

Queering the stage:

**MUBI and the impact of streaming on the framing of queer identities for
university students**

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Abstract

Research on queer media has primarily been conducted through the prism of textual analysis, particularly when considering TV and cinema. Queer production studies have, however, started to open up the field to the importance of distribution and industrial practices when it comes to the queer meaning of a media text, thanks to Bryan Wuest (2018) and Candace Moore (2013) amongst others. As a relatively recent yet widely disseminated mode of consumption for film and TV products, streaming platforms serve as a useful field for research concerning the role of distribution and consumption in the formation and development processes of queer identities. MUBI then emerges as a particularly interesting and important case study due to its global scope of reach and growing popularity amongst the general public (Grater, 2018; Mitchell, 2017). The research thus straddles media industry studies and queer theory by focusing on the importance of niche streaming platforms in the construction of a queer identity amongst university students. In turn, it aims to underscore the space of queerness within streaming services. This thesis tries to answer the following research question: How is MUBI engaging with queer content and how does this engagement come into play in processes of identity formation within their queer university students subscribers? After exposing the presence of queerness on MUBI's interface, the analysis engages directly with the impact of MUBI usage on queer university students' identity formation by conducting 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews. First, the research points to MUBI's particular position within the field of streaming according to the queer community due to its opposition to the mainstream, its proximity to minority communities and unique cinema, and the trust it has created between its curation model and its pool of subscribers. Secondly, the key ways in which participants have experienced identity formation when using MUBI are highlighted, starting with the heightened visibility of diverse queer experiences; then, through the broadening of horizons from a cultural and/or social point of view; and finally by helping further processes of self-validation of one's identity. To conclude, limitations to the identity formation process on MUBI are raised, in part due to a significant lack of engagement with the interactive features mentioned earlier, and in other parts to the inherent differences within the community that alter the ways in which media products are understood. Ultimately, the thesis furthers our understanding of identity formation among queer university students and helps pinpoint media consumption and resulting reception as key moments during which identities are formed, moments thus moulded by the distributor's reputation and/or brand identity.

Keywords - Queer Theory; Media Industry; Identity formation; Cinema; Streaming Industry

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Introduction

As Netflix let go of its original highly profitable endeavour of DVD renting, it opened up the digital stage to a wild and wide revolution within the video industry (Bakare, 2018). Since its decision to pursue original content in 2011, streaming services have taken the centre stage in today's society's relationship with television and cinema (Burroughs, 2018). In particular, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, cinema as traditionally understood in terms of an embodied experience within a theatre, amongst a crowd, has for long not been possible and is still sporadically and locally complicated to access (Roxborough, 2021). This is especially true for arthouse, international cinema, and of key importance for this research, queer cinema, which had already struggled to find a space in the new digital world of media (Moore, 2013). Although mainstream media have progressively become more open to the inclusion of LGBTQ stories and characters within their narratives, GLAAD's 2021 report still presents a significant divide, as only 22% of the main American movie studios included LGBTQ characters (GLAAD, 2021). As such, niche platforms of content such as festivals and niche streaming services such as MUBI stand tall as an online space open to anyone with a focus on arthouse and alternative cinema, one that has much more rarely shied away from offering queer stories than other production and distribution centres (Moore, 2013).

Sticking out from the giant American streaming platforms currently dominating the industry -i.e. Netflix, Amazon Prime, or HBO,- MUBI is a globally available European curated online SVOD (Subscription Video On Demand) platform that specialises in cinema (Frey, 2021; Mueller, 2020). Founded in 2007 under the name The Auteurs, the platform is known as a home to a significant community of film aficionados, counting over 100 000 subscribers in 2017, and experiencing steady growth (Kenny, 2017; Mueller, 2020). Albeit being one of the first streaming platforms to see the day, MUBI has consistently kept a niche image. Originally, rather than focusing on a mass on-demand library similarly to Netflix or HBO, Mubi's main differentiation strategy resided in a one-film-a-day model (*What Is MUBI*, n.d.). Offering each daily film as a highlight, and marketing it specifically, the platform made use of scarcity as a promotional concept. These are additionally advertised as being humanly curated, contrasting with the algorithmic model used by most of its competitors, and belong to the categories of independent, arthouse cinema, gathering cult classics, award-winning pieces, and festival darlings (Ibid.).

As a streaming platform, MUBI offers a concept critically more centred on community building compared to its competitors. Such an endeavour is fostered thanks to the creation of a journal focused on MUBI's content, *The Notebook*, which takes inspiration from influential and traditional publications in the field of film studies, such as *Cahier du Cinema* (Brandman, 2017). Key to the original plan from Efe Cakarel, the mind behind MUBI, the idea came back in 2019 with the publication of a limited paperback copy (Fileri, 2009). To cement the community within one space, the site itself is organised as a way to resemble a personal page similar to social media, with similar features to film critic platforms such as *Letterboxd* (Frey, 2021). The importance took up by the platform in regards to the framing of the films it offered thus separates it from other streaming platforms. In turn, it urges us to have a deeper look into the processes at hand.

Research on queer media, in particular TV and cinema, has primarily focused on the content of media texts, and their existence as queer, focusing thus on textual analysis. Queer representation is a highly complex subject so fundamentally tied to context and personality. What makes representation, and more importantly, good representation? How to know how and why a media text marked you and your understanding of your identity? Despite its importance and its crucial influence on bridging the gap between mainstream and queer content, the emphasis on content has too often excluded the conditions of production and distribution, and in turn their impact on the active audience (Cover & Dau, 2021). Research is most often concerned with a "hypothetical spectator", as opposed to a real, diverse audience (Villarejo, 2019, 50). The reduction of a complex and varied group of people to an imagined single entity inherently limits one's understanding of how the context of watching along with active participation impacts the reception of queer media (Villajero, 2009).

Streaming being a relatively recent yet widely popular mode of consumption for TV and film products makes for hallowed ground of research relating to the place of distribution and consumption in the identity-making and framing process of queer audiences. Going further, MUBI comes forth as an interesting and important case study due to its global scope of reach -available in over 190 countries- and growing fame amongst the general public, despite its existence as a niche streaming service catering to a specific segment of the population (Grater, 2018; Mitchell, 2017). Pondering their approach to queer content should allow an insight into the way in which queer cinema is framed by

industry practices to a general audience and how this framing impacts queer identities and identifications of viewers.

