Female Pop Diva Adoration: Fandom in the Gay Community

A comparative study of how millennial gay men in Lebanon and the Netherlands give meaning to western female pop divas

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how millennial gay men in Lebanon and the Netherlands give meaning to western female pop divas. The research explores this phenomenon by answering the research question: *How do millennial gay men in Lebanon and the Netherlands give meaning to western female pop divas?* It does so by drawing on 14 in-depth semi structured interviews conducted with millennial gay men, out of which 5 were drag performers, all between the ages of 21 and 29 years old, from both Lebanon and the Netherlands. This, to compare the impact of western female pop divas on the lives of gay fans living in and outside of the western world. The data from the interviews was analyzed using a thematic analysis method, with five main themes being identified. First, the study found that growing up gay in a patriarchal society, most participants tend to listen to pop music in order to escape their homophobic realities. Second, the participants also believe that they face similar struggles as women in society and have thus started looking up to pop divas as they see them as powerful and strong female figures that they can emulate. Third, most participants were drawn toward female pop divas' camp qualities, as they allow them to express themselves through their adoration, while other participants tend to decode - or queer - female pop divas and their work in ways that would satisfy their own needs of media consumption. Fourth, the interviewees also expressed a strong emotional adoration of their favorite diva, which has led several of them to deify her. Moreover, the study has revealed that being a fan of a pop diva is being part of a community, which has helped the participants meet other likeminded individuals. Lastly, globalization and Americanization have allowed American pop divas to have fans in Lebanon and the Netherlands, with the participants idolizing American culture through their adoration of female pop divas. All of these findings illustrate how millennial gay men in Lebanon and the Netherlands give meaning to western female pop divas.

KEYWORDS: Fans, Pop music, Divas, Gay men, Drag queens.

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1. Introduction

With recent attention given to drag and queer culture, the gay media consumer arises as an audience worthy of being studied in today's media landscape. One of the more recent examples of this is Netflix's *AJ and the Queen* (2020), a light-hearted comedy drama show starring drag queen and actor RuPaul. The show follows in the footsteps of *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009), a show that popularized the once underground drag queen facet of gay culture to television. Kicking off on the American gay centered "Logo" TV, the show moved to Viacom's VH1 in 2017, bringing it to an entire new, mainstream audience (Stanhope, 2017). Another example is Netflix's *Pose* (2018), an American drama show depicting the lives of the African-American and Latino gay and transgender community in 1980s and 1990s New York City. It explores its underground "ballroom" culture scene, where trans dancers and models participate in runway competitions for trophies and recognition in the community (Rayner, 2018). The show is entertaining and educational: offering viewers a glimpse of the lives and turbulences of being a minority in 1980 America. For centuries, gay culture has always been underground, a sub-culture of society. However, with the rise of shows like *AJ and the Queen*, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and *Pose*, gay culture has been brought to mainstream attention and entertainment, competing with other established shows in the industry, and shedding light on the lives and experiences of a community that has always been disregarded and marginalized in the past. These shows center on divas and the influence of queer culture, therewith revealing a whole new aspect of culture left unexplored in academic research.

Today, homosexuality is considered a normal variation of human sexuality in many parts of the world. The Netherlands was the first country to legalize same sex marriage in 2001, and Ecuador the latest one in 2019 (Perper, 2019). This process of normalization is consequently translated onto the screen, with the rise of shows made by and for the gay community. This change is also apparent in the music industry. Back in 1990, American singer songwriter Madonna released the song "Vogue", her first explicit nod to the gay and queer community of the time. The singer was inspired by her gay friends, vogue dancers and choreographers who first introduced her to the dance form. The song went on to reach the number one spot on the American song charts and propelled gay culture to the top of mainstream society (Watercutter,

2019). More recently in 2011, American singer, songwriter and actress Lady Gaga released "Born this Way", a song that openly addressed the gay community and its struggles with lyrics such as "no matter gay, straight or bi, lesbian transgender life, I'm on the right track, baby I was born to survive", with Elton John describing it as "the new gay anthem" (Neary, 2019). Similarly to Madonna's "Vogue", the song went on to reach the number one spot on America's Billboard Hot 100 chart, reigning at the top for several consecutive weeks. Today, more than ever before, gay and queer culture are part of the mainstream entertainment industry, with the lives and struggles of gay men and women, transgender people, queer people, gender non-conforming individuals and drag queens propelled to stardom and recognition. Hence, with the rise of the popularity of entertainment products targeting gay fans, it is important to pay attention to the gay consumer.

For instance, the art form of drag, depicted in drama shows such as *Pose* (2018) and *AJ and the Queen* (2020) and reality competitions such as *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009) is in itself a quintessential embodiment of fan idolization. Drag is when biological men (allegedly often gay men) dress up as women for entertainment and perform to popular pop songs in gay clubs and bars (Moncrieff & Lienard, 2017). The drag queen phenomenon has drawn considerable attention in recent years. Moncrieff & Lienard (2017) argue that it has helped some homeless and jobless gay men to make a decent living, and for the more successful drag queens a chance at gaining celebrity status in the gay community. In fact, in their performances at bars and clubs, drag queens often lip-sync and perform to timeless pop songs by female pop divas to large crowds of gay men and women, in a ceremonial celebration of life, femininity, individuality and female pop music.

So, in today's consumerist world, it is important to shed light on the way media products are consumed but more importantly by whom they are consumed. This study aims to understand fans' actions, behaviors and motivations and what this says about them and other similar people in their communities. The research focuses on one fandom in particular, that of the female pop diva, one that has amassed a large following throughout the years. The phenomenon has created large fandoms consisting of devout supporters who diligently follow the lives of their object of fandom. In fact, the term "diva" has its roots in the world of opera and is closely linked to the "prima donnas" of opera (Warrack & West, 1992). Today, female performers are referred to as

such when they are deemed to have had a strong impact on the lives of their fans (Jennex, 2013). As such, the phenomenon of the pop diva is not novel, but rather has been going on for several years: pop music has always been in touch with a feminine side, dominated by strong, independent and powerful women (Rosen, 2010). From Cher, Madonna and Britney Spears, to more recently Lady Gaga, Ariana Grande and Dua Lipa, these female pop stars have cultivated strong followings over the years, more particularly so in the gay community, a community that has continuously adored them over the years (Horn, 2017). This thesis aims to understand the role that these female pop divas play in the lives of gay men, by studying how gay men make meaning out of these western female pop divas in order to ultimately better understand the gay community, a community that has largely been marginalized in the past.

1.1 Academic relevance

Academically, some studies have analyzed the phenomenon of female pop divas and their history. According to Lister (2001), female pop divas are deities in the eyes of their adoring fans. For example the mother of modern pop music, Madonna, as described by Lister (2001), has been hailed for her support of marginalized communities. Fans have connected with her because of her efforts to defend minorities in the media when others failed to do so (Draper, 2017). Pop divas have amassed large followings throughout the years, however, none of the research done on female pop divas focuses on the motivations and incentives of one of their most significant admirers: the gay community. For example, Kostenbaum (1993) recalls his admiration of the prima-donnas of opera, the earliest "divas", however the account discusses the phenomenon from a more personal, autobiographical perspective.

In that regard, gay fandoms of female pop divas at large have not been explicitly discussed in previous academic research. More particularly, there lacks research studying millennial gay fans in particular, with "millennials" being people born somewhere between the early 1980s and late 1990s (Dimock, 2019). The research aims to study millennials because they are seen as the most influential generation of consumers (Linden & Linden, 2017) as they are closely linked to the rise of the internet and Web 2.0.

Furthermore, when gay men are usually the topic of research in pop culture, they are rarely viewed as fans, but are rather studied from the perspective of their own representation in the media and queer media. Rodriguez (2018) argues that media industries shape what stories are

told about gay people. According to him, stories of gay men and women are closely linked to power hierarchies in society, with some stories being told, while others ignored (Rodriguez, 2018). The author argues that the hegemonic western media shape the narratives of stories told, and thus only predominantly highlight the lives of white, middle-class, cisgender, and Western gay men, disadvantaging other strata of the community and society (Rodriguez, 2018). The dominant media hence shape the general public's perceptions of gay men, a public only exposed to a representation that is produced by a certain privileged and advantaged level of society. We therefore have a limited understanding of a community and its motivations and desires, and therefore we lack understanding of what it really means to be gay or queer in today's society.

Finally, there lacks research on the art of drag and drag queens, a subcategory of gay culture. The phenomenon's history has been studied (Moncrieff & Lienard, 2017), and its rise to the mainstream and impact on pop culture acknowledged (Brennan & Gudelunas, 2017), however drag queens haven't been studied as fans themselves. They are always regarded as stars in their own right however there is a lack of research that aims to understand how and what makes them fans of pop divas themselves. This study aims to include drag queen performers in the narrative, in order to gain insight from a segment of the gay community that is most often ignored and marginalized. This would help yield a more cohesive and comprehensive understanding of the larger gay community.

1.2 Social Relevance

According to Appadurai (1996), the theory of cultural flows suggests that in the age of globalization, the world's cultures constantly intersect and overlap. With the help of globalization and subsequent Americanization of the world, the international appeal of western pop divas has travelled the planet, touching the lives of millions of people. However, there lacks research that aims to study and compare the impact of western pop stars on the lives of people living in and outside of the western world, such as in the Arab world and Europe for example. The study aims to bridge the gap in the missing literature and provide a comprehensive understanding of gay fans both in the Arab world and the western world, taking Lebanon and the Netherlands as starting points for the research. Ultimately, this might yield interesting results and aims to compare the motives of gay men from both western and non-western backgrounds to help understand the community.

As is the case with Lister (2001) and Kostenbaum (1993) who discuss divas from the 1980s and 1990s, there is a lack of research studying fandoms of more recent, western musical acts and these artists' influence outside of the western world. For example, the Middle-East and Lebanon in particular, have been considered a melting pot of cultures. Lebanon's strategic location between Europe and the Arab Gulf has helped the country and its people to assimilate the cultures of its neighboring nations. Modern media technologies have also helped foreign cultural elements integrate into the Lebanese local culture, allowing for western media and entertainment to blend in with those of the host country (Kraidy, 2003; Burkhalter, 2013). Hence, the country has enjoyed an immense cultural hybridity throughout the years, often reflected in Lebanon's millennial generation. The research will thus include participants from Lebanon in an effort to possibly highlight this phenomenon.

Finally, Bond & Compton (2015) argue that a positive relationship exists between exposure to gay representation in popular culture and gay equality endorsement. Thus, with the rise of gay rights and LGBT equality, gay men have enjoyed much stronger representation in pop culture. However, non-western countries do not enjoy the same level of liberation and freedom. Here lies the importance of this research, as it aims to understand the connection and relationship that bonds the gay community with female pop icons and in order to ultimately foster acceptance and normalization of these aspects. It also aims to bridge the gap in the literature and offer a fresh perspective on what it means to be gay both in and outside of the western world, taking the Netherlands and Lebanon as starting points for the study.

By studying pop divas through the lens of the gay community, the study will reveal valuable insights. Therewith, it might provide an answer to the community's strong admiration of these western icons of popular culture and ultimately help us to learn more about a prominent minority group in today's society. Therefore, the research question that I aim to find an answer to within this research is the following: *How do millennial gay men in Lebanon and the Netherlands give meaning to Western female pop divas?* Before providing an answer to the research question, the thesis will discuss the relevant theories that will provide a solid foundation for the research. This is followed by the methodology chapter explaining why and how qualitative interviews were conducted, as well as the results and conclusion chapters in which the findings of the research are presented and discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the core concepts behind this research will be briefly introduced. First, the topic of fans, fandom and popular culture is presented to provide an understanding of who fans are as well as offering an overview of the academic studies in the field studying fandom. Second, the topics of queering hegemony and camp are presented in order to give an understanding of gay fans' reception of popular culture and how its queer readings have influenced this reception. Third, I will provide an overview of previous research studying female pop divas as well as their relationship with the gay community to argue that they have developed a para-social relationship throughout the years built upon gay fans' intrinsic desires of media consumption. Finally, the topic of globalization and Americanization is presented to provide an answer to western pop divas' international appeal and how it has helped create gay fans of female pop divas around the world.

