Alex Sichel, USA, 1996, 90 mins, narrative)

Among Good Christian Peoples (Catherine Saalfield, USA, 1991, 23 mins, experimental)

And the Band Played On (Roger Spottiswodde, USA, 1993, 144 mins, narrative)

Anthem (Marlon Riggs, USA, 1990, 9 mins, music video)

Anxiety of Inexpression and the Otherness Machine (Quentin Lee, USA, 1992, 53mins, experimental)

Attendant, The (Isaac Julien, UK, 1993, 8 mins, experimental)

Balancing Factor (Carrie House, USA, 1993, 33 mins, documentary)

Ballot Measure 9 (Heather MacDonald, USA, 1994, 72 mins, documentary)

Bar Girls (Marita Giovanni, USA, 1994, 95 mins, narrative)

Bare (Tien, Canada, 1991, 15 mins, documentary)

Bathroom Sluts (Amateur Lesbian Video #1) (Blush Productions/Fatale Video, USA, 1991, 45 mins, erotica)

BD Women (Inge Blackman, UK, 1994, 20 mins, documentary)

Beautiful Thing (Hettie Macdonald, UK, 1996, 90 mins, narrative)

Because Reality Isn't Black and White (Kelly Anderson, USA/Cuba, 1992, 9 mins, documentary)

Before Stonewall (Greta Schiller and Robert Rosenberg, USA, 1985, 87 mins, documentary)

Behind Every Good Man (unknown, USA, 1965, 20 mins, documentary)

Berlin Affair, The (Liliana Cavani, Italy/West Germany, 1985, 121 mins, narrative)

Better Late (Jessica Yu, USA, 1996, 8 mins, narrative)

Beyond/Body/Memory (Neesha Dosanjh, Canada, 1993, 5 mins, experimental)

Bi-Ways (Paul Shimazaki and Prescott Chow, USA, 1993, 5 mins, experimental)

Billy Turner's Secret (Michael Mayson, USA, 1990, 26 mins, narrative)

Bird in the Hand (Melanie Nelson and Catherine Saalfeld, USA, 1992, 25 mins, narrative)

Black and White in Color (Isaac Julien, UK, 1992, 111 mins, documentary)

Black Bag: Gender Bender (Laurens Postman, UK, 1993, 25 mins, documentary)

Black Body (Thomas Allen Harris, USA, 1992, 5 mins, experimental)

Black Is... Black Ain't (Marlon T. Riggs, USA, 1995, 88 mins, documentary)

Black People Get Aids, Too (Cedric Pounds, USA, 1987, 23 mins, documentary)

BloodSisters (Michelle Handelman, USA, 1995, 77 mins, documentary)

Bodily Functions (Jocelyn Taylor, USA, 1994, 13 mins, experimental)

Borderline (Kenneth McPherson, UK, 1930, 80 mins, narrative)

- Born in Flames (Lizzie Borden, USA, 1983, 90 mins, narrative)
- Bottom (Terry Chiu, USA, 1994, 7 mins, experimental)
- Boy! What a Girl! (Arthur Leonard, USA, 1945, 70 mins, narrative)
- Boys from Brazil (John Paul Davidson, UK, 1993, Brazil/UK, 69 mins, documentary)
- Boys in the Band (William Friedkin, USA, 1970, 118 mins, narrative)
- Boys on the Side (Herbert Ross, USA, 1995, 117 mins, narrative)
- Brincando El Charco: Portrait of a Puerto Rican (Frances Negron-Muntaner, USA, 1994, 57 mins, narrative)
- Brown Sugar Licks Snow White (Robin Vachal and Suzi Silbar, USA, 1992, 4 mins, experimental)
- Buddha of Suburbia. The (Roger Michell, UK, 1993, 240 mins, narrative)
- BurLEZk Live! (Nan Kinney and Debi Sundahl, USA, 1987, 90 mins, erotica)
- Car Wash (Michael Schultz, USA, 1976, 97 mins, narrative)
- Carmelita Tropicana (Ela Troyano, USA, 1993, 30 mins, narrative)
- Caught Looking (Constantine Giannaris, UK, 1991, 35 mins, narrative)
- Celluloid Closet. The (Robert Epstein, USA, 1995, 102 mins, narrative)
- Chaahath (Desire) (Lily K Gupta, UK, 1995, 4 mins, experimental)
- Change the Frame (Christina Rey, USA, 1995, 93 mins, narrative)
- Chasing Amy (Kevin Smith, USA, 1997, 105 mins, narrative)
- Chasing the Moon (Dawn Suggs, USA, 1991, 4 mins, experimental)
- Chinaman's Peak (Paul Wong, Canada, 1992, 25 mins, experimental)
- Chinese Characters (Richard Fung, Canada, 1986, 22 mins, documentary)
- Cholo Joto (Augie Robles, USA, 1993, 12 mins, documentary)
- Cities of Lust (Raul Ferrera-Balanquet, USA, 1993, 30 mins, documentary)
- Coconut/Cane and Cutlass (Michelle Mohabeer, Canada, 1994, 30 mins, experimental)