The research thus straddles media industry studies and queer theory by focusing on the importance of niche streaming platforms in the construction of a queer identity amongst university students. In turn, it aims to underscore the space of queerness within streaming services. The thesis makes use of the following research question: *How is MUBI engaging with queer content and how does this engagement come into play in processes of identity formation within their queer university students subscribers?*

To properly assess the subject, the thesis begins by outlining the space taken up by queer media within MUBI, from the films offered to the multiple interactive features on the site's interface (i.e. lists, reviews, etc.). Then, the analysis takes a direct look at the impact of MUBI usage on queer university students' identity formation. This is done in two parts: first, the research points to MUBI's particular space within the queer community's psyche, being a critical place for identity formation due to its opposition to the mainstream, its proximity to minority communities and unique cinema, and the trust it has created between its curation model and its pool of subscribers. Second, three key ways in which participants have experienced identity formation when using MUBI are highlighted. The heightened visibility for diverse queer experiences offers more opportunity for relatability, which, through the broadening of horizons from a cultural and/or social point of view, helps to understand the community in its transnational condition. The two then bolster the credibility allocated to MUBI and its program, a credibility then awarded to the multiple possible identities of its subscribers. Finally, it is critical to understand the limitations to the identity formation process on MUBI, which are in part due to a significant lack of engagement with the interactive features mentioned earlier, and in other parts to the inherent differences within the community that alter the ways in which media products are understood.

Theoretical framework

Concepts of identity have long-standing importance in the field of cultural studies. A staple in the discussion, Stuart Hall's *Question of Cultural Identity* has helped to offer new ways to understand and consider concepts of adherence to certain identities (1996). He

offers the idea that rather than a static, frozen, and motionless concept, identity-making should be seen as an ongoing process, and favours the word 'identification' which implies this constant redefinition (Ibid.). Judith Butler's work on gender furthers this idea and presents queer identity as a spectrum, a space consistently re-defined and contested (Butler, 1993; 1999). Taking a Foucauldian approach, she posits that discourse is the source of one's understanding of sex and gender. It is through constant repetitive and performative actions of expected norms that one solidifies their identity (Butler, 1991). Language is understood as a tool with which to reproduce societal expectations and recreate social constructions (Ibid.). Individuals act and perform in a space constructed by discourse wherein one takes on pre-existing roles (role-taking) that then outline acts of identification (role-making) (ibid.). This concept further exposes the "staged, contingent construction of meaning" (ibid: 205).

Processes of identity formation are generally thought to depend on interactions with other individuals, whose experience then frames our own (Eichner, 2014). It is of particular importance, then, to engage with others, as passive observation is said to be insufficient as a meaning-making practice (Ibid). This engagement is based on agency, on personal decisions to interact or not with the world around us - or online. This idea follows the theory of symbolic interactionism, which explains that meaning is created through interactions between subjects and objects, as opposed to being inherent to objects (Blumer, 1969). Agency is a recurring frame of understanding to comprehend media use and reception in the contemporary and techno-centric world (Eichner, 2014).

In media studies, the concept of identification is linked to the idea of encoding/decoding meaning onto media text, as brought forth by Hall (1973). His highly influential conference echoed throughout media studies has anchored the audience as active producers of meaning. Textual meaning is embedded on multiple levels, from production to reception, yet is ultimately framed by each individual's specific cultural and societal origins. Multiple readings and understandings of media products thus occur, from their dominant and intended ones to an oppositional one (Barker, 2016).

Queer cinema and queerness in cinema are prime examples of the importance of those multiple levels of meaning creation. Indeed, historically, both have been known to be found in the margins, in between the lines of the text, up to their audience's understanding (Chauncey, 1994). These multiple levels of understanding brought forth by the audience

illustrate how media products' impact is shaped by multiple instances, from the creators to the consumers. Schoonover and Galt identify that the context in which the audience is introduced to the film influences their opinion on its queerness, explaining why some films are queer to some and non-queer to others (2016). In other words, the reading of a movie can vary depending on the person watching it: queer communities are known to 'queer' otherwise straight movies, movies that lack any explicit queer representation, to make it their own through an alternative reading of the codes (Creekmur & Doty, 1995). In addition, coming from queer production studies, Jonathan Gray offers the idea of "paratext" which he defines as "texts that prepare us for other texts." (2010, p. 25) This furthers the importance of the multiple levels of meaning embedding and presents distribution as an equally important part of the reading of a text.

Queer theory as a field of study has been thoroughly connected to media studies due to the importance of media in both matters of the construction of identity and the perception of the community by the general public (Maris, 2016; Scarcelli et al., 2020). For instance, the academic understanding of the intersection of both concepts culminates in the creation in 2016 of *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture*, a peer-reviewed journal focused on the articulation and representation of queerness within media in its generality.

Within this field of study, American scholars such as Atay (2019) lament the lack of non-white queer representation on their screen which, as the United States' Hollywood can still be considered a cultural hegemon - if not a cultural imperialist-, directly impacts the overseas perception of queerness. Atay invites a step back from the scholarly focus on the US perspective of queer media and displays a need to understand transnational and global contexts of queer media and identity (2019). Indeed, to posit US media as the base from which the rest of the world engages with cinema and media at large would be rather Americentric. In fact, transpiring from various texts is the concept of transnational queer identity and culture as offered by the new media (Atay, 2019; Szulc, 2020). In other words, one crucial impact of media within queer culture is the creation of queer cosmopolitanism that allows for people of a myriad of cultures to find an equal foot of understanding through a representation of queerness as a concept that transcends borders and cultures (Szulc, 2020).

Production and context of viewership have been thus substantially defined as important parts of understanding queerness in film and in turn its repercussion on identity

building. Of key importance to this thesis, however, is Bryan Wuest's approach to distribution as an equally meaningful lens for understanding the essence of the connotation of a text (2018). Annette Hill's chapter in Di Giovanni and Gambier's book on audience reception studies furthers this academic focus on context's importance when researching the impact of queer texts on identity (2018).