2.1 Fans, fandom and popular culture

The thesis will focus on gay fans of female pop divas, therefore it is essential to provide an understanding of who fans are. This is understood by looking at previous cultural studies research studying audiences and audience reception of media texts. Stuart Hall (1980) provides a thorough examination of this with his encoding/decoding model. According to Hall (1980), media messages contain meanings that are encoded within these messages, with the audience thus decoding this meaning through their very own consumption of the media product. This will result in different meaning making structures, since each member of the audience will decode the message in their own ways and according to their own background, culture and environment (Hall, 1980). In fact, there are three distinct readings by the audience that might occur, mainly the dominant or preferred reading intended by the media producers, the negotiated reading which is when the dominant reading is partly agreed upon, and finally the oppositional reading, which is when the message is decoded in an oppositional way by the audiences (Hall, 1980). In her study of the show *Dallas* and its reception by its audiences, Ien Ang (1986) argues that the audience is active in its consumption in a sense that it is able to decode media content and interpret the messages that the content is trying to convey (Ang, 1986). Thus, media consumers have agency: they are able to interpret the messages transferred by the mass media in their own

way, and are therefore not passive in their media consumption (Hall, 1980; Ang, 1986). Conversely, according to Duffet (2013), when drawing on the concept of 'textual determination', a media text determines its own meaning and automatically influences the reception of its audience (Duffet, 2013).

Additionally, in his study of televisual textuality and its influence on audiences, Gray (2003) argues that not all audiences are equally active in their media consumption: when a consumer's relationship with a media text is that of close effect, the nature and structure of the text changes, and that "textuality shifts according to viewer engagement level" (2003, p. 65). Gray (2003) offers three different textualities that aim to define different types of media audiences: the fan, which is the audience member with the most intense and strong involvement with a media text; the anti-fan, which is the audience member with a strong dislike for a certain media text; and finally the non-fan, which is the audience member who consumes certain media texts but with no intense involvement. Hence, fans are audience members who engage more thoroughly and emotionally with their preferred media product. They are active in their media consumption by interpreting the media text in ways that other, non-fans, might fight trivial or un-important, and thus influencing their meaning making (Gray, 2003; Jenkins, 1992, Hall, 1980). Therefore, one can argue that not all media consumers are active in their media consumption, as some audiences are passive in their decoding and interpretation of messages conveyed by the media. However, others tend to make meaning out of the messages and thus develop an emotional attachment to the media product (Duffet, 2013; Gray, 2003; Hall, 1980). The nuance between the two defines the fan, as fans' consumption relies on their active participation.

Originally, the word "fan" was often used pejoratively in popular culture to refer to viewers and consumers of "disfavored" genres of entertainment, such as soap operas, science fiction and pop music (Gray, 2003). The term first emerged in the 19th century to refer to enthusiastic sports spectators, however at the time it did not escape its negative connotations rooted in religious zealotry, fanaticism, possession and madness (Jenkins, 1992). Similarly, fandom has consistently been characterized as deviant and obsessive (Jenson, 1992; Gray, 2003; Jenkins, 1992). Jenson (1992) argues that the fan was first considered to be passive, and was brought into existence by the modern celebrity system. News media have constantly fed into this narrative, with their reporting of the killings of celebrities by the hands of their own fans and

thus blaming the media influence for the fans' obsession (Jenson, 1992; Jenkins, 1992). This narrative has created an "us vs them" account, whereas the fans were constantly being distanced from society and were thus continuously being labeled as different, deviant and obsessive, and were considered a result of the media's power and of the obsession surrounding celebrity culture (Jenson, 1992; Jenkins, 1992). Fans and fandom are thus understood as a result of media and mass culture, and a need to compensate for a lack of identity, intimacy and community in society (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

However, fan studies have come to provide a corrective approach. Jenkins (1992) argues that fans' media consumption is emotional and passionate and thus differs significantly from that of the non-fan. Similarly, Sandvoss (2005) notes that a fan's object of fandom is interwoven with their sense of the self. Their relationship becomes so personal that the object of fandom becomes a part of the Self and what makes the fans who they are as a person and as a member of a larger community and group of people (Sandvoss, 2005). While previous studies have considered fans a result of the influence of mass media, Duffet (2013) argues that one becomes a fan by translating their media consumption into a cultural activity, by sharing feelings and emotions about their object of fandom with others and by joining a community of similar and likeminded individuals. Thus, "fandoms' very existence represents a critique of conventional forms of consumer culture" (Duffet, 2013, p. 56) in that fandoms are not merely a result of the influence of mass media, but are rather conceived by consumers who want to see a change in society and who thus critique the conventional forms of mass media consumption. Jenkins (1992) refers to this conceptualization as a 'labor of love', characterized by a lack of promotion of economic consumption, but rather represents fans' adoration of their object of fandom with no economic benefit. Fans are thus active in their media consumption in that they encourage other members of the fan community to share their experiences of interpreting the media product, which is for them a labor of love, an emotional bond that connects them (Jenkins, 1992; Duffet, 2013; Booth, 2010). Fans are attracted to their own interests and to experiences that they can relate to, and thus aim to create something out of this adoration.

Due to its non-commercial nature, Duffet (2013) argues that fan adoration is itself a gift economy, based on the concept of giving back without waiting for something in return. Similarly, Hellekson (2009) argues that in this gift economy, fans enter willingly on the basis of

a shared interest, and are thus more prone to give back. Learning about fans therefore provides us with valuable insight regarding the fans themselves as well as regarding the communities that they are part of, and this is where this research steps in. This conceptualization gives agency back to the fans and contradicts previous discussions on fans and fandoms that would consider them merely a result of the mass media (Jenson, 1992).

When studying gay fans of female pop divas, one must understand their wants, desires and logics behind their media consumption and engagement. Drawing on the conceptualization of the active audience (Hall, 1980; Ang, 1986), McQuail (1994) first introduced the "Uses and Gratifications" theory to discuss the effects of the media on people. The theory explains how media consumers use and consume their preferred media of choice to satisfy their own wants, needs and desires. Recent scholarly research has also built upon the Uses and Gratifications theory to provide an answer to fans' media consumption. For example, Askwith (2007) provides five logics of engagement that drive media fans to consume certain media products over others: these are the logics of entertainment, social connection, mastery, immersion and identification (Askwith, 2007). Thus, as opposed to the average media consumer, fans are active in their media consumption. Fans aim to satisfy their own wants and needs, while also aiming to build social connections with other likeminded individuals who share the same love for their object of fandom, and thus build a community surrounding their object of fandom, a mirror of themselves and their desires (Hall, 1980; McQuail, 1994; Sandvoss, 2005; Jenkins, 1992).

For example, one of these needs for media consumption is that of escapism, as argued by Vorderer, Klimmt & Ritterfeld (2004) who note that media provide a form of escape from the harsh realities that the consumers might face in their daily lives, and as such media is used as a tool to satisfy this need. It is important to note that as argued by Collis (2017), the entertainment industry is 'audience-centric' meaning it can be differentiated from other industries because of its reliance on its audience. The industry tends to study these wants and needs of the fans to ultimately design products that cater to these wants and needs. Hence, the relationship between fans and their object of fandom is that of mutual reciprocity: the media needs to listen to the wants and desires of the fans in order to succeed, while the fans themselves engage with their preferred media product to satisfy their own desires (Hall, 1980; Askwith, 2007; Collis, 2017).

This section of the chapter helped us understand gay fans of female pop divas by introducing fans, as well as arguing that fans are active in their media consumption, as opposed to that of the average media consumer. What follows next is a discussion of two trains of thought analyzing the reception of pop culture by its gay audiences.

2.2 Queering hegemony and "camp": pop culture's queer appeal

When discussing gay audiences' reception of popular culture, one can establish two contradicting trains of thought: the first argues that gay fans "queer" hegemonic pop culture products and claim them as their own in order to find some leverage in heteronormative society. The other argues that pop culture is in itself essentially queer and geared towards appealing to its gay audience because of its camp aesthetics and components. Both of these conceptualizations will be discussed in the following section of the chapter in order to better understand how gay men give meaning to female pop divas.

In their study of the Eurovision Song Contest and its reception by its gay audiences, Singleton, Fricker & Moreo (2007) argue that "queering" means to disrupt and critique the regimes of the "normal" or normative. The term "queer" was brought into commonplace terminology in the late 1990s, with the broadcast of the hit show *Queer as Folk* (1999), which provided mainstream audiences with a look into the trendy and glamourous lifestyles of its gay characters (Morland & Willox, 2005). According to the show, the mundane life of straight people is transformed, through a queer eye, into a glamorous and trendy new world. "Queering" and via the invocation of gay subcultural readings of the hegemonic mainstream popular culture thus critiques its heteronormative nature (Singleton et al., 2007; Morland & Willox, 2005). Hence, for a media or cultural product to lend itself to being queered, it has to be in one way or another hegemonic or dominant in society. As is the case with the Eurovision Song Contest, a popular and mainstream televised song contest, Singleton et al. (2007) argue that gay men have queered the phenomenon and have asserted their ownership of it throughout the years, mainly due to its covert queer meanings that appeal to its gay audiences. The contest heavily relies on its live performance aspect: Mungen (2006) argues that musical performance, with its visual and auditory aspects offers opportunities to play with gender identities and thus critique society's conventions regarding gender and sexuality. The relationship between sexual identity and the performative is given significant importance in the queer world because queer people have always relied on performance and theatricality in their everyday life in order to hide aspects of

their sexuality and identity that do not adhere to society's heteronormative standards (Mungen, 2006; Singleton, Fricker & Moreo, 2007).

In turn, Butler (2010) argues that performativity works "to counter a certain metaphysical presumption about culturally constructed categories" (Butler, 2010, p. 147): performance allows the performer to challenge society's preconceived gender and societal norms. So, musical performances allow themselves to be "queered" by their gay spectators. This is due to their ability to be interpreted in many different ways, and more particularly so in ways that would feed into the queer narrative that gay men have built themselves, one of gender non-conformity, sexual liberation and survival against oppression.

Likewise to performance, music can also lend itself to being queered. Mungen (2006) argues that as a nonvisual medium, music allows for the listener to create images in the mind based on previous experienced live or mediated performances. The lack of a visual aspect in music allows the listener to create his or her own realities and challenge the song's dominant meanings that were initially intended by the producers (Mungen, 2006; Hall, 1980). This is particularly apparent in pop music and more so that of female pop divas. For example, Horn (2017) argues that female pop divas' lack of songs celebrating traditional heterosexual relationships, and the sexual ambiguity in the song lyrics have allowed gay audiences to identify with the music. Female pop divas' music thus allows itself to be queered because of its covert ability to allow its audiences to challenge its dominant meanings and denotations in order to fit their specific queer narrative (Mungen, 2006; Horn, 2017). Similarly, Whiteley (2006) argues that pop music's engagement with the sexually provocative has allowed for the questioning of traditional gender identities. Pop music allow for the construction of fantasies in the listener's mind that aim to circumvent society's norms and regulations where sexual drives are repressed (Whiteley, 2006). She claims that "pop music can signal both what is denied and what we would like to experience" (Whitely, 2006, p. 251), in that it allows the listener to experience what was denied from them in life. Hence, gay men aim to satisfy their innate sexual desires that they may not be able to express in day to day life through listening to pop music (Whitely, 2006; Mungen, 2006). Female pop divas' sexual liberation and freedom portrayed in their songs are grounds for gay men's queering of their music as they allow their fantasies to come to life, in a world where heteronormative romance and sexuality prevail (Horn, 2017; Whiteley, 2006).

As a result, when it comes to female pop divas, their music and use of performance and theatricality allow them to be queered by their gay audiences. According to Taylor (2013), queer theory postulates that identities are not normal or natural, but are rather "performative and discursively constituted" (p. 195): this way, we come to understand identity only through repeated stylized acts, such as femininity being associated to female bodies. As the heterosexual female identity is more hegemonic in society compared to that of the homosexual male, gay men have "queered" female pop divas and adopted them as their own so as to gain some leverage in society (Taylor, 2013; Horn, 2017). Pop divas are mostly straight, cis-gendered women, or what we can define as the "hegemony" in this narrative. With its constant "queering" of pop divas, the gay community has adopted them as their own, and has claimed ownership of them, by attending their concerts, buying their records, waving the rainbow flag at their shows and performing to their pop hits in drag. Pop divas are the "straight" gateway for the gay community to go mainstream, and this is happening with the community's constant "queering" of the phenomenon.