- Color Purple, The (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1985, 152 mins, narrative)
- Coming of Age (Josh Hanig, USA, 1982, 60 mins, documentary)
- Coming Out, Coming Home (Hima B, USA, 1996, 45 mins, documentary)
- Coming Out Under Fire (Arthur Dong, USA, 1994, 90 mins, documentary)
- Complete St. Veronica, The (Dale Hoyt, USA, 1986, 5 mins, documentary)
- Complicated Flesh (Cheryl Dunye and Kristina Deutsch, USA, 1993, 14 mins, documentary)
- Cruel (Desi Del Valle, USA, 1994, 20 mins, narrative)
- Crying Game, The (Neil Jordan, UK, 1992, 112 mins, narrative)
- Current Flow (Jean Carlomusto, USA, 1990, 5 mins, documentary)
- Cut Sleeve: Lesbians & Gays of Asian/Pacific Ancestry (Nikos Diaman, USA, 1993, 24 mins, documentary)
- Cutting the Edge of a Free Bird (Ann Marie J. Bryan, USA, 1993, 15 mins, narrative)
- Darkness of My Language, The (Silvana Afram, Canada 1989, 4 mins, experimental)
- Dear Jessee (Tim Kirkman, USA, 1997, 82 mins, documentary)
- Defect (Ray Navarro, USA, 1990, 20 mins, documentary)
- Delta, The (Ira Sachs, USA, 1996, 85 mins, narrative)
- DiAna's Hair Ego: AIDS Info Up Front (Ellen Spiro, USA, 1990, 29 mins, documentary)
- Didn't Do It For Love (Monica Treut, Germany, 1997, 80 mins, experimental)
- Dimelo (Hima B and Loana dp. Velencia, USA, 1995, 15 mins, documentary)
- Displaced View, The (Midi Onodera, Canada, 1988, 52 mins, documentary)
- Does Love See Color? (Terry Berman, USA, 1997, 60 mins, documentary)
- Double the trouble, twice the fun (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1992, 25 mins, docudrama)
- Drag in for Votes (Gabriel Gomez and Elspeth Kydd, USA, 1991, 17 mins, documentary)

- Dream Girls (Kim Longinotto and Jano Williams, UK/Japan, 1993, 50 mins, documentary)
- Dreams of Passion (Aarin Burch, USA, 1989, 5 mins, experimental)
- East River Park (Zoe Leonard, USA, 1992, 6 mins, experimental)
- Eat the Rich (Peter Richardson, UK, 1987, 100 mins, narrative)
- Emergence (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1986, 18 mins, documentary)
- Eunuchs: India's Third Gender (Michael Yorke, UK, 1991, 1991, documentary)
- Family Name (Macky Alston, USA, 1997, 89 mins, documentary)
- Fantasy Dancer (Linda Vista, USA, 1990, 33 mins, narrative)
- Falling Through the Cracks (Amber Hollibaugh, USA, 1991, 10 mins, documentary)
- Ferdous (Paradise) (Shakila Mann, UK, 1990, 8 mins, experimental)
- Fierce Sisters (Paloma Etienne, UK, 1996, 30 mins, documentary)
- Fighting Chance (Richard Fung, Canada, 1990, 31 mins, documentary)
- Fingers and Kisses (Shu Lea Cheang, Japan/USA, 1995, 5 mins, erotica)
- Fire (Deepa Mehta, Canada, 1996, 104 mins, narrative)
- First Wives Club (Hugh Wilson, USA, 1996, 104 mins, narrative)
- First Year (Trac Vu, USA, 1996, 6 mins, narrative)
- Flesh and Paper (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1990, 30 mins, documentary)
- Flow (Quentin Lee, USA/Canada, 1995, 80 mins, documentary)
- Flowing Hearts: Thailand Fights AIDS (John Gross, USA/Thailand, 1992, 32 mins, documentary)
- Fly That Friendly Sky (Pablo Bautista, USA, 1992, 4 mins, experimental)
- Foetal Gay's Nightmare, A (Rune Layumans, Phillippines, 1991, 5 mins, experimental)
- Forbidden Love – The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives (Aerlyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie, Canada, 1992, 85 mins, documentary)
- Frankie and Jocie (Jocelyn Taylor, USA, 1994, 20 mins, documentary)