In this multimedia environment of constant technological renewal, it is crucial to understand the changes the media industry at large is currently going through due to the increasing presence of the internet in media consumption and the consequent move from analogue to digital - digitisation (Pardo, 2012; Havens & Lotz, 2017). Combined with globalisation, and in its wake the more focused idea of cultural globalisation, the growing streaming industry is becoming decisive in the video industry. Within the film industry, these processes imply that traditional production centres such as Hollywood have been struggling to find their place in this new environment, especially with the rise of pirated media (Pardo, 2012; Moore, 2013). Of interest to this thesis is the space occupied by alternative cinema, including queer cinema, which has to find adequate space on this new digital stage that is profitable enough for their survival (Moore, 2013).

Scholars such as Major (2021) have urged for a closer focus on niche streaming services which have slowly but surely settled in the grander field of the streaming industry. This is of particular importance as many such as Dramafever and Filmstruck have been known to suffer and not survive the highly competitive industry in comparison to giants such as Netflix or Disney+ (Ibid.). Queer production scholars, such as Bryan Wuest (2018) and Candace Moore (2013), have already ventured into analysing the importance of distribution and industrial practices when it comes to the queer meaning of a media text. As such, the research at hand seeks to expand this idea by taking into focus MUBI, a streaming platform focused on cinema in its nuances, gathering alternative titles and non-mainstream subjects.

Method

Research design

Methodologically, this thesis focuses on qualitative research and analysis, based on a media industry studies perspective, and first makes use of a platform analysis and trade

press analysis as a way to understand the platforms' relation to queer content. This method offers introspection into mediated texts¹ as crucial objects of study, following scholars such as Freeman (2016), Havens et al (2009), or Herbert et al (2019). Of equal importance is the very content of the platform, counting the films and their presentations, as well as its format as a social network in the likes of Letterboxd², focusing on individual and amateur cinema critiques. Following this line of thought, an interview with a MUBI employee can offer the platform's vision regarding queer content, putting in focus the potential importance their queer audience is given in the decision-making process regarding the acquisitions falling under the term queer cinema. This interview provides a reliable source of information on the way the company itself perceives its impact and relation to queer content as it is an interview with what is considered an informant interview (Gabor, 2017). This interview provides specialised knowledge of the field, specifically here the company, that is the object of research. The knowledge obtained would have been otherwise inaccessible or overtly difficult to get (Ibid.). The interview was conducted with Anais Lebrun, Vice president of programming at MUBI, on zoom for 30 minutes. The Appendix B.1. presents the interview guide used for this specific interview. All of the data acquired was thematically analysed as a way to unearth pre-existing assumptions on MUBI's unique and niche brand identity made in the public eye regarding MUBI's relations to queer cinema and their queer audience.

Keeping in mind the findings of the platform analysis, in-depth semi-structured interviews were chosen as a way to assess contemporary conceptions from university students on their queer identity framing process in parallel to their use of MUBI. These interviews are apart from the interview with MUBI's employee, and follow the interview guide in appendix B.2. Media studies in relation to gender and sexuality have been analysed through both quantitative and qualitative research, however, in this case, the intersection between them is marked by nuances and subjective understandings (Scarcelli et al., 2020). Taking from Johnson, interviews offer space for members of the target group to take time in the articulation of their answers, which in relation to identity, particularly queer identity, is

¹ L. Barraclough, (2020, May 22). *Film Streaming Service MUBI Launches Library Section*. Variety; J. Brandman, (2017, February 14). *Behind the Screens: MUBI's Director of Content on Streamlining Streaming Services*. Observer.

² Online social networking service made for cinephiles in order to share opinions about, and love of, cinema. Similar to the social platform side of MUBI.

key (2011). Indeed, as brought up in the theoretical framework, queer identities and queer media are still today under debate as context is of utmost importance in this instance (Wuest, 2018). The use of semi-structured interviews thus allows a more complex grasp on people's meaning-making practices, which are inherently nuanced and subjective, complicated to systematically assess, and in need of an open discussion as a way to adequately cover as much of the participants' thoughts and ideas (Johnson, 2011).

The in-depth component of these interviews is key for this thesis in order to help encompass the various ways in which members of a community engage with the media they consume, along with mapping out the similarities and differences in consumption patterns and choices (2001). As such, in-depth interviews in the context of this thesis have as a clear goal the understanding of the varying reception of queer content coming from a niche streaming platform such as MUBI and the multiple usages made by that same audience towards ends of identity-making and framing thanks to the interactive components of the platform.

Ultimately, as a way to encourage validity and credibility, a triangulation of data between those gathered from public texts and those from interviews is undertaken (Silverman, 1993). Continuing with a thematic analysis as a framework for the analysis helps highlight common themes found in multiple interviews, as such offering a rigorous analysis of the multiple ways in which streaming services can frame queerness or how this framing relates to personal identities. When contrasted with the analysis of the public data, the two analyses allow an insight into the discrepancy between the goals of the platform and the ways in which they are received by the audience. This method's flexibility comes here as a useful component due to the lack of pre-existing understanding of the relationship between online consumption of media and identity framing (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Sampling and procedures

As the target population of my interviews, I focus on queer English-speaking university students subscribers of the MUBI platform, within an age range of 18 to 30. Although the thesis targets university students, a limit on age was established in order to focus on people who can still easily remember or might still be in the exploration stage of their identity as defined by Coleman (1982). This means that although their sexual identity has already been defined in opposition to heteronormativity, peer support and framing of

media are becoming decisive in identity formation as this is still a highly malleable stage (ibid.). This segment of the population is one to which I belong, making the understanding of their lived experience something rather close to me and as such will prevent some of the misunderstandings that can and will probably arise in the early interviews, a key issue in the interview method pointed out by scholars such as Johnson (2001), and Rubin and Rubin (1995). Then, as the primary interest of this thesis resides in the formation of queer identities, a sense of belonging to this queer community is necessary. The focus on English-speaking university students is derived both from the ease of access and the context of digital natives, making this segment of the population one that is known for a general interest in streaming services due to their growing up with this new form of consumption of content (Pardo, 2012).

With such base information in mind, 10 semi-structured interviews based on voluntary participation were conducted. The focus on a semi-structured process was done as a way to leave space for the opinion and sensibilities of the interviewees. For ethical and confidentiality reasons, the identity of the participants will be kept anonymous within the paper using made-up first names only, as specific identities are unnecessary for the present study.