While Singleton et al. (2007), Mungen (2006), Whitely (2006) and Taylor (2013) consider the concept of queering hegemony in popular culture, other scholars have provided an alternative approach to understanding pop culture's queer appeal. This is mainly explicated through the notion of camp. In her essay *Notes on "Camp",* Susan Sontag (1964) provides one of the first and earliest understandings of what camp is about. Described by Sontag (1964) as a sensibility and a taste rather than an idea, camp at its core is about its love for the unnatural, the artificial and the exaggerated. Camp is about seeing the world in terms of style and aesthetics, rather than in terms of beauty. When it comes to camp's appeal to its queer audiences, Sontag (1964) argues that homosexuals constitute "the vanguard and most articulate audience of camp" (p. 12). She says that this is the case because homosexuals are "the creators of sensibilities" and are "creatives in the truest sense" (Sontag, 1964, p. 12) and argues that homosexuals have tried integrating into society by promoting the aesthetic sense, that of camp. Equally, Morrill (1994) argues that camp disrupts the binary logic of western society: drawing attention to camp and queer theory's similarities, he argues that both aim to break society's preconceived constructions of gender and sexuality. Similarly, Denisoff (2001, as cited in Leibetseder, 2016) notes that camp supports the idea that all identities in life are socially constructed, and that they are changeable and adaptable. Horn (2017) on the other hand links camp more explicitly to queer history. The

author argues that before the beginning of the gay rights movement in the United States, camp had its roots in gay subculture and provided this oppressed group a measure of coherence, humor and solidarity in the face of a heteronormative society. Henceforth, gay audiences have found solace throughout the years in camp, as it goes against society's binary norms of gender and sexuality, and challenges previously held beliefs and understandings of the world that do not serve the queer narrative (Sontag, 1964; Morrill, 1994; Horn, 2017).

In her book, Leibetseder (2016) talks about camp's modern inclusion in popular culture, and mentions camp in pop music. In fact, with the rise of the popularity of camp, it has consistently been associated to pop culture, creating what Leibetseder (2016) calls "pop camp": "pop", short for "popular", is the view of the masses, a mass phenomenon encompassing the likes of the popular society, whilst "camp" is the taste of an elite minority; both conjoined together to form one single entity. This is especially noticeable in modern popular culture and especially with female pop divas: Horn (2017) mentions female pop divas' overt reliance on camp in their work, with a purpose to defy society's gender and sexuality conventions. However, upon discussing Madonna's relation to camp, and taking her song "Vogue" as an example, both Leibetseder (2016) and Horn (2017) indicate that, like many other female pop divas, Madonna has infused her work with camp, albeit toned down to appeal to the hegemonic and heteronormative society and its expectations. Through camp, Madonna, a white, heterosexual, cis-gendered woman is privileged, with a strong and powerful economic influence, masks the "powerlessness of the subcultural groups through her performance of agency and power" (Leibetseder, 2016, p. 68). Hence, Madonna, like other female pop divas adopts or appropriates queer culture and camp and brings it to the mainstream This breaks society's standards that have marginalized the queer community for so long and allows the community to have a platform (Leibetseder, 2016; Horn, 2017).

Similarly to Leibetseder (2016), Deflem (2017) mentions another female pop diva, Lady Gaga, and argues that her initial success was found within the gay community. This was most notably due to camp in her artistic ventures and influences, theatricality, bold fashion statements and support of gay rights. Consequently, female pop divas aim to address and satisfy their queer audience's need for camp by elaborately and intricately infusing their work with material that speaks to this specific demographic (Leibetseder, 2016; Horn, 2017; Deflem, 2017). According

to this train of thought, pop culture and female pop divas are inherently camp, and do not require a queer reading for them to appeal to their gay audiences (Sontag, 1964; Leibetseder, 2016; Horn, 2017). They have infused camp in all aspects of their work throughout the years: from their over-the-top costumes, sexual liberation, refusal of conventional gender norms as well as their suggestive and empowering lyrics in order to challenge society's norms.

2.3 Pop divas and the gay community: a para-social relationship

In this section of the chapter, the para-social relationship bonding gay fans with female pop divas will be discussed. The deification of these divas is a result of the gay community's desire to find solace and belonging in them within a secular society that lacks the previously held influences of organized religions.

In previous accounts of admiration for female pop divas, empowerment of the audience was given significant importance (Kostenbaum, 1993; Lister, 2001; Jennex, 2013). In one of the earliest examples of this, Kostenbaum (1993) reveals in his own autobiographical account his fascination with opera divas and discloses how gay men look up to them as they consider them examples of strength and comfort. According to him, gay men face similar struggles in a patriarchal society, and therefore look up to these opera divas as powerful figures that they can emulate in order to face the challenges of life (Kostenbaum, 1993). Drawing on Kostenbaum's (1993) findings, Jennex (2013) argues that to be deemed a "diva", a female performer needs to offer fans strength that they cannot find elsewhere. As such, the diva is an emblematic figure who brings the gay community together and "represents a specific gay experience to participants" (Jennex, 2013, p. 346), one that offers them strength and unites them. Although she examines female divas of modern times such as Whitney Houston, Madonna and Celine Dion, Lister (2001) in a similar fashion to Kostenbaum (1993) finds in her work on the "prima-divas" and the "Madonnas", that these singers are praised for their flexibility and their continuous reinvention of themselves. Lister (2001) argues that this fascination with female divas allows for their deification by their audiences, an activity that "enables both the worshipped and worshipper" (2001, p. 8) as it has helped eliminate the negative connotations associated with the term "diva".

Similarly to Lister (2001) who argues that the proliferation of diva worship is in large part due to the cult of celebrity that dominates society, Marshall (1997) argues that what is fundamental to the construction of the popular music celebrity is the conveyance of commitment

and difference in their work. Commitment here meaning the fans' close and intimate relationship with the performer, as well as the ways in which the artist conveys their authenticity in representing the audience (Marshall, 1997). He argues that the singer's authenticity is expressed through his or her communication of solidarity with the audience, and it is this authenticity and relationship with the fans that has helped proliferate the celebrity's power and influence (Marshall, 1997). Likewise, Dyer (1986) argues that celebrities and stars "articulate what it is to be human in contemporary society" (1986, p.10). Hence, stars are a reflection of the human and are thus a reflection of the self (Dyer, 1986; Sandvoss, 2005). Thus, the relationship that bonds female pop divas with their gay fans is that of close effect. Gay men find strength and power in their divas that they can emulate, and this relationship is predominantly built on the singers' authenticity and commitment to their audience in their work (Dyer, 1986; Kostenbaum, 1993; Marshall, 1997; Lister, 2001).

Upon studying the reasons behind the rise of celebrity culture, Alberoni (2007) draws a difference between people of institutional power whose actions have an influence on society, such as monarchs, priests and prophets, and those who do not but "whose doings and way of life arouse a considerable and sometimes even a maximum degree of interest" (2007, p. 2). The latter are the ones who Alberoni (2007) defines as the celebrities. However, both of these groups possess what Max Weber (1968, as cited in Alberoni, 2007) defines as "charisma". According to Weber (1968), this charisma leads to the creation of a power relationship because of the fact that the one who possesses this charisma is seen as a leader or a chief, thus producing an internalized feeling of obligation (Weber, 1968; Alberoni, 2007). Hence, both of the groups mentioned by Alberoni (2007) possess the power to attract and influence people, mainly because of their charisma. This power relationship, important for this thesis because it conveys the relationship that exists between fans and their object of fandom, is observable when it comes to celebrities and their fans and is apparent through their para-social relationship. Thi is then explained most notably by the significant decline in the popularity of organized religions in modern times (Rojek, 2015).

According to Rojek (2015), the modern meaning of the concept of celebrity derives from the 'fall of the gods', and the rise of democratic governments and secular societies. With the dwindling power of the church and religion, celebrities have quickly replaced the monarchy as

the new symbols of belonging and recognition, and as the belief in God faded, celebrities became immortal (Rojek, 2015). Thus, these celebrities and pop divas quickly substituted the place previously occupied by deities and figures of religion to become deities themselves in the eyes of their adoring fans. Fans have found solace and a sense of belonging and integration in them in a secular society that lacks the religious authorities of previous times (Rojek, 2015; Lister, 2001).

Drawing on similarities between religion and music fandoms, Sylvan (2002) argues that music subcultures and fandoms provide a strong religious experience, and almost everything that a traditional religion would, creating a community of individuals bound by their same adoration. However, while Rojek (2015) and Sylvan (2002) argue that secularization has dampened the power of religion, Jindra (2000) argues that the power of religion has begun to emerge in other aspects of life, and has found itself in popular culture and pop music. Hence, fans and fandoms share significant similarities with traditional religions (Rojek, 2015; Sylvan, 2002; Jindra, 2000). Subsequently, and because of the deification of pop divas, fans have built rapport with them through a para-social relationship: according to Horton & Wohl (1956), the new mass media gives an illusion of a face to face relationship with the performer. This para-social relationship is developed through the media and creates an illusion of presumed intimacy between the performer and the fans, and thus allows there to be rapport, albeit one sided (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rojek, 2015). This is also apparent when it comes to celebrities' "totemic values": according to Rojek (2015), a totem is a representational symbol portraying an imaginary brotherhood that conveys meaning, ritual and unity to the group (Rojek, 2015). Fandoms are thus created through the development of a para-social relationship with their object of fandom, bound by totemic values that establish lines of demarcation that separate them from other groups (Rojek, 2015; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Hence, when it comes to fans, a strong emotional attachment is attainable even without concrete and direct personal reciprocity between them and their objet of fandom. Para-social relationships are at the core of celebrity culture, and most significantly at the core of pop diva adoration.

Kostenbaum (1993) argues that drag queens, just like female pop divas, are exaggerations of certain feminine traits. One might even argue that the art of drag is itself a representation of the para-social relationship that bonds gay men to female pop stars, as drag queens gain a living performing to their hits, with some of them impersonating them on stage (Moncrieff & Lienard,

2017). While previously only considered part of the underground gay subculture, drag queens have gained an unprecedented amount of attention and respect in mainstream pop culture in recent years, and have similarly gained unmatched admiration from the gay community itself, mainly due to the immense global success of the show *RuPaul's Drag Race* (Brenna & Gudelunas, 2017).

This para-social relationship can be observed through drag which is itself deemed as "female impersonation": Hills (2002) argues that impersonation is a form of what he calls "performative consumption" (Hills, 2002, p 122), uniting the areas of performativity and consumption in one. In a similar note and in her theories on performativity, Butler (1993) argues that gender is not a performance that a subject chooses voluntarily to adopt, but rather gender is performative, in that a person's involuntary actions and ways of presenting themselves consolidate their gender, a phenomenon that is being reproduced at all times. Hills (2002) thus draws the distinction between both performance and performativity to argue that performance happens willfully, while the performative, just like gender, is unintentionally presented. Thus, through the art of drag and female impersonation, this performative dimension of consumption becomes the most apparent, as it generates a new experience. As the star is intentionally recreated through performance, a new, intuitive performativity and personal narrative arises: that of the impersonator's life as a star (Hills, 2002; Butler, 1993). This blurs the lines between the self and the other, as the impersonator fluctuates between the two (Hills, 2002): impersonation is both a reflection of the star and the impersonator and is a reflection of the para-social relationship that bonds the two together, a phenomenon one can observe through drag.

Therewith, if drag is a labor of love (Jenkins 1992), it also reflects how it can be a mirror of oneself, a phenomenon reflected through the para-social relationship that bonds the drag performer and the star being impersonated (Sandvoss, 2005; Moncrieff & Lienard, 2017; Jenkins, 1992).

2.4 Globalization, Americanization and western pop divas' global appeal
The following section of the chapter will discuss the concepts of globalization and Americanization, and will argue that they have helped bring the phenomenon of western female pop divas to the world, in turn creating a global 'imagined community' of fans that crosses borders.

Brennan & Gudelunas (2017) argue that, with *RuPaul's Drag Race's* move to Viacom's VH1 channel, the show has made drag culture immensely more accessible to mainstream American as well as global audiences. This international appeal of the show can be explained by looking at the processes of globalization and Americanization (Brennan & Gudelunas, 2017). Ritzer & Stillman (2003) define globalization as the "the growth of transnational politics, the integration of the world economy, and a subsequent blending of cultures around the world" (2003, p. 31), which here means it has allowed the cultures of the world to intersect and overlap. Moreover, as argued by James & Steger (2014), the concept of globalization came to be from a merging of the four levels of the formation of social meaning, mainly the ideas, ideologies, imaginaries and ontologies. As such, globalization is rooted in the global exchange of ideas and ideologies as well as the formation of modes of understanding the world (James & Steger, 2014). Similarly, Appadurai (1996) considers that the world's cultures constantly intersect and overlap in this time of globalization. This happens most notably through what Appadurai (1996) defines as 'mediascapes', which are the variety of media that help us shape our ideas of the world, as well as the 'ideoscapes' which are the flows of ideologies across borders. These dimensions hence allow for the spread of ideologies and content equally around the world and are at the core of globalization (James & Steger, 2014; Appadurai, 1996).