- Frankie Goes Downtown (Fred Siffam USA, 1993, 8 mins, experimental)
- Fresh Kill (Shu Lea Cheang, USA, 1993, 80 mins, narrative)
- Fruta, La (Roly Barrero Chang, USA/Mexico, 1991, 3 mins, experimental)
- Fuji (Gil Bardsley, Canada, 1995, 10 mins, narrative)
- Full Moon in New York (Stanley Kwan, Taiwan/USA, 1990, 90 mins, narrative)
- Gangtime (Loring McAlpin, USA, 1993, 23 mins, documentary)
- Gay Cuba (Sonja de Vries, USA/Cuba, 1995, 57 mins, documentary)
- Gay Youth (Pam Walton, USA, 1992, 40 mins, documentary)
- Generation Q (Robert Byrd, USA, 1995, 60 mins, documentary)
- Give Me Body (Pablo Bautista, USA, 1991, 9 mins, experimental)
- Go Fish (Rose Troche, USA, 1994, 85 mins, narrative)
- Greta's Girls (Greta Schiller and Thomas Seid, USA, 1976, 60 mins, narrative)
- Grief (Richard Glatzer, USA, 1993, 92 mins, narrative)
- Harold and Hiroshi (Ed Askinazi, USA, 1989, 38 mins, narrative)
- Head On (Ana Kokkinos, Australia, 1988, 90 mins, narrative)
- Heaven, Earth and Hell (Thomas Allen Harris, USA, 1993, 25 mins, experimental)
- Her Giveaway (Mona M. Smith, USA, 1989, 15 mins, documentary)
- Her Sweetness Lingers (Shani Mootoo, Canada, 1994, 12 mins, experimental)
- Here Be Dragons (Stephen Winter, USA, 1993, 14 mins, narrative)
- History of Violence, A (Danny Acosta, USA, 1991, 7 mins, narrative)
- History Will Accuse Me (Carl George, USA, 1993, 20 mins, documentary)
- Honoured by the Moon (Mona M. Smith, USA, 1989, 23 mins, documentary)
- How to Kill Her (Ana Marie Simo, USA, 1990, 15 mins, narrative)
- Hungry Hearts (Nan Kinney and Debi Sundahl, USA, 1989, 30 mins, erotica)

Hysterio Passio (Quentin Lee, USA, 1994, 2 mins, experimental)

I (Joel Roman Mendias, USA, 1995, 15 mins, experimental)

I Am Your Sister (Catherine Russo, USA, 1991, 59 mins, documentary)

I Like Dreaming (Charles Lofton, USA, 1994, 6 mins, experimental)

I Never Dance the Way Girls Were Supposed To (Dawn Suggs, USA, 1992, 10 mins, experimental)

I Shall Not Be Removed: The Life of Marlon Riggs (Karen Everett, USA, 1996, 57 mins, documentary)

I've Never (Pamela Jennings, USA, 1992, 6 mins, experimental)

If She Grows Up Gay (Karen Sloe Goodman, USA, 1982, 23 mins, documentary)

Ife (H Len Keller, USA, 1993, 5 mins, narrative)

Iluminado las Aguas (Raul Ferrera-Balanquet, USA/Mexico, 1992, 4 mins, experimental)

In My Father's House (Aishah Shahidah Simmons, USA, 1996, 15 mins, documentary)

(In)Visible Women (Ellen Spiro and Marina Alvarez, USA, 1991, 26 mins, documentary)

Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love, The (Maria Maggenti, USA, 1996, 93 mins, narrative)

Infidel (Catherine Saalfield, USA, 1989, 45 mins, experimental)

International Sweethearts of Rhythm, The (Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss, USA, 1986, 30 mins, documentary)

Intro to Cultural Skit-Zo-Frenia (Jamika Ajalon, USA, 1993, 10 mins, experimental)