Prior to the interview process, finding and recruiting participants for this project had been a long and tedious endeavour. MUBI, albeit being the leader of its category of cinema-only streaming platforms, indubitably remains a niche platform with a limited audience, and by focusing on the queer community in university, the target group was rendered even smaller. To reach this specific part of the population is complex, as there is no common space in which to reach this particular group of people, rendering the recruitment process especially arduous. Recruitment continued through the five months of the thesis research and writing, reaching an end primarily due to time constraints and the reach of theoretical saturation, wherein new information was making itself scarce (Johnson, 2001).

The search for participants originated within communities I am a part of, such as previous schools (Leiden University, University of Amsterdam) and informal friend circles, due to proximity and ease of reach, yet only two participants were derived from this process. A second channel for recruitment was the mass emailing of professors of gender, queer, and/or media studies, such as Ginette Vincendeau from King's College, and Jessica Ford from the University of New Castle. The final channel taken was through multiple social

media platforms, namely Instagram, Twitter, Whatsapp, and Facebook. Searching for online groups that could contain potential participants, I reached out using my own personal accounts and both sent messages to group members or posted on the group common wall. Twitter took a particular space as I directly messaged followers of the MUBI twitter who displayed affinities to the queer community in their bio, handles, and Twitter names, such as an emoji of a gay flag or direct namedropping of non-straight sexual identities.

Ultimately, interviewees were gathered through the multiple channels named previously, with a particular help coming from social media. Two interviewees were friends of the author, three were directly contacted through Twitter, two answered an Instagram story, and two directly reached out through email following a mass-sent email from the University of King's College. A snowballing sampling technique was put in place, and two more interviews were derived from interviewees' personal networks, as participants provided referrals to contacts of theirs (Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Topic list and sample questions

Concerning the interviews themselves, a semi-structured interview protocol was followed, taking as a base 25 open-ended questions separated into three main parts, namely queer identity, queer cinema, and queer cinema on MUBI. Firstly, the questions focus on how each interviewee understands their sexual and gender identity, and how they express it in their daily life. Then, zooming onto culture and cinema in particular, participants are asked to describe their understanding of and relationship to queer cinema in its generality. Finally, they are asked in more detail about their usage of the MUBI platform, both as a streaming and social one, when it comes to queer cinema. Follow-up questions were individually prompted by the participants' own unique experiences and beliefs as a way to bolster their argumentation and proceed with an in-depth analysis of their perspectives. Protocol questions include: Are you open about your association with the queer community in your daily life? What constitutes a queer film in your opinion? Do you feel that queer cinema has had a place in your own understanding of your identity? Do you consider MUBI a valuable platform when looking for queer cinema?

Data collection

Participants were 10 individuals identifying either as a woman or non-binary. The original research took a particular focus on European university students, which was then dropped when recruitment efforts stalled due to the complexity of finding interviewees fitting such specific criteria and the limited time under which the author found herself. Nationalities thus include one British, one Irish, one Turkish, two Mexican, three French, one Saudi, and one Portuguese. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 24 and were located mostly in the Netherlands, namely The Hague and Amsterdam, but also in London, Paris, and Mexico City. The end result of having participants from multiple cultures and nationalities is of great help as the goal is to compare and contrast the opinions of a community known for its cosmopolitan and transnational creation (Atay, 2019; Kohnen, 2016). One participant identifies as a trans woman, two as non-binary and the rest as cis-gendered women. All identify as queer, although they understand the term as an umbrella one. Three preferred the lack of specificity queer offers, one identifies primarily as a lesbian, four identify as bisexual, and two as pansexual.

The interview process was entirely done through video calls. Although a couple of participants offered face-to-face encounters, situations imposed the usage of internet-mediated interviews, particularly through ZOOM and Google Meets. This impacted the collection of data in expected ways, as the COVID 19 pandemic has forced the literature on online possibilities for interviews to expand drastically. As internet connexion can be unstable, interviews are longer and are sometimes cut short or interrupted (Tremblay et. al., 2021). Sound quality being changing as well negatively impacts the recording and understanding of the participants' voices which could not be helped by body language due to limited visibility of a person's body on camera (Krouwel et. al., 2019) Nevertheless, the use of online interviews is also thought to provide more comfort to participants as they are free to choose an environment that suits them, and which makes them feel at ease (Tramblay et. al., 2021). Additionally, I proceeded to be in my own bedroom for each interview, an informal context which provided participants with an insight into my personal life represented in the video frame, albeit being limited by the camera angle. This helped foster positive rapport as I was giving knowledge of myself in exchange for knowledge of themselves, thus furthering the mitigation of inequalities in power relations between interviewer and interviewees (Weller, 2017).

Each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes long, depending on the person interviewed. Those were audio-recorded using a phone. Participants were informed of the recording when asked to participate, with the consent form, and at the beginning of the interview. Each was made aware of the start and end of the recording. Prior to each interview, participants were made aware of the study itself, both the research question and the theoretical background, and were given an overview of the topics being breached in the interview. Each person was given space and encouraged to express any concerns or questions both before and after the interview, concerning anonymity or further interest in the subject of the thesis and was asked to provide written informed consent.

During the interviews, a feminist perspective on in-depth interviewing was taken. A feminist approach implies that in order to establish trust and ensure the most reliable data collection during the process, a reciprocal relationship has to be established (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Feminist perspectives on interviewing expect reflexivity and interactivity as a way to break ideas of hierarchy between interviewee and interviewer, which prevents issues of objectification (Legard et. al., 2014). When dealing with individuals belonging to the queer community, fear of objectification can arise due to the mediatic importance of the concept. As such, during the interviews, I endeavoured to make them feel comfortable talking to me about their identity by disclosing my own, sometimes letting my opinion out by quickly verbally acquiescing or nodding. Taking thus from Rubin and Rubin's 'responsive interviewing', a form of reciprocity is created during the exchange and both parties can enjoy an exchange of thoughts and information (2012). Although this departs from traditional thoughts on interviews which demand from the interviewer a distance and neutrality towards their subject, I do believe my involvement as someone belonging to similar cultural circles as my interviewees was a good foundation for mutual trust and understanding (Johnson, 2001). A key problem that arose during the early stages of the interview process was the complexity of leaving behind my own knowledge of the subject (ibid.). The constant paradox of qualitative research, one's understanding and beliefs regarding the world and more specifically the subject at hand are impossible to forget for the time of the interview. Rather, the technique of bracketing was used, which pertains to "the act of suspending one's various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 175). This concept directly improves the data collected as it helps remove pre-existing bias in the researcher's mind but

is also an active endeavour needed to be kept up throughout the entire interviewing procedure.