However, dominant cultures have an advantage in the process: Crane (2002) defines cultural globalization as the transmission and diffusion of media and arts across national borders. One of the models of cultural globalization is that of cultural imperialism, a theory which postulates that the global economic system of the world is dominated by a core of advanced countries, while third world countries stay at the periphery with little to no control over their political, cultural and economic development (Crane, 2002). This results in a 'cultural homogenization', the process through which local cultures are transformed by the world's dominant ones which results in cultures that are homogenous across borders (Appadurai, 1996; Crane, 2002). A quintessential example of this is Americanization, which Ritzer & Stillman (2003) define as a one-directional process that propagates American ideas, customs and social patterns around the world, and tends to overwhelm local forces that aim to resist it. The phenomenon has had a tremendous impact on the global community and has especially impacted the world's entertainment industries, with American programing dominating media markets around the world (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Hence, with the global economic and cultural power

of the United States, and through the process of globalization and subsequent Americanization, western culture and media products such as female pop divas have travelled around the world and have seeped through the many different nations, assimilating with their local cultures. The media and entertainment industries around the world are ideal examples of this Americanization of cultures and showcase the cultural power that the west holds, with American entertainment media being heavily consumed around the world, and most often than not being favored over those of the host nation (Crane, 2002; Ritzer & Stillman, 2003; Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Appadurai (1996) argues that this globalization is the building block of "imagined worlds" (p. 33), a term first introduced as "imagined communities" by Anderson (1991) and which he argues are "the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (1996, p.33). According to this logic, the world we live in is made up of a collection of "imagined worlds" in people's minds, which are able to contest and subvert the imagined world of the official mind of the society they live in (Appadurai, 1996; Anderson, 1991). Hence, the media co-construct our realities, and influence the way we perceive the world around us. Athique (2014) builds upon the concept of the imagined worlds that Appadurai (1996) mentions to argue that the global media has allowed for audiences to imagine themselves to be part of larger and more abstract social formations. It is what the author calls a 'collective symbolic imagination' in which diverse groups of people from different corners of the world are bound by one collective culture, which "has allowed for the reading of cultural artefacts as allegorical renditions of identifiable societies or social groups" (Athique, 2014, p. 5). When we put this into perspective when studying gay fans and their adoration of western female pop divas, one can argue that these fans share a common westernized and Americanized culture, a common ideology and a common perspective wherever they may be around the world. The proliferation of fandoms of female pop divas thus create an imagined world, one that binds people across borders and cultures, with one main common trait that binds them together: their adoration of their object of fandom (Athique, 2014; Appadurai, 1996). With the rise of globalization and following Americanization of cultures, western female pop divas have crossed borders and have found a home within the hearts of many of their fans around the world.

When it comes to studying the influence of globalization and Americanization, one should highlight how these processes have impacted the countries featured in this study, mainly Lebanon and the Netherlands. As Kraidy (2003) argues, modern media technologies in Lebanon have played an important role in the integration and incorporation by local cultures of foreign and western cultural elements. Most significantly though is that the capital Beirut in particular is a cosmopolitan haven that has assimilated the cultures of the west, especially when it comes to the consumption of western and American music (Burkhalter, 2013). Nonetheless, it is important to note that the vast majority of Lebanese society, particularly outside of the capital, is still rooted in traditions, with a population that is still very much religious and sectarian (Faour, 2007). This has harbored a strong cultural hybridity in the country, and is most apparent within the millennial generation, who, because of the processes of globalization, have a propensity to position themselves within two worlds: that of the East, and that of the west (Kraidy, 2003), and have therefore assimilated the cultures of the west, while still being subjected to the effects of a traditional and religious society.

As for the Netherlands, the Americanization of Dutch culture dates back to as late as the 1940s with the Americanization of Western Europe (Gassert, 2012). The two countries thus share a similar cultural proximity (Kraidy, 2003; Gassert, 2012) to western and American culture, and have integrated this culture in their everyday lives due to the processes of globalization and Americanization. This study steps in to highlight this phenomenon through the lens of western female pop diva adoration.

The previous studies have shown that gay fans, as an active audience have a significant power in the industry's consumption process, and pop divas, their object of fandom, so interwoven with their sense of self so as to form a unique relationship, a labor of love. This research steps in to learn more about a group of people that is most often marginalized in the media and is rarely given a voice. By positioning gay men as the active audience, the study aims to bridge the gap in previous research and provide a better understanding of the relationship that bonds the gay community with pop divas and ultimately a better understanding of what it means to be gay in today's society, a society that has consistently marginalized the struggles of the gay community. This chapter discussed the theoretical framework and background of the thesis in order to create

a solid foundation of these theories and how they relate and feed into the topic at hand. It provided insights about fans and fandoms, as well as discussing queer readings of pop culture and how this might influence and explain gay fans' adoration of female pop divas. The next chapter aims to provide an explanation of the methodology used to answer the study's research question. This will be followed by an analysis of the results as well as a conclusion and a discussion of the findings.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology used to find an answer to the research question is discussed, as well as the reasons why this particular method was used and how the subsequent research was conducted. Moreover, the chapter addresses how the findings were analyzed as well as discussing the ethics and possible limitations of the study.

3.1 Qualitative Method: In-depth interviews

To provide an adequate answer to the research question of this thesis, namely *How do millennial gay men in Lebanon and the Netherlands give meaning to western female pop divas?* in-depth interviews are most suitable. The goal of this thesis is to find meaning through language and conversations with the subjects. Rorty (2009) argues that interviews help construct knowledge about the social world through normal human interaction. Legard, Keegan & Ward (2003) also argue that the subjects' personal accounts provide valuable information in social science research because of the power of language to provide meaning. Therefore, our understanding of the world we live in is made possible through close contact with the people around us.

For this research in particular, I aim to understand the motifs behind gay men's adoration of female pop divas. This understanding is made possible only through a direct conversation with the subjects in question in order to have a clear and personal understanding of their life experiences. As Hammersly & Atkinson argue, "a crucial feature of language is its capacity to present descriptions, explanations, and evaluations of almost infinite variety about any aspect of the world, including itself" (1995, p. 126). Hence, knowledge about the subjects and their experiences is constructed through language, which in turn will help the researcher make meaning out of this language. Kvale (1996) offers a study that explains this process through metaphors and argues that with the "miner metaphor" (p.3), knowledge is waiting to be uncovered and unraveled by the researcher, unpolluted by any external factors that might hinder the understanding of the subject. The second position, which Kvale (1996) calls the "traveler metaphor" (p.3) argues that meanings of the interviewee's stories and accounts are developed as the "traveler" or interviewer interprets them, hence the research will be leading the conversation to new insights and is an active player in the development of data and meaning making. Both of these methods were used in the conduction of the interviews and in the analysis process.

These semi-structured interviews follow a pre-determined topic list (see Appendix C) that covers the concepts that need to be discussed, in order to provide cohesive responses from all participants, and would make it easier to compare and contrast results in the analysis phase (Bryman, 2012). Likewise, semi-structured interviews allow for the interviewer to probe and ask questions that were not present in the initial topic list when a certain topic is discussed, which allows for the researcher to delve into important areas that were maybe overlooked at first (Bryman, 2012). In this case, the interviewer is an active player in the interview process.

3.2 Sample and data collection

The data to be collected in the interviews revolve around the subject's personal thoughts, life experiences and relationship with female pop divas. This can only be done through the in-depth interviews as they aim to make meaning out of these responses (Hammersly & Atkinson. 1995; Kvale, 1996) and ultimately provide an answer to the research question. As was previously mentioned in chapter 2.4, the comparison between Lebanon and the Netherlands is interesting as the dissimilarity in human rights and sexual freedoms between the two countries will provide a rich outlook on the phenomenon. However due to Lebanon's traditional and religious society (Faour, 2007), one on one in-depth interviews allow for the anonymity of the participants, while still providing the researcher with all of the needed information (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003). The comparison between both countries will offer insight into the impact of pop divas on the lives of gay men living in and outside of the western world: Lebanon especially was chosen because it has enjoyed an immense cultural hybridity throughout the years, often reflected within its millennial generation (Kraidy, 2003; Burkhalter, 2013), but is however still plagued by the traditions and customs of a predominantly religious and sectarian society (Faour, 2007).

For this thesis, 14 participants were interviewed, all of them self-identifying as gay men, with five of these 14 participants working and identifying as drag performers. To ensure a comparison between Lebanon and the Netherlands – and a comparison between gay men and drag queens - special attention was paid to finding participants from these locations and characteristics, with social media being used as a tool to actively search for prospective interviewees in Beirut and the Rotterdam area. In this case 'purposive sampling' was used to find the initial interviewees by setting out a call for participants on Instagram stories, as well as actively searching for potential participants by looking through hashtags on Instagram such as "#dutchdragqueen" and messaging the users. Thus, participants were selected according to the

researcher's own judgement, and based on their convenience (Sarstedt, Bengart, Shaltoni & Lehmann, 2017). After finding initial participants through social media, a "snowballing" technique was used (Bryman, 2012), whereas these initial gay men and drag queens interviewed led me to other gay men and drag queens in their circles who were willing to participate in this research. While I have previously argued that drag queens are most often gay men who dress up in women's clothing for the purpose of entertaining a crowd (Moncriff & Lienard, 2017), I distinguish between the two in this research because I believe that through their experience in drag, drag queens have a somewhat different experience and relationship with female pop divas that needs to be acknowledged and highlighted.

To be selected to participate in the study, interviewees had to identify as gay men, be fans of one or more female pop diva and considered to be millennials, meaning born somewhere between the early 1980s and late 1990s (Dimock, 2019). The millennial generation has been chosen because millennials are seen as the most influential generation of consumers (Linden & Linden, 2017) as they are closely linked to the rise of the internet and Web 2.0 (Fromm & Garton, 2013). Hence, millennials grew up with the rise of the internet and are more active and global in their consumption of media and popular culture. This process resulted in 5 gay men from Lebanon and 4 gay men from the Netherlands being interviewed. Most of them were university students, one was a marketing specialist, one a freelance photographer, and two of them were as of yet unemployed university graduates. As for the drag queen participants, 5 were interviewed, with 3 from Lebanon and 2 from the Netherlands. All participants were millennials, with ages ranging from 21 to 29 years old. Moreover, all eight participants interviewed from Lebanon live and work in the capital Beirut. However, one out of the six participants interviewed from the Netherlands originally came from a Dutch rural village, but now works in Rotterdam. The remaining participants live and work in cities such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam, which are major cosmopolitan cities comparable to Beirut.

After the participants were chosen, the interviews were conducted in March and April, 2020, with the first one done in mid-March and the last one done in mid-April. The interviews followed a pre-prepared topic list that covered subjects that helped to unpack how this group of participants gives meaning to female pop divas. For example, they were asked about the acceptance of their sexuality, but also the role that pop divas play in their lives, and how this

adoration is reflected in their daily lives as fans. Drag queen participants were asked an additional set of questions relating to their experience doing drag as well how female pop divas might or might have not influenced their work.

As for the length of the interviews, it varied from 28 minutes for the shortest one to 52 minutes for the longest, with an average of 39 minutes per interview. It is important to note that the five drag queen participants were given an extra set of questions to answer, which in turn increased the length of time it took to complete their respective interviews by about 5 to 10 minutes each. Finally, all of the 14 interviews were audio recorded from Skype through a phone's audio recorder. This is done to allow the interviewer the capacity to focus on the answers provided by the interviewee and in turn probe and ask specific questions, instead of focusing on taking notes, which might deter the interviewer from having a natural flow in the conversation and interaction with the participants (Bryman, 2012). The interviews were later transcribed verbatim.

3.2.1 The impact of COVID-19 on the research

Initially, the goal was to conduct all of the interviews face to face with the participants. As Opdenakker (2006) argues, face to face interviews provide the researcher with important social cues that can add meaning to the verbal answers given by the interviewee. Also, face-to-face interviews benefit from a synchronous communication in time and place, ideal for in-depth interviews (Opdenakker, 2006). Unfortunately, due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, and abiding by the government's safety regulations, the entirety of the interviews had to be done through the next best alternative method: online via Skype video calls. In fact, the web camera offers an interaction that would help retain some of the social and non-verbal cues that a face to face interview offers (Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour, 2014). Moreover, skype calls offer more flexibility, allowing prospective participants to be interviewed from a place that is convenient to them (Janghorban, et al., 2014). However, this might be considered a limitation, should they select to be interviewed in an environment that is disruptive, and that might hinder their concentration and the subsequent data gathering of the researcher (Janghorban, et al., 2014).