Jareena: Portrait of a Hijda (Pre Killiat, Cuba/USA, 1990, 25 mins, documentary)

Jungfraumaschine (The Virgin Machine) (Monika Treut, West Germany/USA, 1988, 85 mins, narrative)

Khush (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1991, 24 mins, documentary)

Kim (Arlyn Gajilan, USA, 1987, 27 mins, documentary)

Kiss of the Spider Woman (Hector Babenco, USA/Brazil, 1985, 119 mins, narrative)

Kore (Tran T. Kim Trang, USA, 1994, 17 mins, experimental)

Korkei Dori (Landscape Catching) (Hiroyuki Oki, USA, 1992, 5 mins, experimental)

L-Shaped Room, The (Bryan Forbes, UK, 1962, 124 mins, narrative)

Lady in Waiting, The (Christian Taylor, USA, 1993, 30 mins, narrative)

Lady Boys (Jeremy Marre, UK, 1992, 60 mins, documentary)

Land Beyond Tomorrow (Nicci Farrel, USA, 1993, 4 mins, experimental)

Last Emperor, The (Bernando Bertolucci, Italy/HK/UK, 1987, 160 mins, narrative)

Latin Boys Go To Hell (Ela Troyano, USA/Germany/Spain, 1997, 75 mins, narrative)

Lick (Hima B and Eliza O Barrios, USA, 1995, 10 mins, experimental)

Lick Bush in '92 (Gabriel Gomez and Elspeth Kydd, USA, 1993, 89 mins, documentary)

Lily and Lulu Go to the March (Lily Marnell and Luciana Moreira, USA, 1994, 11 mins, experimental)

London Kills Me (Hanif Jureishi, UK, 1992, 107 mins, narrative)

Long Time Comin' (Dionne Brand, Canada, 1994, 52 mins, documentary)

Looking for Langston (Isaac Julein, Sankofa, UK, 1988, 40 mins, experimental)

Lord and Master (Troy Boyd, USA, 1992, 7 mins, experimental)

Loss of Heat (Noski Deville, UK, 1994, 20 mins, experimental)

Love Beneath a Neon Sky (Christine Rey, USA, 1993, 3 mins, experimental)

M. Butterfly (David Cronenberg, USA, 1993, 100 mins, narrative)

Mala Noche (Gus Van Sant, USA, 1985, 78 mins, narrative)

Malaysian Series, Part 1-6 (Azian Nurudin, USA, 1987, 15 mins, experimental)

Mark of Lilith, The (Bruna Fionda, Polly Gladwin and Isiling Mack-Nataf, UK, 1986, 32 mins, narrative)

Max (Monika Treut, USA/Germany, 1992, 27 mins, documentary)

- Media Blackmale (Bruno Wendell, Canada, 1992, 5 mins, documentary)
- Memory Pictures (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1989, 24 mins, documentary)
- Memsahib Rita (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1994, 20 mins, experimental)
- Messiah at the City (Dennis Kounin, USA, 1979, 16 mins, documentary)
- Mi Pollo Loco (Andrew Durham, USA, 1995, 35 mins, narrative)
- Minoru and Me (Toichi Nakata, UK, 1992, 45 mins, documentary)
- Miss Ruby's House (Lisa Collins, USA, 1993, 18 mins, narrative)
- Mona Lisa (Neil Jordan, UK, 1986, 104 mins, narrative)
- More Than a Paycheck (Lexi Leban, USA, 1994, 10 mins, experimental)
- Mother's Hands (Vejan Smith, USA, 1992, 10 mins, experimental)
- Muieria: Olmeca Rap (T. Osa Hidalgo de la Riva, USA, 1991, 3 mins, experimental)
- My Beautiful Laundrette (Stephen Frears, UK, 1985, 94 mins, narrative)
- My Father Is Coming (Monika Treut, USA/Germany, 1991, 82 mins, narrative)
- My Idol (Sikay Tang, USA, 1994, 4 mins, experimental)
- My Sorrow Means Nothing to You (Clifford Hengst, USA, 1990, 4 mins, experimental)
- My Sweet Peony (Karin Lee, Canada, 1994, 30 mins, narrative)
- Nana, George and Me (Joe Balass, Canada, 1997, 48 mins, documentary)
- Night Visions (Marusia Bociurkiw, Canada, 1989, 60 mins, narrative)
- No Money, No Honey (John O'Shea, USA, 1992, 4 mins, music video)
- No Regrets (Non, je ne regrette rien) (Marlon Riggs, USA, 1992, 38 mins, documentary)
- Nocturne (Joy Chamberlain, UK, 1990, 58 mins, narrative)
- Norman, Is That You? (George Schlatter, USA, 1976, 92 mins, narrative)
- Odds and Ends (A New-Age Amazon Fable) (Michelle Parkerson, USA, 1993, 28

mins, narrative)