Processes of trust were complex in certain cases where participants declined to show their faces. Although facial recognition was not necessary for my research, the mix of online video calls, without video, made establishing mutual understanding more complicated, as opposed to a real-life interview (Johnson, 2001). Nevertheless, as this research deals with subjects that might be uncomfortable to talk about for some, with questions being rather personal -without being invasive- the possibility to keep the camera off also offered a bigger cloak of anonymity, along with the comfort of not being able to see direct reactions to the participants' words (Weller, 2017). One participant for instance is going through gender dysphoria and expressed feeling uncomfortable with their gender presentation, as such preferring to forgo visual communication for audio-only. Another one was unsure of her English and felt more focused without the added pressure of body expression.

Coding & data analysis

The recordings were then transcribed verbatim using a paid online transcription service. The completed transcript was then reviewed while listening to the recording for acute accuracy. Through this, I could already get a general overview of the subjects breached by the participants and make a preliminary outline of the focus themes during coding. The interview that subjectively felt the densest in terms of discussion and information was taken in order to establish the initial codes which then informed the rest of the coding. These were substantially altered throughout the process but offered a base from which to grow through the coding of the rest of the interviews, which were done in chronological order of their conductions.

All transcripts were added to one google doc and excerpts were highlighted using a colour code that grew with the coding process to help visualise the various themes present. After finishing the last interview, I went back to each transcript to apply the finalised coding book. The themes distilled were put in a table and linked to certain key quotes taken from various interviews as illustrations.

Results

1. MUBI's online queer engagement

To begin with, the first part of this thesis focuses on the presence of queerness within MUBI's platform and its engagement with it. Although one's queer identity is not tied only to queer cinema, academia has consistently exposed how media consumption, and by extension media representation, directly impacts identity formation (Fornäs & Xinaris, 2013; Storey, 1999; Strelitz, 2002). Today's media landscape is fragmented, spread out from TV to online VOD platforms or DVDs. The ways in which media is consumed then take on an importance that they previously did not. In this context, the platform used, in other words, the distributor, is understood as a "productive space that reframes the programming we watch" (Chamberlain, 2010, 84). Said reframing is inherently done through the cultural and social lens of the platform, and thus through that of its creators and owners. This lens becomes the subjective line of thought then used by subscribers "for navigating and controlling one's experience" with platforms (Ibid., 85). Many scholars have uncovered the perceived control, or agency, felt by users as an illusion created by VOD platforms and other distributors (Johnson 2019, 113; Van Esler 2020). In the current media landscape, where one can consume programs on a myriad of different platforms, the decoding of information and meaning is bound to be impacted by the platform's identity and beliefs. This follows the ideas of Hall and the multiple levels of encoding outlined earlier in the thesis (1981).

To accurately understand how MUBI frames the content it offers, and its following influence on queer youth's identity formation, an in-depth analysis of MUBI's interface in relation to queer and LGBTQ+ identities is required. Additionally, an interview with MUBI's global programming strategy manager, Anais Lebrun, was conducted with questioning pertaining to the space given to the queer audience and queer cinema when programming. The two data sets are then cross-examined as a way to unearth the approach to queerness and the scope of said approach taken on by MUBI. This exposition and analysis will be used to understand how subscribers' interaction with the interface impacts their queer identity.

When opening the website MUBI, subscribers are immediately taken to the main page, labelled "Now Showing" which offers the film of the day, and occasionally a current monthly or weekly focus (See appendix A.1). When scrolling down, the site unveils a few

local playlists curated by MUBI employees. There is found the first space offered to queer cinema and the queer community. The playlist is called *Pride Unprejudiced: LGBTQ+ cinema* and is made up of 27 films coming from multiple cultures, such as Brazil, Spain, Pakistan, Hong Kong... (See appendix A.2). The section is introduced with a short text explaining the importance and scope of queer cinema, and outlining what to expect in the playlist, albeit remaining evasive and ambiguous through the repeated use of metaphors and other complex linguistic constructions. The register used is formal and graphic, full of adjectives and positive forms, expressing excitement for the collection, and using a vernacular familiar to cinephiles, as pointed to by Frey (2021). Keeping in line with their identity, this text assumes a certain knowledge from its subscriber pool on both cinema and queer identities, mentioning “filmmaking conventions” and the “broad spectrum of genders and sexualities” (See Appendix A.2). The assumption of knowledge then frames MUBI’s understanding of their audience as educated on film and gender studies and the platform effectively outlines the films offered in a decidedly qualitative light, exposing MUBI’s highbrow understanding of cinema (Prallet, 2022). Without expressing it in those words, the introduction frames the films in this playlist as objectively good pieces of cinema. There is also a focus on the multiplicity of queer representations. Interestingly something often decried by academics and audiences alike, diversity in cinema, particularly queer cinema, is still lacking on mainstream video platforms, including linear TV. Here, MUBI posits that “representations in cinema have become increasingly robust, diverse, and multidimensional.” (*Pride Unprejudiced: LGBTQ+ Cinema*, n.d.) This is a bold claim that is seemingly upheld by the clear diversity of cultures represented. Already, MUBI separates itself from traditional encounters with queer media.

To introduce the playlist visually, a trailer is offered on the top of the page, made up of snippets from films one can watch in the playlist, along with some that are not available anymore (See appendix A.2). One can assume they either used to be part of the playlist or are part of it in other countries. This trailer furthers the display of diversity and eclecticism within queer cinema, supporting the previous claim from MUBI of queer cinema’s robustness, diversity, and multidimensionality (*Pride Unprejudiced: LGBTQ+ Cinema*, n.d.). The page also offers to post the playlist on Twitter and Facebook. By offering possibilities to share what one watches on MUBI, an emphasis on community building is created. That

same trailer, shortened, is played before watching a film during June, which is considered queer pride month, as a promotion for the playlist of queer cinema on MUBI.