3.3 Thematic Analysis

For the analysis of the data gathered from the interviewees, a common process used in qualitative research is to identify key themes, concepts or categories in the data (Legard, et al., 2003). This

was the main starting point for the analysis, and is what Braun & Clarke (2006) refer to as a thematic analysis. The method is used for "identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data [and] minimally organizes and describes the data set in (rich) detail" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). From an essentialist or realist point of view, thematic analysis can report the meanings, life experiences and the reality of the participants. However, from a constructionist point of view, the method can examine the ways in which realities, events, experiences and meanings are the effect of a range of discourses in society (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The method thus focuses on unveiling latent content from the responses, meaning that the covert ideas embedded in the responses were analyzed, rather than the more overt and explicit answers given by the interviewees (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Firstly, after the data has been transcribed, it was important to read and go over the content to be familiar with it. From the raw data gathered, initial codes were generated and involved identifying features of the data that appear to be interesting (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Boeije (2010) further explains this conceptualization and refers to this as the process of "open coding" (p. 96) whereas all the data gathered up to this point is read very carefully and divided into fragments. These fragments are compared amongst each other, grouped into categories dealing with the same subject and finally labeled with a code (Boeije, 2010). The next phase is sorting the initial codes into broader, overarching themes and sub-themes and organizing the initial codes within the identified themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to look at how these themes are related to each other, and thus identifying the dominant themes that can be gathered from the data and even perhaps a core concept for the research. Boeije (2010) refers to this step as "axial coding" (p. 108). Finally, the themes are then analyzed and the researcher can thus identify what story each theme tells. It is important to ensure that there is no overlap between the themes. Hence, the themes that have resulted from the study are the following: growing up gay in a patriarchal and heteronormative society, identifying with female pop divas and their music, emotional adoration and deification of the diva, gay pop diva fandom as a community, and finally globalization, Americanization and western pop divas' global appeal.

3.4 Ethics and Limitations

Due to the topic's sensitivity in some environments such as in Lebanon, and in order to ensure that the research was conducted ethically, a consent form was sent to each participant by email prior to the interview. This form informed participants about the nature and purpose of the

research as well as giving them the possibility to reveal their names or stay anonymous. Moreover, it informed them about the researcher's need to audio record the interview for research and analysis purposes, with all participants agreeing to be audio recorded. Participants also orally agreed to have their first names and age credited in this research, with drag queen participants using their stage name instead. This procedure allowed for the interview process to go as smoothly as possible, where the participants felt comfortable enough to reveal information that they would not normally talk about.

Lastly, validity and reliability have to be present for a research to be credible, where validity is about the accuracy of the results and reliability is about the consistency of the results (Silverman, 2011). Several issues might affect these two concepts, mainly the impact of the researcher on the study as well as the values and views of the researcher (Silverman, 2011). Being a fan of a female pop diva, Lady Gaga, and being part of the gay community myself, and thus coming from a "shared experience" (p. 224) perspective, this offered me three advantages in the research process, as argued by Berger (2015): a head start in knowledge about the topic, facilitation in the recruitment of participants, as well as being equipped with insights and the ability to understand implied content. However, these benefits come with some limitations, as they might blur the boundaries between researcher and interviewee, with the researcher imposing his or her own values, beliefs and biases in the process (Berger, 2015). Another limitation is that even though interviews provide an in-depth and personal outlook into the lives, experiences and thoughts of the participants, they do not deliver mass information about a large number of people like a survey. However, they do provide insight into this particular group of participants' beliefs, which might be representative of how such a group feels in the community.

This chapter provided a thorough explanation of the research method used to answer the study's research question, along with a discussion of the steps used to conduct the interviews and analyze the results. Moreover, it provided an overview of the ethics that have been followed as well as the limitations that might arise from the conduction of this study. The next chapter will offer a discussion of the results that have come up from the analysis of the findings of the 14 interviews, followed by a final chapter providing a conclusion to the research with an answer to the research question.

4. Results

In order to find an adequate answer to the research question: *How do millennial gay men in Lebanon and the Netherlands give meaning to western female pop divas?*, 14 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This chapter presents the findings of this research, building upon the five core themes identified in the interview data, which are the following: 1) growing up gay in a patriarchal and heteronormative society; 2) identifying with female pop divas and their music; 3) emotional adoration and deification of the diva; 4) gay pop diva fandom as a community; and 5) globalization, Americanization and western pop divas' global appeal.

The first theme discusses how the patriarchal society has oppressed the participants, thus encouraging them to listen to pop music in order to escape their homophobic realities. The second theme discusses how the interviewees identify with female pop divas and their music, and how this has empowerment them and helped them express their innate desires through their adoration when they are not able to do so in real life. The third theme explores the participants' personal and intense adoration of female pop divas, allowing divas to be seen as immaculate deities in the eyes of their adoring fans. The fourth theme discusses how being a fan of a pop diva is about sharing this adoration as part of a community of likeminded individuals and how this community has helped the participants form strong bonds out of these friendships. Finally, the last theme discusses how globalization and Americanization have given western female pop divas power and influence over fans living around the world, with fans ultimately favoring them over local artists.

4.1 Growing up gay in a patriarchal and heteronormative society

To understand how gay men give meaning to female pop divas, one must first learn more about their media consumption. Upon being asked about what they usually do in their free time, all 14 participants interviewed mentioned that they liked to listen and stream new music, and watch video content online. The internet thus formed the main channel through which they consume this media content, like the following citation illustrates: "I love listening to music all the time, whatever I am doing there's always music on. I also watch series, a lot of Netflix"[1] (Adham, 25, unemployed, Lebanon). Similarly, Adrian (21, student, Netherlands) further clarified this by explaining that "during my free time I mostly ninety percent of the time listen to Spotify on my

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[1] Some quotes have been altered by the author in order to improve readability.

way to university, going back home and everything". This high prevalence of music consumption through Spotify resonates with Linden and Linden's (2017) argument on how the millennial generation is closely related to the rise of the internet, and how it has assimilated it and adapted it in their everyday lives. Similarly, Leroy, a 25 year old freelance photographer explains how he consumes his media content: "Well, I pretty much consume a lot of Netflix and YouTube, um actually more so YouTube because I prefer to watch shorter videos, especially when I'm having a busy day, short videos can be as informative and entertaining as longer ones" (Leroy, 25). As demonstrated by the above responses, the participants always find time to listen to music and consume pop culture in their daily lives, even on the busiest of days. For example, Leroy prefers to watch YouTube videos over Netflix, as they are short and concise and allow him to stay updated on new releases easily.

Most importantly however is that this high level of media consumption and engagement with pop culture might be considered a stepping stone when it comes to understanding the participants' adoration of female pop divas, an adoration that has come to fruition in a patriarchal and heteronormative society that has consistently oppressed them. As demonstrated by the responses of Sultana[2] (24, a drag performer from Beirut, Lebanon) who says that he has always been interested in listening to pop music. It formed a staple in his teenage years and has helped him distance himself from his homophobic environment, as he explains here:

I would always listen to music to in a way [to] get away from the reality that I was in, it's very therapeutic I would say, especially when you're in an environment that doesn't support you or accept you […][3] when we're growing up, especially like as queer kids for example, in the Middle East, you're not allowed to express yourself or you're not allowed to be feminine, you are not allowed to say that you like feminine stuff.

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[2] Throughout the discussion of the results, drag performers are referred to by their stage names, upon their request for anonymity and in order to differentiate them from the rest of the participants. Moreover, since they all self-identify as gay men, they are referred to using male pronouns (he/him).
[3] Content omitted from the quotes by the author.

This response illustrates how Sultana, having grown up gay in the Middle East, has used music as a way to escape the harsh realities of living in a heteronormative Arab society, a society that has not allowed him to be himself. This is further exemplified by other participants from Lebanon, such as Emma Gration, a 27 year old drag performer, who talks about how his surroundings were the main reason why he was not accepting of his sexuality: "I was okay with being gay *until people started telling me that it was not[4]*". This likewise explains how the participants' surroundings and environments have played a significant role in their level of acceptance of their sexuality, which would clarify why they would consume music as a form of escapism. Also, Paul a 25 year old unemployed university graduate recounts his own teenage years and early adulthood experience. He closely links his past being bullied to his love for listening to female pop music: "Most gays need an escape from reality because they have to hide when they're not accepted, um so music is mainly the way […] We feel comfortable around females more than around men because *we were never bullied by females*". This illustrates how Paul has used music as a form of escapism to escape the homophobic reality that he was in, which was exerted upon him by male bullies in his life.

The findings presented above somewhat resonate with the observations of Vorder, Klimmt & Ritterfeld (2004), who note that media is used by consumers as a form of escapism from the harsh realities that they might be facing in their daily lives. The participants have thus adopted a negotiated meaning (see Hall, 1980) in their decoding of pop music: that of escapism. This meaning might not be the dominant or preferred reading intended by the producers of the media text, but is rather decoded in such a manner by the participants in order to satisfy their own needs of media consumption.

Noticeably, these observations are more apparent with the Lebanese participants, rather than the Dutch participants. Upon being shown a compilation video of different female pop songs throughout the decades (e.g. including "Born this Way" by Lady Gaga and "I Will Survive" by Gloria Gaynor), all eight Lebanese participants mentioned the power and influence that this pop music has had on their lives. For example, drag performer Evita Kedavra, 29, Lebanon, says "*There is power in listening to music*, there is power in listening to people's

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[4] Text emphasized in italics (added by the author) illustrates a moment of significance or particular attention to be paid.

stories through music. This speaks to you on a subconscious level". Evita considers music to be there for a purpose, and not merely to be used as a form of entertainment, but rather holds a message from the artist, waiting to be uncovered by the listener. This is also illustrated by Adham (25, Lebanon) who mentions how he has always attached strong emotions to pop music: "there isn't one song that I don't know and I haven't connected with at some point throughout my life … because we tend to attach emotions and lots of memories to music". This demonstrates how Lebanese participants, by ascribing strong emotions to pop music and by decoding it through a negotiated meaning, have been able to use it as a form of escapism. This has allowed them to channel their inner emotions and feelings into pop music, when they are unable to do so in a heteronormative society. This resonates with the findings of Faour (2007) and Kraidy (2003) who argue that Lebanon has enjoyed an immense cultural hybridity throughout the years, but is however still labored by a religious and sectarian society, a society that has harbored a homophobic reality for the participants to live in.

Contradictorily, the Dutch participants viewed the songs in a somewhat dissimilar manner, with their responses offering a shallow interpretation of the music. This is evidenced by Gabriel, a 21-year-old student from Rotterdam, the Netherlands: "[Pop music] is just fun and loud and happy". Likewise, Rita Book, 27, a drag performer from Amsterdam views pop music as fun and cheerful: "Um, well I feel like it's *uplifting, happy, also makes me want to dance*. It gives me energy". What these responses illustrate is that the Dutch participants' consumption of pop music is about enjoying the songs because they are joyful and fun, and are thus consumed as a form of leisure and entertainment. Hence, there exists a difference between the Lebanese and the Dutch participants' needs for pop music consumption, as the latter do so predominantly in order to satisfy their need for entertainment, while the Lebanese participants do so as previously observed as a form of escapism.

A reason for this difference might be because of the Dutch participants' experiences of growing up gay in Dutch society. For example, Gabriel mentions that he was always comfortable with his sexuality: "I don't have any sad memories when it comes to that, like I don't feel embarrassed about it. *I just take it, it's me and it's normal.*" Similarly, Adrian (21) mentions his own experience growing up gay in the Netherlands: "[Being gay here] is actually pretty good because you don't hear any criticism […] I can hold my boyfriend's hand in public and no one

says anything". Hence, because of the fact that the Dutch participants did not face discrimination in their Dutch societies, they did not develop the need to use music as a form of escapism like their Lebanese counterparts. This is due to the fact that they do not view their realities as uncomfortable or harsh to live in as gay men themselves.

Nevertheless, one of the Dutch participants, Leroy (25), mentions how he has used pop music as a form of escapism himself, having grown up in a traditional Dutch village. He faced discrimination from his peers at school, before moving to study and work in Rotterdam. He then draws attention to the messages behind the songs and draws a significantly deeper emotional connection with them, unlike the other Dutch respondents. For example, his reflection on the Gloria Gaynor song '*I will survive'*: "it's an important part of the video … gay men listen to songs like this one to deal with emotions in this sort of festive way that can help cope with emotions better". The response illustrate how, similarly to the Lebanese participants, Leroy attaches an emotional connection to pop music. He goes on to mention how he was bullied at school for listening to pop music because he says people around him did not understand it:

> I grew up in a Dutch village, so for me it was kind of hard also having this love for pop music when I was younger because *I would get bullied for it* actually [...] So it was actually something that I sort of put away for a long time because it was this part of myself that I couldn't express and that people didn't understand.

As illustrated by these responses, Leroy draws a connection between a participant's upbringing and their subsequent needs for media consumption. Having grown up in a Dutch village, an environment that is more conservative than major urban areas such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam where the other participants come from, has developed in him the need to find solace in listening to pop music. This is similar to what the Lebanese participants have expressed. These findings somewhat resonate with Mungen's (2006) study of the reception of music by its audiences, where he argues that the lack of a visual aspect in music allows the listener to create his or her own realities and images in his or her mind. This allows music to be queered and to appeal to the participants. This also resonates with the findings of Vorder, Klimmt & Ritterfeld (2004) and

their argument that media is used as a mood regulation medium and has allowed itself to be queered by its gay audiences, since it provides them with the ability to escape their environments and create their own realities.