Ojos que No Ven (Eyes That Do Not See) (Jose Gutierrez-Gomez and Jose Vergelin, USA, 1987, 52 mins, documentary)

Only the Brave (Ana Kokkinos, Australia, 1993, 59 mins, narrative)

Oranges are not the only fruit (Beeban Kidron, UK, 1989, 90 mins, narrative)

Orientations (Richard Fung, Canada, 1984, 57 mins, documentary)

Osaka Story (Toichi Nakata, UK/Japan, 1994, 75 mins, documentary)

Other Woman, The (Andrea Slane, USA, 1991, 13 mins, experimental)

Our House: Lesbian and Gays in the Hood (Not Channel Zero/Black Planet Productions, USA, 1992, 30 mins, documentary)

Out of Season (Jeanette Buck, USA, 1998, 98 mins, narrative)

Out in South Africa (Barbara Hammer, USA, 1994, 51 mins, documentary)

Out of the Shadows (Washington D.C. Media Project, USA, 1990, 21 mins, documentary)

Out Rage '69 / Culture Wars (Arthur Dong, USA, 1995, 60 mins, documentary)

Parallel Sons (John G Young, USA, 1995, 93 mins, narrative)

Paris is Burning (Jennie Livingston, USA, 1990, 78 mins, documentary)

Party (Charles Sessoms, USA, 1993, 26 mins, narrative)

Passion of Remembrance, The (Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien, UK, 1986, 82 mins, docudrama)

Peach (Christine Parker, NZ, 1994, 16 mins, narrative)

Philadelphia (Jonathan Demme, USA, 1994, 119 mins, narrative)

Place of Rage, A (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1991, 52 mins, documentary)

Please Decompose Slowly (Alfonzon Moret, USA, 1992, 20 mins, experimental)

Poison (Todd Haynes, USA, 1991, 85 mins, narrative)

Porcaria (Filipe Paulo, Canada, 1995, 35 mins, narrative)

- Portrait of Jason (Shirley Clarke, USA, 1967, 106 mins, documentary)
- Potluck and the Passion (Cheryl Dunye, USA, 1993, 22 mins, narrative)
- Prayer Before Birth, A (Jacqui Duckworth, UK, 1992, 20 mins, experimental)
- Preservation of the Song (Carter Martin, USA, 1995, 32 mins, narrative)
- Primas (Augie Robles, USA, 1995, 7 mins, narrative)
- Primitive and Proud (T. Osa Hidalgo de la Riva, USA, 1992, 15 mins, experimental)
- Private Pleasures (O. Wow, Fatale Videos, USA, 1985, 60 mins, erotica)
- Queen, The (Frank Simon, USA, 1968, 80 mins, documentary)
- Rage and Desire (Rupert Gabriel, UK, 1991, 17 mins, documentary)
- Ray Navarro Memorial Tape (Catherine Saalfeld and Gregg Bordowitz, USA, 1990, 30 mins, documentary)
- Reflections: A Moment in Time (Janet Liss, USA, 1987, 37 mins, narrative)
- Riot Grrrandmas!! (Mary Patten, USA, 1997, 20 mins, videozine)
- Safe is Desire (Debi Sundahl, USA, 1993, 60 mins, erotica)
- Safer Sister (Maria Perez, USA, 1992, 1 min, experimental)
- Salmonberries (Percy Adlon, Germany/USA, 1993, 94 mins, narrative)
- Sambal Belacan in San Francisco (Madeline Lim, USA, 1997, 27 mins, documentary)
- Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (Stephen Frears, UK, 1987, 100 mins, narrative)
- Sapphire and the Slave Girl (Leah Gilliam, USA, 1995, 18 mins, experimental)
- Sari Red (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1988, 12 mins, experimental)
- Second Generation Once Removed (Gita Saxena, USA, 1990, 19 mins, experimental)
- Scenes from the Class Struggle in Beverly Hills (Paul Bartel, USA, 1989, 102 mins, narrative)
- Season of the Boys (Ho Tam, USA, 1997, 3 mins, experimental)
- Set It Off (F. Gary Gray, USA, 1996, 120 mins, narrative)