During the interview, Ms Lebrun highlighted the direct goal of MUBI as a strong supporter and sponsor of “underrepresented film and underrepresented visions.” (Lebrun, 2021) This is understood as the hallowed ground for queer cinema and representation by both MUBI and its subscribers. That being said, queer cinema is not the only part of the vision MUBI holds regarding championing alternative cinema. Although queer cinema is a key aspect of it, the platform’s focus can reside in other forms of underrepresented content in the mainstream. They sustain that these underrepresented sides of cinema, including international work and festival darlings, need to be given more space on streaming platforms in order to take them out of their invisibility curse. As such, MUBI makes use of particular times of the year, such as pride month or niche film festivals, to zoom in on certain parts of niche cinema and give them centre stage at least on their platform, as pointed out by Ms Lebrun.

The queer cinema is part of the vision that we want to support and but it's part of many other versions of specific vision that we want to support, you know, so there is not when, for example, it's Pride Month, of course, we want to do a focus that is related to that, and we will have some global exclusive that will meet that will match the topic and- and take that into account, that it's part of a broader strategy, which is to give some space to voices that are usually not accessible. (Lebrun, 2021)

MUBI marks a difference between films offered in the queer focus during pride month or other key moments for the queer community, and the films tagged as LGBTQ+; which speaks to the general discourse about what makes queer cinema in academia.

So right now we have an approach about the tagging which is broad, if they could be tagged. They could be tagged easily. But then when we do a focus outside of that film group that is available all year long. When we do a focusing on a specific period of the year, we make sure that the theme is really covering that topic. At the core of the experience. (Lebrun, 2021).

This difference is understood as the space taken by queerness within the film. If the film is presented during a focus, its primary concern and theme have to be directly about queer experiences and people. A film including queer side characters but focusing on a straight person or experience is not understood as representative enough to warrant being

in focus but will be tagged as LGBTQ+. The decision when it comes to what goes into queer playlists and queer tags is decided by the database team, followed by the curation team, as named by the interviewee. Tagging a film LGBTQ+ is done as often as possible, the definition of LGBTQ+ films being understood in “broad” terms (Lebrun, 2021). The exact limit was not given during the interview, as Ms Lebrun is not part of the team responsible for it. The point is to offer the myriad of ways queer can be understood, as well as leave space for people unfamiliar with the community to slowly but surely be introduced to this side of cinema.

The second space given to queer cinema is in the Browse tab. This section, also known as the catalogue or library in the trade press and other platforms, regroups every film currently available on MUBI, as such expanding the original 30 films per month format (Frey, 2021). Within genres, the title “LGBTQ+” will take you to the LGBTQ+ -or queer- films on offer at the time of the research (See Appendix A.3). The catalogue also offers to further filter your research by year and country, with the latter being separated between common and uncommon countries. This allows for a separation between mainstream and niche, a distinction that makes sense on a platform that, again, prides itself on variety and diversity of choice. Each film is represented by a miniature displaying a still, the title of the film in bold, all caps, white, classic font, under which is found in smaller font the director’s name and least visible is the year which is not in bold. Additional information is only offered if one clicks on the miniature. The stills chosen to illustrate the films are all very different in their concept, sometimes exposing a queer kiss or closeness, other times having nothing to do with queerness.

Another option available for searching within the catalogue on MUBI is to browse through film festivals and their selection for the current year (See Appendix A.4). Multiple queer/gay/LGBTQ+ film festivals are available, namely Outfest: Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Frameline: San Francisco International LGBTQ Film Festival, or Mix Copenhagen LGBTQ+ Film Festival. When organising the list by recommended, the first one that pops up is the Outfest. That is however the only one in the first two pages out of 8 pages of film festivals.

Researching the term “queer” on MUBI in their research bar yields 2605 films (See Appendix A.5). The amount of film yielded by the research is so due to MUBI’s endeavour to be a cinematic database as much as a streaming platform (Frey, 2021). Out of these 2605

films, 11 are available to watch in the Netherlands currently.³ However, the word “queen” rather than “queer” is present in these 11 titles, and in fact no available film uses the word queer. This coincides with the usage of LGBTQ+ by MUBI rather than queer. Typing LGBTQ+ in the search bar a few more results, some linked to queerness, others not at all. These characteristics of the search outline the overwhelming focus from MUBI’s audience on the term “queer” rather than LGBTQ+.

It becomes apparent that a key space to look into when researching queer cinema specifically on MUBI is within the lists of films curated either by MUBI itself or its subscribers. Here, the term “queer” takes on much more weight than the acronym LGBTQ+. The research for “queer” yields 13 pages of lists made out of 24 results per page, while LGBTQ+ only yields four pages and LGBT six (See Appendix A.5). The substantial difference in usage of each term by MUBI subscribers is then made evident and forces a focus on queer and its derivations by exposing the audience’s preference for it. Titles of general, big “queer” lists include “Fox and his (queer) friends” which has over 5000 followers and over 9000 films; “Queer”, with 352 films and 94 followers, or various “Queer Cinema” titled lists with varying amounts of films included or followers. Other lists are more specific, such as “Queer Middle Eastern,” “Queer of Color”, “Comics are Queer as Hell,” or “Queer Incomplete Beauty,” and include films that adhere to other genres on top of LGBTQ+. Some lists only gather a handful of followers, if at all. Some lists are made up of only one film. The lists offered are made by a myriad of subscribers, pointing to the vast pool of queer subscribers on the platform, along with the multiple possible lenses to take when looking at cinema.

Ms Lebrun’s team is composed, in parts, of people belonging to the queer community and are said to be active participants in the discussion surrounding queer inclusion. Particularly, a strong focus on an open and continuous discussion regarding social themes is presented in the interview, as Ms Lebrun believes “it needs to be an ongoing conversation for it to be positive” (Lebrun, 2021). As such MUBI is presented as a contemporary, socially aware, and inclusive platform both on and off the internet. Progress for the sake of progress is however not the goal of MUBI, Lebrun exposes. She posits that although discussions have to be raised, and people from the concerned groups should be

³ This research was done during the months of April and May 2022.

listened to, it is important to have a complete perspective of the audience. Taking the queer/LGBTQ+ discourse as an example, Ms Lebrun offers the fact that not every language shares an understanding of the word queer. As such, despite my pointing out the academic focus on the term queer as opposed to the acronym LGBTQ+ and its derivations, MUBI needs to target populations and audiences not versed in the queer community's politics and conversations. Doing the opposite would ostracise an audience that could otherwise have been open to discovering queer aesthetics and themes in cinema. As she expresses: "It's about making the topic accessible to not only talk to this community but another whole audience that you think should discover that cinema."