Remarkably, while discussing their upbringing, several Lebanese participants were quick to give credit to the women in their lives. For example, Evita (29) mentions a certain disdain towards men and argues that it was the women in his life that have built him up, and not the men:

Listen, I like to consider myself a huge feminist. I consider myself a huge ally to women and their struggles. *I don't like men*. I just don't. So to me, the people that taught me how to behave, the people that gave me confidence in who I am today were really my sister and my mom and my girl friends, my female teachers: *they were the first ones that encouraged me to be the person I am now* because when I was a kid and I was loud and feminine and performance oriented, it was them that were applauding me, it wasn't men.

This response illustrates the reasons why Evita started looking up to women. According to him, the fact that he was feminine and flamboyant growing up clashed with the patriarchal ideals that the heteronormative Lebanese society expects you to abide by. Thus, he has found solace within the women around him who were in fact accepting of this femininity.

In a similar fashion, Adham (25) mentions how he was shunned by the masculine Lebanese culture: "I remember that one of the first feelings I had as a child, is *being intimidated by the toxic masculinity* in our culture because I wasn't able to live up to it. I think in a way we *attach ourselves to femininity and to very feminine characters to feel accepted*". As one can see with these quotes by the interviewees, the participants tend to find common grounds and similarities between them and the women in their lives and thus start looking up to them as a protective mechanism that helps them cope with the realities of being gay in a patriarchal society. This is especially the case in communities that still hold on to traditional customs and values such as the ones still present in Lebanon and in some Dutch areas and villages.

The above can be considered a stepping stone when it comes to understanding how gay men give meaning to western female pop divas, discussed in the following sections of the chapter.

4.2 Identifying with female pop divas and their music

The second theme identified in the findings is "identifying with female pop divas and their music". Many of the interviewees tend to relate to the struggles of women in society, while being gay men. This is illustrated with the following statement by Fahmi, a 26 year old master's student from Beirut, Lebanon who argues that both gay men and women face the same tribulations under a patriarchal society: "It's not a secret that as gay men, we've been marginalized, so we've had to adapt to the standards of a patriarchal society to fit in […] *Women have also been always objectified and marginalized by the patriarchy*". Likewise, Rita Book (27, Netherlands) closely links this to sexuality and gender, arguing that certain groups in society are more privileged than others: "Anyone who's not the straight cisgender, heterosexual white man I think can in some way relate to one another, with *all of them being oppressed in society*, uh to some extent".

What the above statements reveal is that the participants are aware that as gay men themselves, they are part of minority groups in society. The participants thus equate their struggles to those faced by the closest people to them: women. As such, gay men have long identified with women, as they primarily consider them their equals in society, with both of them having to deal with the same hardships. This would explain why the participants tend to look up to the women in their lives, as well as feeling more comfortable around them. In fact, they do not see them as a threat or a danger, but rather as people they can learn from in order to face the struggles of a patriarchal society (also see Kostenbaum, 1993).

What this has done is that it has allowed gay men to start identifying more with femininity rather than masculinity, as they do not see the former as a threat. This is further exemplified with George, a 25 year old student from the Netherlands: "*I relate more to femininity*. Um it's not that I'm feminine, you know? But I can feel the struggle of women". What this statement illustrates is that the participants unintentionally started to associate themselves to femininity instead of masculinity as they believe that they have been shunned by the latter throughout their lives. Sultana (24) explains this with the following statement:

"[Women are] expressing their own selves, but while expressing their own selves, *we hear our voices through them*. Even long before realizing that they are our voices we would just gravitate towards them". What this statement illustrates is that the participants believe that women speak for them, with both of them standing side by side in the face of oppression.

So, gay men have started looking up to female celebrities and figures in pop culture. When it comes to female pop divas, the participants tend to be attracted to their power and unapologetic nature, as they see in them powerful and independent female figures that they can emulate. For example, upon being asked about what they think sets their favorite pop diva apart from all the others, participants were quick to mention how they saw their favorite diva as being "powerful", "strong" and "unapologetic". Mike, a 22 year old student from Lebanon mentions his favorite pop diva Madonna and argues that he thinks that it was her unapologetic and strong persona that first attracted him to her: "it was her freedom of expression and her sexual liberation that impressed me […] *It's just how she unapologetically expresses herself, how daring she is, how unafraid of anything she is*". This statement illustrates how Madonna has been lauded in the past for her unapologetic nature and her ability to constantly reinvent herself, which has allowed her fans to idolize her (see Lister, 2001).

Similarly, Gabriel (21, Netherlands) mentions how the power and authenticity that his favorite pop diva Lizzo holds is what first drew him into her: "She's a black woman who is quite a big girl, but she's not afraid to be a big girl. *She's authentic because she is real*". Similarly to Mike and Gabriel, Licka Lolly (27), a drag performer from the Netherlands mentions his love and adoration for Beyoncé: "She's strong and confident. Everything she does is impactful. Her songs *build you up subconsciously to be stronger* and to refuse the situation that you are in". This power in authenticity that the participants refer to can be linked to what Marshall (1997) mentions in his study of celebrity culture and its impact on audiences. The relationship between celebrities and their fans is that of close effect, with a conveyance of commitment in their work based on their authenticity and how well they tend to communicate their story to the audience. Likewise, stars express what it means to be human in today's society: they are a reflection of the qualities that they aim to convey to their audience. As such, their fans see in them qualities that they can emulate in their daily lives (see Sandvoss, 2005; Dyer,1986). The participants see themselves in their favorite pop divas, the way they see themselves in the women in their lives.

Several participants mentioned that one of the reasons they are fans of female pop divas is because they tend to be more creative in their work than their male counterparts, as evidenced by the following response by Mike (22): "Female artists are usually more creative and expressive than male artists. They're also *more extravagant*". Similarly, Sultana (24) had a similar remark: "I mean if you compare male and female artists, female artists just give us so much more". What the participants are unaware of is that they are referencing pop divas' camp qualities in their responses (see Sontag, 1964). This resonates with the work of Sontag (1964) who argues that camp is a sensibility that embraces the non-normative and is celebrated by homosexual men, as she considers them "creatives in the truest sense" (p.12). Hence, while gay men may not be able to express this creativity in real life, they are drawn to female pop divas' camp aesthetics as they express their innate desire for creativity and expression. This observation was apparent in eleven out of the fourteen participants, who considered that female pop divas' creativity and theatricality were important factors behind their adoration. However, four out of the five drag queens interviewed, found that their adoration of female pop divas and their creativity significantly influence their work as drag queens. As Evita Kedavra mentions, he has been inspired by his favorite diva Barbra Streisand, and she is the main reason why he started doing and still does drag:

> *Barbra Streisand inspires me to this day when I perform*, because every time I perform I have to have a Barbara Streisand number [...] a big reason why I still do drag is because I really still want to perform specific songs [by her], I have like montages in my head of future performances.

Another drag performer Emma Gration (27) from Beirut mentions similar comments, arguing that Beyoncé has had an immense impact on his career as a drag performer "For me as a performer I try to channel this energy on stage when I perform, *when the lights are on me I'm Beyoncé*, it's funny when I say it out loud like this but it's really true". The responses illustrate the ways in which the participants see themselves through their favorite diva. According to Emma Gration, Beyoncé gives him the confidence he needs on stage. While the gay male

participants are attracted to female pop divas' camp qualities because they allow them to express their innate desires through their adoration, the drag queen participants are heavily influenced by this creativity as it inspires them to be more inventive in their own performances as drag queens.

One can link this to the observations made by Butler's (1993) theory of performativity and Hills (2002) and his theory of performative consumption. The theory states that through impersonation (in this case, female impersonation), the performative dimension of consumption becomes the most apparent, as it generates a new experience. As the star is intentionally recreated through performance, a new narrative arises: that of the impersonator's life as a star. Through their impersonations, the drag queen participants not only reflect their adoration of their favorite diva, but also communicate what it means to be themselves. So, for them, performing in drag allows them to channel the confidence they have gained through their pop diva adoration, while still conveying what makes them who they are as people and as fans (See Sandvoss, 2005; Hills, 2002).

Finally, when asked about the subjects that female pop divas tackle in their songs, twelve out of the fourteen participants mentioned themes of empowerment, and how these appeal to them as gay audiences. As Fahmi (26) mentions: "these songs are all about *empowerment and believing in yourself*, believing in your capabilities". Licka Lolly (27) also mentions the songs as ones that encourage you to celebrate yourself: "I think the main thing is *empowerment and feeling powerful*. It's about celebrating yourself, whoever you are and wherever you are, and they want you to celebrate the things that make you different". Similarly, Paul (26) mentions how the empowering messages in the songs makes him happy for being alive: "This music makes me feel happy and proud of who I am. It makes me thankful that I'm well, alive and able to hear". While these songs by female pop divas include themes of empowerment, they do not explicitly reference the gay community, but these songs are "queered" by their gay audiences in order to appeal to their own narrative (see Singleton et al., 2007; Mungen, 2006). This "queering hegemony" is found to be happening with pop culture and female pop divas in particular, as gay men tend to decode the messages in pop music according to their own narrative and in order to satisfy their own wants and needs of media consumption (see Hall, 1980; McQuail, 1984). This allows them to develop a sense of belonging and recognition in society.

Conversely, Sultana (24) mentions how more and more female pop artists are starting to be vocal about gay rights and including themes of gay empowerment in their songs: "Take Born this Way by Lady Gaga or You Need to Calm Down by Taylor Swift for example, I think that these songs are very directly associated to gay men and their fight for gay rights […] *that's why we love them, because they make our voice be heard*". Hence, when pop divas explicitly reference the gay community in their songs, they are thus willfully directing their work to appeal to their gay audiences by infusing their work with camp (see Sontag, 1964; Horn, 2017). This allows the songs to appeal to the participants as they are inherently geared towards them, and as Sultana mentions, it allows them to have a voice and a platform.

Overall, gay men find strength in female pop divas as they tend to relate to their struggles as women in a patriarchal society, and see in them someone that they can emulate. They also allow them to express their innate desires that they are unable to express in their everyday lives.

4.3 Emotional adoration and deification of the diva

The third theme that has been observed in this study is the "emotional adoration and deification of the diva". What has been significantly striking in the observations is how emotionally attached the participants are to their favorite pop divas. Upon being asked about what connection they might share with them, most participants were quick to disclose how emotionally invested they are in their adoration. For example, Adrian (21) mentions his intense adoration of Taylor Swift: "… it's *bordering on obsession*. Yeah, because I got to a point where I'm really obsessed with Taylor and I'm literally on my phone all day checking her social media, all day listening to mostly only her music". Similarly, Mike (22) mentions his own intense admiration of Madonna: "I think she's got a gift. She's more than just normal… *I really think I have something in common with this woman*". This illustrates how the participants used specific words to describe their pop divas and their adoration of them, with words such as "obsession" and "connection". This would in fact highlight their intense adoration of their object of fandom. This is further demonstrated with Sultana (24), who similarly mentions his adoration of Nicki Minaj: "…for me like that's a very personal connection that I have with her, which it *sounds crazy to think*".

What these statements illustrate is that the participants are proud to share their experiences with the researcher. However, as Sultana's statement suggests, he describes his adoration as "crazy", which would indicate that they do consider their consumption as different

than that of the general population. The choice of words here is very important, as it provides an understanding of how the participants view their adoration. Several participants also described certain life experiences that they associate with this admiration. For example, Evita Kedavra (29) mentions his idolization of Barbra Streisand and recounts his very first time seeing her live in concert in New York: "I cried for like two and a half hours in this huge auditorium theatre. I was bawling my eyes out and crying. *I've been obsessed with her ever since*". What this illustrates is that the responses seem to follow a pattern with the participants: they are aware of their intense adoration, yet they do not have agency when it comes to them becoming a fan.

This resonates with Hills's (2002) argument on how fans do not claim agency in their "becoming a fan" stories, but later do claim agency through their performances of fan identity (p. 123): they thus do not have a say in how or why they become a fan. This can be also seen in a response from Tarek, a 26 year old marketing specialist from Beirut who recalls being in one of Ariana's concerts in Manchester, England where a bombing happened as the moment that made him become a fan: "[…] after that it felt like *some sort of connection, which sounds weird*, but like it's something we both share that not a lot of people share with her." According to Tarek, he became a fan after the incident, and he believes it has created a strong connection between him and his object of fandom that not many other people have. Therefore, the intense bond that the participants share with their object of fandom is what makes them fans (see Duffett, 2013; Jenkins, 1992), and occurs involuntarily, with the participants being aware of it and ultimately acting upon it.