- 7 Steps to Sticky Heaven (Hoang Tan Nguyen, USA, 1995, 24 mins, experimental)
- Sex and the Sandinistas (Lucinda Broadbent, UK, 1991, 25 mins, documentary)
- Shades (Jamika Ajalon, USA, 1994, 12 mins, narrative)
- Shame (Steve McBride, UK, 1995, 17 mins, narrative)
- Shasta Woman (Crystal Mason, USA, 1992, 36 mins, documentary)
- She Don't Fade (Cheryl Dunye, USA, 1991, 23 mins, narrative)
- She left the script behind (Dawn Suggs, USA, 1993, narrative)
- She Must Be Seeing Things (Sheila McLaughlin, USA, 1987, 85 mins, narrative)
- She's Gotta Have It (Spike Lee, USA, 1986, 84 mins, narrative)
- Shinjuku Boys (Kim Longinotto and Jano Williams, UK/Japan, 1995, 53 mins, documentary)
- Sightings (H. Len Keller, USA, 1995, 15 mins, narrative)
- Significant (Br)other (Charles Lofton, USA, 1993, 5 mins, experimental)
- Silence... Broken (Aishah Shahidah Simmons, USA, 1993, 8 mins, experimental)
- Sis: The Perry Watkins Story (Chiqui Cartegena, USA, 1994, 60 mins, documentary)
- Six Degrees of Separation (Fred Schepisi, USA, 1993, 112 mins, narrative)
- Sixth Happiness (Waris Hussein, UK/India, 1997, 97 mins, narrative)
- Skin Deep (Midi Onodera, Canada, 1994, 95 mins, narrative)
- Slanted Vision (S Ma Ming Yuen, USA, 1995, experimental)
- Sleeping Subjects (Quentin Lee, USA, 1993, 28 mins, experimental)
- Spin Cycle (Aarin Burch, USA, 1991, 28 mins, experimental)
- Splash (Thomas Allen Harris, USA, 1990, 7 mins, experimental)
- St. Louis Blues (Dudley Murphy, USA, 1928, 17 mins, narrative)
- Stonewall (Niegl Finch, UK/USA, 1995, 99 mins, narrative)

Storme: The Lady of the Jewel Box (Michelle Parkerson, USA, 1987, 21 mins, documentary)

Story So Far: A Forgotten Classic, The (Rif Sharif and Noski Deville, UK, 1994, 25 mins, narrative)

Suburban Dykes (Debi Sundahl, USA, 1990, 30 mins, erotica)

Suburban Queen (Mindy Faber, USA, 1985, 18 mins, documentary)

Surfer Dick (Wayne Yung, Canada, 1997, 3 mins, experimental)

Susana (Susana Munoz, USA/Argentina, 1980, 25 mins, experimental)

Surviving Sabu (Ian Iqbal Rashid, UK, 1997, 16 mins, narrative)

Territories (Isaac Julien, Sankofa, UK, 1984, 25 mins, experimental)

Thank God I'm a Lesbian (Laurie Colbert and Dominique Cardona, Canada, 1992, 55 mins, documentary)

These Shoes Weren't Made For Walking (Paul Lee, Canada, 1995, 27 mins, experimental)

Thick Lips, Thin Lips (Paul Lee, Canada, 1994, 6 mins, experimental)

Thin Ice (Fiona Cunningham Reid, UK, 1994, 88 mins, narrative)

This Is Not an AIDS Advertisement (Isaac Julien, UK, 1987, 5 mins, experimental)

Three Faces of Women (Rick Castro, USA, 1994, 45 mins, narrative)

Tiny and Rubv: Hell Divin' Women (Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss, USA, 1988, 30 mins, documentary)

To Be With You (Martha Garcia, USA, 1995, 1 min, narrative)

To Ride a Cow (Quentin Lee and Deeya Loran, USA, 1993, 24 mins, narrative)

To Wong Foo, Thanks For Everything, Julie Newmar (Beeban Kidron, USA, 1995, 108 mins, narrative)

Toc Store (Ming-Yuen S. Ma, USA, 1991, 21 mins, documentary)

Tokyo Cowboy (Kathy Garneau, Canada, 1994, 94 mins, narrative)

Tongues Untied (Marlon Riggs, USA, 1990, 55 mins, documentary)