MUBI is understood and thought of as a credible and trustworthy recommender, which Frey elaborates on in his chapter "Recommendation Credibility in the MUBI Interface," in his book *MUBI and the Curation Model of Video on Demand* (2021). To be specific, Frey outlines a few processes that he deems at the core of MUBI's credibility: "These processes include an "authentic" arthouse ethos, a sleek aesthetic, community exchange, the ideal of content diversity, explanations that resemble critics' reviews and festival programmes, and above all the promise of human-generated recommendations." In processes of identity formation, the credibility of a recommender, of a gatekeeper, impacts with more strength and deepness the watcher, or subscriber (Hall, 1992). Similarly, the reputation of the site or source of recommendation has been exposed as the primary heuristic used to evaluate whether to trust a recommendation or not (Metzger et al., 2010). By positioning itself as a tastemaker and an established and reliable force within the niche community that are cinephiles, MUBI furthers the loyalty of its subscriber base.

Ultimately, MUBI appears to leave a substantial space for queer cinema with easy access on its interface and offers space for the queer community to express itself in regards to their cinematic endeavours. It is compelling to know that queer and its implications in the world of cinema and streaming are recurring topics of conversation amongst MUBI executives as it helps to link the brand's identity to the current politics of inclusion in cinema. With this information in mind, it becomes apparent that MUBI comes forth as a particularly intriguing platform regarding queer audiences' reception, and in turn queer audiences' identity formation processes.

2. MUBI's impact on queer identity formation

Identity formation as understood by cultural and media studies is a continuous process that is built up of a myriad of instances and moments throughout a person's life (Butler, 1993; Hall, 1979). Media studies, to this process, add the importance of media consumption. Indeed, positioning representation as a pillar in identity formation in our contemporary society, scholars offer the multiple levels of meaning encoding during the creation of a media product as a disputed site for our identification process (Baker, 2016). Creation and consumption levels have been adequately considered by scholars (Ibid.). The encoding happening at the distribution level, however, is still largely unknown in academia. This part then, using the previously outlined particularities of MUBI when it comes to framing its programs and content on their platform, presents first why MUBI's brand identity has an impact on queer identities, and then how the framing of queer films through this brand identity impacts the formation of queer university students' identity.

2.1 Reasons for impact

A key reason for MUBI's particular place within queer youth's minds is its reputation. This reputation was created by MUBI and spread through the general press to create a brand identity. Brand identity impacts the reception of that brand in public opinion, which is the very reason for advertising's over presence in our current society (Wayne, 2018; Metzger et al., 2010). When it comes to brands within media, and more particularly entertainment media, that brand identity has a vital impact on the reception of the products offered by that brand, fostering consumer loyalty and even contributing to one's identification process (Arvidsson, 2006). From the interviews, three specific characteristics of MUBI's brand identity were outlined as having a direct impact on the reception of any given film consumed on MUBI and thus on consumers' identities. First, MUBI's brand relies on opposition to the mainstream platforms, such as Netflix or HBO, which echoes the niche existence of queerness within mainstream media. Then, MUBI offers itself as a "champion of the unique", at least as understood by an interviewee. The clear focus on ostracised communities and artists helps to believe in MUBI as part of the community, a form of allyship. Finally, MUBI positions itself as a trusted recommender of quality cinema, and as such grows the perceived importance of content both culturally and personally. This part

unveils an evident connexion to the queer community through the culmination of MUBI's underdog position and its focus on human exchange.

2.1.1 An opposition to the mainstream

The previous part established MUBI's brand identity as formed by its discursive space outlined by its executives and the practical presentation of its interface. Coming from these discoveries is the separation, both in practice and in discourse, between mainstream VOD platforms and MUBI's niche art film platform in their approach to queerness in cinema. This sentiment of discrepancy is echoed throughout the interviews. Sacha exposes an understanding of MUBI as a quality platform and of Netflix as a greedy and production-obsessed one:

It was very overwhelming, with stuff like Netflix. And stuff like Netflix, where like, it's just so much, but you don't know what's actually good, like very much a quality over quantity. But with like MUBI, I feel like, if I watch something on MUBI, I'm gonna at least get something out of it. You know? (Sacha)

Similarly, Emma expresses tiredness regarding what has been offered on mainstream platforms, and presents it as a stepping stone towards getting a subscription to MUBI:

And I was so fed up of what was available on Netflix, or Amazon Prime. (Emma)

This decision to forego mainstream VOD platforms for a niche one also finds root in Mina's opinion on the quality of the content offered on these alternatives:

But I do think that the movies that are on MUBI are better than the ones let's say on Netflix, or Amazon. (Mina)

This negative perspective on the way Netflix approaches its content, and specifically its queer content is not limited to one person. The platform is taken as the antagonist of queer cinema, if not cinema as a whole, following multiple claims of programs including queer characters that are felt as offensive or "straight" by the participants, such as Emma:

Netflix and the stuff that they've done with all their attempts at queer films feel to me homophobic? (Emma)

Participants point to a specific facette of mainstream queer content when expressing feelings of discomfort and uneasiness when approaching it: representation. Camille, Mina,

and Donna, in their own words, explain the disparity between their experiences and the ones they have seen on mainstream platforms, highlighting the uniformity and stereotypical essence of said content:

I felt like the representation, because it's honestly always about that I feel, the representation was quite far away from my experience of my queerness. (Camille)

I don't like the selection on Netflix. I think it's very stereotypical. (Mina)

I think that the mainstream Turkish... The queer representation is very caricaturistic. So only to make fun of characters that hmmm... are paired with being for example, a queer, gay, Turkish man, or something, so I think that those are not.. (Donna)

Netflix, as opposed to MUBI, feels like they are targeting certain audiences. When creating content, particularly queer content, Sacha feels as if Netflix officials keep in mind a straight-cis audience:

You know, like, I will like, I feel like Netflix when it comes to queer content, they very much want a certain kind of queer content. But I also think that that queer content that they kind of push is the kind that would appeal to like straight people or like cis people. (Sacha)