The above resonates with the arguments made by Gray (2003) who argues that fans as the active audience in their media consumption share a relationship of close effect with their object of fandom. The participants therefore decode media messages (see Hall, 1980) in a dissimilar manner than other casual media consumers, as for them the nature and structure of the media text changes and develops a new meaning and a new understanding. In this case, the participants have built a para-social relationship with their object of fandom (see Horton & Wohl, 1956), one that is one-sided and is maintained through their performance of fan identity. In this case, the participants do not directly engage with their favorite divas but have nevertheless built a solid para-social relationship with them, as the responses have revealed.

This passionate admiration has a tendency to develop into a much stronger and more intense adoration: that of the deification of the diva. As Lister (2001) argues, by identifying female pop divas as stars they can idolize and emulate, fans deify these divas. This is in large part due to the cult of celebrity that dominates today's secular and contemporary society. In this case the power and influence of organized religions have dwindled, with fans idolizing celebrities in order to find a sense of belonging in them (see Rojek, 2015). For example, Rita Book (27, Netherlands) recounts his own deification of Lizzo: "You know when you see someone being on top of the world, so outspoken and unafraid I think you automatically *look up to them and see them as this godly being*". Also, Leroy (25, Netherlands) explains why he thinks divas are seen as deities in the eyes of their adoring fans: "I think that this distance and this image and status that divas have created for themselves helps with them being seen as such because *they are seen as glamorous and gay men look up to that*".

What these responses reveal is that the participants from the Netherlands deify their divas as they see in them strong and powerful figures that represent them and that they look up to. While Rojek (2015) argues that the deification of the celebrity is mostly a result of the decline of the influence of organized religions in secular societies, some of the findings have revealed the opposite. When it comes to traditional and religious societies such as the one in Lebanon, the deification of the diva is largely due to the fact that the participants do not find themselves accepted in traditional religions and by the people around them who practice these beliefs. They have thus found solace within their own religion, that of the female pop diva.

This dissimilarity can be observed between the responses of the participants from Lebanon and those of the participants from the Netherlands, with the latter living in a much more secular environment. For example, Adham (25, Lebanon) mentions how feeling unaccepted in his traditional Muslim environment has led him to deify his favorite diva: "We seek the divine somehow in these divas because we *don't find that acceptance in religion and from the people around us*". Similarly, Evita Kedavra (29) mentions how and why he has "worshipped" Barbra Streisand throughout the years: "I think everyone needs to put faith in something and a lot of queer men *because of the struggles that they dealt with identifying themselves in the society they live in, it's a form of relief*". Hence, the Lebanese participants have deified female pop divas as a result of living in religious and homophobic environments that do not accept them, as they do not

find themselves in these traditional religions. Evita continues and mentions how this deification has been translated in his work as a drag performer, arguing that performing to a Barbra Streisand number is a religious experience similar to that of "going to church": "I wanted to worship her as if it's church where I'm literally performing her music through her voice in drag to a big crowd of people ... It's not a commodity to me when I'm getting in drag. *It is literally worshiping*."

These observations can be linked to the findings of Sylvan (2002) and Jindra (2000) which argue that music subcultures and fandoms provide a strong religious experience. Thus the power of religion would begin to emerge in other aspects of life, finding itself in pop culture and pop music. It has been observed that the Dutch participants who deify their favorite pop divas do so seeking a sense of belonging in a society that has lost the power and influence previously held by organized religions. Conversely, the Lebanese participants tend to deify their favorite divas as a result of feeling unaccepted by the religious society and environment they live in, prompting them to find solace within their own religion, that of the female pop diva.

4.4 Gay pop diva fandom as a community

What the observations from the interviews have shown is that coupled with gay men's adoration of female pop divas is a community and a sense of belonging shared with other fans and fandoms. In this case each member of the community has their own favorite pop diva that they idolize. Upon being asked to describe his experience of being part of a fandom, Rita Book (27) was quick to mention how each gay man tends to be a fan of a specific female pop diva and how this is reflected in the community:

> *It's a thing that I feel like it also has to do with identification*, like you see a lot of people that are either Beyoncé fans or Rihanna fans or Gaga fans, and they really are identifying themselves with them and it's like you're a different kind of person when you're a Rihanna fan, than a Beyoncé fan.

What the above statement illustrates is that Rita Book, particularly through his participation in the community, has noticed how gay men tend to act or carry themselves differently depending

on which female pop diva they idolize and they identify with. This is further explicated by Adrian (21) who views fans of each pop diva differently: "It depends on every person because you could see Lady Gaga fans in the community and they usually like to dress up or like to go crazy about everything […] *you see a lot of shifts in how people act and it's all about the artists at this point*". The participants' responses illustrate how identifying with a certain pop diva effects the way the fan acts in their respective communities.

Likewise, Licka Lolly (27) describes his own take on the issue: "I noticed that there's a lot of pop divas and each gay man has their own diva that they worship, and when you compare them you notice that *they have different ways of carrying themselves*". What the above statements indicate is that the interviewees, and through their participation in the gay community have noted how each gay man tends to act and carry themselves differently according to the female pop diva that they idolize. As Licka Lolly further mentions: "by following these different artists, *it makes us different people*", which indicates how much of an influence these divas have had on the ways in which the participants choose to act with others in their communities. Paul (26) from Lebanon further illustrates this issue by arguing that for him, the female pop diva that a gay man is a fan of is a reflection of his own views and understandings of the world:

> It's not just about the music anymore. It's a lifestyle. *When you're a fan of an artist, then you are indirectly supporting what they do in the world and supporting the work that they are releasing*, so for me knowing who someone is a fan of tells me so much about them as a person and what they stand for.

This statement by Paul shows how being a fan of a pop diva is a reflection of who the fan is as a person. For example, Rita Book mentions that seeing that someone is of the same fandom as him, allows him to be more comfortable around them, as he argues it: "it says a lot about them and what they stand for". These responses can be somewhat linked to the findings of Sandvoss (2005) who argues that being a fan is a reflection of the Self and a reflection of the star being idolized. This initiates a sense of belonging between people of the same fandom, as they share common views and ways of thinking bound by their adoration of their favorite pop diva.

The findings have revealed that these fandoms help gay men meet other likeminded individuals when it would be difficult to do so in life. They also help them form bonds and strong relationships. As Paul (26) mentions: "Most of my entourage are Lady Gaga fans, and *for me it's basically the family that I chose for myself*. We share the same interests and sometimes the same struggles in life." As this illustrates, the participants choose to form strong bonds with other people from the same fandom. This might be related to the fact that they do not see themselves being accepted by their own communities and religions.

Paul continues and mentions Twitter as the primary medium that has helped him meet other Lady Gaga fans and gay men in his community: "*I met most of them through twitter*, then when we got to know each other we started meeting." In a similar fashion, Sultana (24) mentions how fandoms and Twitter fan communities have helped him meet other gay men when it was difficult for him to do so in real life: "When we met through twitter, it was like before anyone of us came out, or even discussed dating men or being gay […] then as a group we realized that we understand each other." Sultana continues and mentions how social media fandoms have helped him connect with other gay men from around the world: "social media helps us stay connected with each other".

Similarly, Tarek (26) describes his experience of participating in the Ariana Grande fandom, and argues that it has helped him form bonds with people that understand him: "being in a fandom is *having someone to share the passion with* …. It honestly has led to a lot of friendships". These findings can be linked to the arguments made by Anderson (1991) who has coined the term "imagined communities". In turn, the world is built up of a "collective symbolic imagination" (see Appadurai, 1996; Athique, 2014) in which diverse groups of people from different corners of the world are bound by one collective culture. As such, participants from Lebanon and the Netherlands who idolize the same pop diva might have more in common with each other than other people from their respective countries, since they are part of the same "imagined community" (see Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996). They thus tend to form strong bonds more easily with other people from the same fandom.

Most notably, what the above responses have revealed is that the participants from Lebanon tend to meet other gay men and fans largely through the internet and social media, while on the other hand, Dutch participants were more inclined to do so in real life, by meeting

in gay spaces such as gay bars, gay clubs and at concerts. For example, George (25) mentions how meeting other gay fans in real life has helped him identify himself within the community:

> Being a fan of a female pop star is sometimes maybe less about the artist, but maybe more about the culture, because it also has this type of communal bonding experience. If a lot of your friends are really into a certain artist, then it becomes like this communal cultural thing that you all enjoy together, which helps you identify yourself in a community.

What this illustrates is that for the Dutch participants, being part of a fandom is translated in their everyday life in the gay community, with them sharing this adoration with friends in gay spaces such as clubs and bars. This is also evidenced by the following response by Rita Book who mentions these spaces as places that have helped instate in him this sense of belonging, as it invited people to share their adoration and vulnerability with each other: "By going to a club where a lot of people adore the same person or are open about that feeling they have towards something, that creates like this common vulnerability that you share together. *You don't have to know each other, but you're the same*."

This vulnerability that Rita Book mentions is at the core of gay spaces such as clubs, bars and concerts, as they allow members of the community to share their adoration with each other without fear of judgement or ridicule. As such, gay safe spaces have allowed the Dutch participants to express their female pop diva adoration with other members of the community, and have also allowed them to meet other likeminded individuals. On the other hand, the Lebanese participants have met other fans mainly through social media.

4.5 Globalization, Americanization and western pop divas' global appeal

The final theme identified is "globalization, Americanization and western pop divas' global appeal". Out of the fourteen participants interviewed, eight mentioned that they were more drawn to western female pop divas than to local artists from their own respective countries because of western pop divas' large and global impact and influence on the world. As Licka Lolly (27) mentions: "All these divas are huge, and *they are very influential*, each one of them".

The participants from both Lebanon and The Netherlands found that western pop divas hold a much stronger influence and power on the world. They are seen by them as being much more influential than local artists from their country of origin. As Gabriel (21) mentions, this influence is perpetuated and empowered by the tools of globalization: "*Their platform is bigger*. Their social media impact is bigger, which helps them reach much more people". What this statement illustrates is that the participants are aware of the fact that western female pop divas have a larger and more impactful platform.

Likewise Adrian (21) mentions how his favorite diva Taylor Swift has the opportunity to deliver her message on an international scale: "… *she does everything on a global scale*, and because of that everyone in the world knows who she is". Thus, western pop divas have been able to have a strong reach and a much more powerful influence on the participants from both Lebanon and the Netherlands as the processes of globalization are set up to work in their favor. This seems comparable to the findings of Crane (2002) and his theory of cultural imperialism. The theory states that dominant cultures and ideologies which pertain to dominant powers in the world are the ones that are able to seep through local cultures and are able to assimilate and even dominate a country's local culture. This results in a cultural homogenization (see Appadurai, 1996), in which local cultures are transformed by the world's dominant ones which results in cultures that are homogenous across borders. This can be observed when it comes to all fourteen participants interviewed, who when asked about their own favorite female pop diva, have cited only American female artists which are Lizzo, Beyonce, Lady Gaga, Madonna, Ariana Grande, Lana Del Rey, Britney Spears, Nicki Minaj, Barbra Streisand and Taylor Swift. Therewith, paired with globalization is a form of Americanization of the world (see Ritzer & Stillman, 2003)

This globalization and Americanization of western female pop divas has been linked to the 'American dream' as mentioned by Mike (22) in his interview, who argues that western cultures are always admired: "I think it's this kind of the *American dream and of looking up to and admiring the west*". He continues and argues that this ideology is the modern world's way of thinking, the idea of creating something out of yourself from nothing. The processes of Americanization and globalization have helped instate ideas and ideologies in the participants' minds that the west is better and more developed. This has made them admire American female

pop divas, who are seen as a quintessential personification of these ideals: stars who have made a name for themselves out of nothing.

When asked to compare western female pop divas to those from their country of origin, five out of the eight Lebanese participants were quick to mention how western female pop divas had more freedom to express themselves and to deliver their message than their Lebanese counterparts. They connected this to the current ideologies and traditions in the Middle East. As Fahmi (26) mentions: "[Lebanese singers] do not push the envelope as much as Western artists do, and that is completely understandable *considering society, and how the world is shaped in the Middle East*". Hence, given the current traditions and religious restrictions that are still in place in Lebanese society, it has been noted that the Lebanese participants tend to be drawn more toward western female artists as they tend to satisfy their needs of media consumption, since they are more sexually liberated and are able to express themselves more freely.