- Torch Song Trilogy (Paul Bogart, USA, 1989, 117 mins, narrative)
- Totally F***ked Up/Totally Fucked Up (Gregg Araki, USA, 1994, 85 mins, narrative)
- Transsexual Menace (Rosa von Praunheim, Germany, 1996, 90 mins, documentary)
- 24 Hours a Day (Jocelyn Taylor, USA, 1993, 9 mins, experimental)
- Twilight of the Gods/Te Keremutunga o Nga Atua (Stewart Mains, NZ, 1995, 14 mins, narrative)
- Twisted (Seth Michael Donsky, USA, 1996, 100 mins, narrative)
- Two in Twenty (Laurel Chiten, Cheryl Qamar and Rachel McCollum, USA, 1988, 160 mins, narrative)
- Two Men and a Baby (Juanita Mohammed, USA, 1993, 10 minutes, documentary)
- Two Spirit People (Lori Levy, Gretchen Vogel and Michel Beauchemin, USA, 1991, 20 mins, documentary)
- Two Spirits (T. Osa Hidalgo de la Riva, USA, 1993, 27 mins, documentary)
- Untitled (John Sanborn and Mary Perillo, USA, 1989, 10 mins, experimental)
- Urinal (John Greyson, Canada, 1991, 100 mins, docudrama)
- Vanilla Sex (Cheryl Dunye, USA, 1992, 4 mins, experimental)
- Victor (Christopher Leo Daniels, USA, 1992, 30 mins, experimental)
- Village Idiot, The (Patrick Snee, USA, 1992, 26 mins, narrative)
- Vintage: Families of Value (Thomas Allen Harris, USA, 1995, 72 mins, documentary)
- !Viva 16th! (Valentin Aguirre and Augie Robies, USA, 1994, 30 mins, documentary)
- Voguing: The Message (David Bronstein, Dorothy Low and Jack Walworth, USA, 1989, 13 mins, documentary)
- Warrior Marks [excerpt] (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1993, 10 mins, documentary)
- Watermelon Woman, The (Cheryl Dunye, USA, 1997, 90 mins, narrative)
- Wavelengths (Pratibha Parmar, UK, 1997, 15 mins, narrative)
- Wedding Banquet, The (Ang Lee, Taiwan/USA, 1992, 104 mins, narrative)

Well Sexy Women (The Unconscious Collective, UK, 1993, 55 mins, documentary)

What Is a Line? (Shari Frilot, USA, 1994, 7 mins, narrative)

What's the Difference Between a Yam and a Sweet Potato? (J. Evan Dunlap and Adriene Jenik, USA, 1992, 4 mins, experimental)

Whatever (Kika Thorne, Canada, 1994, 21 mins, experimental)

When Night is falling (Patricia Rozema, Canada, 1995, 93 mins, narrative)

Why Am I Gay? Stories of Coming Out in America (Kenneth Paul Rosenberg, USA, 1993, 60 mins, documentary)

Wild Life (John Gross, USA, 1985, 40 mins, documentary)

Wild Side (Cammell Donald, USA, 1996, 92 mins, narrative)

Wild Thing: A Poem by Sapphire (Cheryl L. Dunye, USA, 1989, 8 mins, experimental)

Wild Woman of the Woods (Shani Mootoo, Canada, 1993, 12 mins, experimental)

Women In Love: Bonding Strategies of Black Lesbians (Sylvia Rhue, USA, 1986, 52 mins, documentary)

Women of Brewster Place. The (Donna Deitch, USA, 1989, 200 mins, narrative)

Wonderland (Philip Saville, UK, 1989, 103 mins, narrative)

Work (Rachel Reichman, USA, 1996, 90 mins, narrative)

Working Girls (Lizzie Borden, USA, 1986)

Yang and Yin: Gender in Chinese Cinema (Stanley Kwan, China/Hong Kong, 1996, 80 mins, documentary)

You Thrive on Mistaken Identity (Melissa Chang, USA, 1989, 18 mins, experimental)

Young Soul Rebels (Isaac Julien, UK, 1991, 103 mins, narrative)

Zero Patience (John Greyson, Canada, 1993, 95 mins, narrative)

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In the text, any film referred to, uses the standard convention of Title followed by (in brackets), the country of production and year of release. This is discontinued after initial citation, although underlining of the title remains.

Additional details (name of director, length and type of film) are provided in the filmography.

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