However, while the Dutch participants do not express noticing a striking dissimilarity between how local Dutch singers and western female pop divas expressed themselves, they are very much aware of the impact of Americanization on the world of entertainment. As George (25) argues: "[American pop divas] have an international career just because they are American […] *the world is adapted to an American system, and you have to adapt to it*". This shows that the participants have been dominated by American culture with George arguing that "you have to adapt to it" signaling a sense of obedience and compliance. Also Adrian (21) mentions how even as a Dutch person himself, he is more connected to the English language: "I connect more with English lyrics … *it's a global language that connects us all*". So, Dutch participants have also been under the influence of American culture, with the English language having been assimilated within their daily lives.

We can thus draw similarities in this regard between Dutch and Lebanese participants, as both of them were highly influenced by American culture, with them looking up to it and adopting the English language in their everyday lives. However, it should be noted that given the fact that all the participants interviewed are millennials, who are people born between the early 1980s and late 1990s (Dimock, 2019), they are more prone to be influenced by the processes of Americanization than other age groups in society. This is because they are seen as more digitally connected, are considered the most influential generation of consumers and as are closely linked

to the rise of Web 2.0 (Linden & Linden, 2017). The participants interviewed are thus more prone to be fans of western female pop divas than possible participants from other generations. This nuance may be grounds for future research.

From these findings, five key themes have been identified and discussed in this chapter. The next chapter will offer a conclusion to the overall study and delve deeper into the results. This conclusion will be followed by a discussion and suggestions for future research.

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis was to answer: *How do millennial gay men in Lebanon and the Netherlands give meaning to western female pop divas?* This was done by conducting interviews with 14 millennial gay men from Lebanon and the Netherlands who identify as fans of female pop divas. The research question cannot be answered by solely one specific answer, but is rather understood by combining the findings from the several themes that have been identified in the interviews with the participants.

The first theme identified was growing up gay in a patriarchal and heteronormative society. It has been revealed that as an active audience, gay fans engage with pop music in order to satisfy their own wants and needs from this media consumption. The participants from Lebanon in particular listen to female pop music as a form of escapism from the homophobic realities that they live in, and thus attaching strong emotions to these pop songs. This resonates with the findings of Ang (1986), Hall (1980) and McQuail (1994) who view fans as an active audience, which aims to consume certain media products in order to satisfy specific needs of media consumption, such as escapism and feeling a sense of belonging. On the other hand, it has been revealed that the Dutch participants, living in a much more secular and liberal environment, listen to female pop music as a form of leisure rather than a form of escapism. It has also been revealed that due to being bullied and marginalized while growing up, participants from both countries tend to start looking up to the women in their lives as they them as their equals in society.

This brings us to the second theme that has been identified from the interviews: identifying with female pop divas and their music. It has been noted that the participants considered women and gay men as equals, with them facing the same struggles in a patriarchal society. Participants from both Lebanon and the Netherlands have thus started looking up to the women in their lives in order to learn from them how to face the challenges that society presents, and this has been translated in their adoration of female pop divas. For the participants, seeing strong and unapologetic women being themselves inspires them to do the same, with participants mentioning their favorite pop divas' authenticity as an important factor that resonates with them. This resembles the findings of Marshall (1997) and Dyer (1986) who argue that stars express

what it means to be human in today's society, with fans seeing in them qualities that they can emulate in their daily lives. Furthermore, several participants have unknowingly mentioned female pop divas' camp qualities as factors that have fascinated them, arguing that female pop divas are usually more creative and theatrical than their male counterparts. Also, drag queen participants are inspired by this creativity, presenting it in their own work as performers. As Sontag (1964) and Horn (2017) argued, camp is a sensibility that embraces the non-normative, and is noticeable in the wardrobe, songs, performances and videos of female pop divas. The participants are thus drawn towards pop divas' camp qualities as camp is inherently linked to homosexual men (Sontag, 1964) and expresses their innate desires and need for creativity. Camp has also been observed in female pop divas' embrace of gay representation and fight for gay rights in their work, with participants mentioning songs such as *Born this Way* by Lady Gaga as examples of this. On the other hand, the interviewees have also expressed how female pop divas usually tackle topics of empowerment in their songs, which are not necessarily linked to the struggles of being gay, but are however "queered" by their gay audiences in order to fit their narrative and to satisfy their specific wants and needs from this media consumption. This resonates with the concept of "queering" (see Mungen, 2006, Leibetsedder, 2016; Singleton, Fricker & Moreo, 2007) in which queer audiences decode hegemonic pop culture phenomena in ways that would satisfy their own queer narrative. In reality, this specific phenomenon was not necessarily queer or targeting gay audiences in particular. Gay audiences thus adopt a negotiated meaning (see Hall, 1980) in order to satisfy their needs of media consumption.

Next, the third theme that was identified from the interviews was the emotional adoration and deification of the diva. Most participants interviewed expressed an intense and emotional admiration of their favorite pop diva, and this was apparent by the words they have used to describe this adoration, such as "obsession" and "connection". Also, several of them ascribed works of their favorite female pop diva to certain moments in their life. Most strikingly though, is that some Dutch participants have actually deified their divas in order to find a sense of belonging in an increasingly secular Dutch society (see Rojek, 2015). However, this does not apply to the Lebanese participants: according to their responses, they live in a much more traditional and religious environment. They are thus more prone to deify female pop divas because they don't see themselves being accepted in religion and by the people around them who

practice these beliefs. The Lebanese participants have thus found solace and acceptance in their own religion, that of the female pop diva.

The fourth theme identified was gay pop diva fandom as a community. The theme has revealed that each participant had their own specific pop diva that they idolize, which is in turn translated in the gay community. The interviewees argued that being a fan of a certain pop diva tells us more about the person than we think, and that it is a reflection of how the fan acts like and what he fan stands for in society. These observations can be linked to the findings of Sandvoss (2005) who argues that the object of fandom is a reflection of the fan's sense of the Self, and that this instates a sense of belonging with other members of the fan community who share similar ways of thinking. Moreover, the findings have revealed that the participants from Lebanon tend to first meet other members of the fandom through the internet and social media. On the other hand the Dutch participants were more prone to meet in gay spaces such as gay clubs, bars and concerts. This difference between the results can be linked to the dissimilarity of freedoms that exist between both countries, with Lebanese participants having to live in a much more religious environment (see Faour, 2007), and thus having to resort to the internet to meet other gay fans.

The last theme identified is globalization, Americanization and western pop divas' global appeal. The participants from both Lebanon and the Netherlands expressed their fascination with western culture and the American dream. They see western pop divas as being more influential than the local artists from their own countries, with participants recognizing the strong impact of American culture on their lives. Because of "cultural homogenization" (see Appadurai, 1996; Crane, 2002) local cultures are transformed by the world's dominant ones which results in cultures that are homogenous across borders. This would explain how American female pop divas in particular have been able to reach people in both Lebanon and the Netherlands, with participants ultimately favoring them over local artists from their own respective countries.

So, in order to provide an answer to the research question, one can argue that gay men in Lebanon give meaning to western female pop divas by listening to their music as a form of escapism. They also share a strong emotional connection with their favorite pop divas, as they see them as strong and powerful female figures that they can emulate, providing them with the opportunity to express their creativity through their adoration. Conversely, the Dutch participants

give meaning to pop divas by listening to their music as a form of leisure and entertainment, and divas are seen as a basis for their social interactions and group formations in their communities.

5.1 Discussion, limitations and future research

This thesis provided valuable insights into how millennial gay men in Lebanon and the Netherlands give meaning to the western female pop diva. When analyzing the implications of this study on contemporary society, it is interesting for practitioners in the entertainment industry, and most specifically the music industry. It provides managers with insights on how a large share of their market, gay men, give meaning to pop divas. Ultimately, it might help them make informed decisions regarding how their client, the female pop diva, should target this niche audience in order to satisfy their needs for media consumption.

However, similarly to all research, there are some limitations to this study. Firstly, being a fan of pop divas and part of the gay community myself, this might have affected the overall analysis and discussion of the results, as certain biases might have come into play. Moreover, the participants interviewed came from cosmopolitan cities such as Beirut, Amsterdam and Rotterdam. This might have influenced the results, as insights from gay men from rural areas, smaller cities and countries with different cultural and religious backgrounds were not taken into consideration.

Also, limiting the participants to gay men and millennials does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the pop culture phenomenon that is female pop diva adoration. As such, future research should take this into consideration and possibly aim to interview female fans of pop divas or heterosexual men. Moreover, future research should include participants from other age groups. Unlike the millennial generation, prospective participants from other age groups might not be as influenced by the Americanization and digitalization of society, and would possibly provide the researcher with important findings.

Another possibility for future research is to interview fans of stars of other genres of music or for instance conduct a longitudinal study with the same sample interviewed, in order to view how they would give meaning to female pop divas in 10 years from now. For example, would they still abide by the responses they have provided in this study or change preference? This would help us understand whether the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon have

evolved over time, or not. Nonetheless, this research has offered valuable insights of this fascinating phenomenon, and has contributed to both academic and societal knowledge.

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Appendix A: Overview of participants

Participant Number	Name	Age	Occupation	Location	Interview Duration
1	Adham	25	Currently unemployed. Previously: marketing executive	Beirut, Lebanon	44min
2	Adrian	21	Student	Rotterdam, Netherlands	35min
3	Evita Kedavra[5]	29	Drag performer/designer[6]	Beirut, Lebanon	52min
4	Fahmi	26	Student	Beirut, Lebanon	31min
5	Emma Gration	27	Drag performer/project coordinator	Beirut, Lebanon	41min
6	Gabriel	21	Student	Rotterdam, Netherlands	28min
7	George	25	Student	Rotterdam, Netherlands	43min
8	Leroy	25	Freelance photographer	Rotterdam, Netherlands	34min
9	Rita Book	27	Drag performer/graphic designer	Amsterdam, Netherlands	38min
10	Mike	22	Student	Beirut, Lebanon	36min
11	Licka Lolly	26	Drag performer/interior designer	Amsterdam, Netherlands	35min
12	Paul	26	Unemployed university graduate	Beirut, Lebanon	42min
13	Sultana	24	Drag performer/makeup artist	Beirut, Lebanon	46min
14	Tarek	26	Marketing specialist	Beirut, Lebanon	36min

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[5] Drag performers are referred to by their stage names upon their request for anonymity and in order to distinguish them from the rest of the participants.
[6] Drag performers involved in this study perform in drag in addition to having another main source of income from another occupation.

Appendix B: Example of theme and sub-themes

	Women and gay men face similar struggles in a patriarchal society	Women are seen as their equals
	Pop divas are unapologetic and challenge society's norms	Participants look up to them in order to learn from them how to face society's challenges
Identifying with female pop divas and their music	Female pop divas' work is infused with camp	Female pop divas are seen as more creative than their male counterparts
		Allow gay men to express their innate desires for creativity and expression through their adoration
		Drag queens are influenced by camp in their work
	Female pop divas' work allows itself to be queered by its gay audience	Themes of empowerement resonate with gay men

Appendix C: Interview topic guide

Introduction:

The participants are shown a video of a gay man performing to pop songs by female divas throughout the decades:

Todrick Hall – "21 Songs Every Gay Knows": https://youtu.be/CQEY7iGGJO0

The gay community and female pop divas:

1- Tell me more about you, what you do in your free time and what entertainment products do you consume?

2- What is particularly striking about this video? What emotions does it generate in you?

3- With this video in mind, who do you think are the main followers of female pop divas? Explain to me why you think this is the case?

Becoming a fan:

4- What is your definition of a fan? What makes someone a fan of something or someone? What is this idea of the fan that you have based upon? (Media, environment etc..). Please explain.

5- Now, do you have a favorite pop diva yourself? Who is she? Can you tell me more about her and how and what made you become a fan of her?

6- What attracted you to her in the first place and what helped make a lasting impression on you? (Probes: her music; her fashion; her performances; her attitude? Etc...).

7- Can you tell me more about the connection that you share with her?

8- What characteristics do you see in your favorite pop diva that you don't necessarily see in others? What makes her stand out to you?

9- What are the topics tackled in her songs? How does this music make you feel?

10- Do you engage with other people from the same fandom? If so, why do you do so, and what emotions do you attach to your fandom?

About the interviewee:

11- You have previously disclosed to me that you identify as a gay man. What made you feel comfortable to accept and express your sexuality?

12- How is it being gay from where you are from? Do you have any friends in the gay community and do they also have their own favorite pop diva?

Additional section for drag queen participants: Drag queens and pop divas:

13- How did you get into the art of drag and who or what influenced you to do so and who inspires you?

14- How does drag make you feel? How could this be tied to your pop diva adoration?

Conclusion:

15- In conclusion, if you look back on how your adoration of female pop divas started and how it is now: what do you notice? Has it changed or evolved over time? How could this be related to your sexuality? Please explain.

16- Why do you think are western pop divas favored over local artists from your country?