Rather than playing into queer culture, and queer aesthetics, Netflix's queer content is understood within the queer community as being limited within traditional representations of queerness, focusing on coming out, for instance, or the tragedy of being queer. These representations bring up negative connotations of queerness, ones that the group interviewed declines the need for, rather hoping for diversity and realistic representations. It is interesting to note that this disdain for mainstream content does not imply a complete refusal to engage with it for all of the interviewees. Although the tragedy of queerness and coming outs are not entirely written off by the community and is not thought to be exactly problematic, it does become so when the image offered is frozen in place, which is what is felt by the queer community represented here. Talking about mainstream queer content in France, Camille expresses feeling ostracised by the forced unanimous opinions on content within the community:

And so this I feel has played a big part in my understanding of my queerness because in France, when you're lesbian, you have to love Celine Sciamma, just- it's just, it's the way it is, mostly. (Camille)

The importance of the group's opinion on one's understanding of their identity creates a trap wherein identity formation processes feel severed or halted. This consequence of mainstreaming queer identities in cinema was already addressed by Amy Villajero regarding lesbians on screen (2003). The heightened visibility of lesbians on screen was forcing the image to become motionless, frozen in time. Mennel posits the mainstreaming of queer cinema as the intentional framing of queer identities within a film in a way that is easily understood by non-queer audiences (2012). This is done through the desexualisation of queer characters in search of acceptance from mainstream audiences - which is to be understood as non-queer. The widespread of this negative opinion on Netflix is then linked to processes of identity formation. By disregarding mainstream content as bad quality, opinions as to what makes queer cinema are then re-thought, and certain films, although they offer queer characters, are then deemed as non-queer. Throughout the interviews, a great majority of participants mentioned the film *Love, Simon* (dir. Berlanti, 2018):

Well, the first cinema I've- I've watched and loved was rom coms. And so it's just- it's a straight rom-com. But he's gay. So the people he falls in love with are boys. But this is it. This is where, you know, so it's like sometimes there was like something that is complicated with the family. You know, because the character is gay, but that's mostly it. And it doesn't change anything about the way they- they act or they interact with other people and the world and they have friends the same way that straight people do, they have the same relationship with their families that straight people do and things like this. (Camille)

And so I can think of a lot of films that feature gay people, or gay relationships that I wouldn't necessarily describe as queer, like a lot of the mainstream in the last 10-15 years, there's a lot of sort of, yeah, mainstream gay films, I think of like love Simon or something like that. It feels like that... That doesn't feel queer to me. (Emma)

It's just like, it's supposed to be about gay people, like a gay guy, but it's completely just from a straight perspective. And I didn't feel like it at all was about queer people. It's just about how straight people deal with queer people's existence. (Lola)

Interestingly, *Love, Simon* was written by an openly bisexual woman and directed by an openly gay man. yet opinions do not diverge: although some can still watch it and have a nice time, everyone who mentioned the film questioned its status as a queer film. As Camille outlines, to be queer impacts the entirety of your life and shapes the ways in which

you experience people, your family, or friends. This distinction was not felt enough and thus the impact on identity formation is the separation between one's identity and the mainstream portrayal of that identity. This is the crossroad from which MUBI's strong potential impact on queer identities is outlined.

2.1.2 Champion of the unique

Within the field of VOD platforms, MUBI comes through as a particular player. Of course, it is first and foremost its focus on cinema that already forces it to stand out from the rest of the general VOD platforms. Yet, that is not all that sets it aside from the rest. A crucial point coming from all of the interviews conducted is that MUBI is understood as a safe space:

It creates an environment and a platform that feels queer-friendly, and tolerant and accepting of minority voices. And like it's a- it's a proponent of queer and minority voices, the same way that it did focus for Black History Month, or for women directors. It feels like a place that is pushing forward those voices as opposed to minimising them or putting them on the far corners of their platform when nobody reaches them. (Emma)

It is often recommended amongst queer groups and micro-communities. In-group recommendations display a common awareness of the site as safe for the queer community (Barker, 2016). Moreover, it also presents MUBI as a place that understands the need for positive representation and exposition of queerness and other minorities as it is endorsed by others looking for this very quality:

Um, actually, last year, so in early 2021, I got MUBI as- three months of MUBI as a free gift from a friend, a friend, my cousin. And she's also gay. (Martha)

This is exacerbated by MUBI's outspoken general focus on non-mainstream media, underrepresented communities, and cult classics (MUBI, 2020). Their opinion as to what deserves centre stage on their platform helps the queer community to accept them as an ally, a supporter of the community, a champion of the unique, to use an expression mentioned by Sacha:

I feel like they're just more likely to have queer content because they're willing to champion anything that gives like a unique voice, if that makes sense. (Sacha)

This distinction from other VOD platforms displays an adequate comprehension from the public of the intentions of the platform: "I think at the core of what's the identity of MUBI is to give some space to underrepresented film, and underrepresented visions" (Lebrun, 2022). Both perceptions of the place MUBI holds within niche programming - i.e. MUBI's and its subscription pool's- directly impact the place it holds within the queer community.

Indeed, queer originally means odd or strange. Today, it implies being at odds with the rest, going against the current and normative rules of society. The reclaiming of the slur into an identity is embraced by the reclaiming of the cinematic and streaming stage for that very community. MUBI's space within this reclaiming thus nests in its direct connexion to queer culture as a whole and is described often as a queer-friendly platform:

But the people who manage the social media are very queer friendly. And not only. I think they are up to par with like queer memes and jokes. They often, on their stories, I think, every week, the MUBI instagram does like this highlight reel of the best MUBI mentions on Twitter. Anytime there will be gay jokes or gay things on there, I have noticed. (Martha)

This proximity to queer culture is of key importance to the queer communities' own proximity to the platform. Emma, in her interview, pressed several times on this language that arises within a minority community through the consumption of the same media products, the participation in similar events, and ultimately the experience of similar situations:

It's like queerness gives you another language in which to explain your experiences and your thoughts. And if people aren't part of that community, it's really hard to relay those experiences and thoughts to people who don't have that language. (Emma)

It is crucial to take into account this engaging with queer culture - for instance, on social media- that MUBI demonstrates. Through the use of queer slang and the continuous support of queer cinema in its multiple versions, MUBI presents itself to its followers and subscribers as part of the community and a well-versed participant in communal culture as well as language. This presentation furthers the sentiment of queer friendliness, of shared belonging to the world of underdogs, and it helps to create a safe space in which subscribers can freely explore and debate their sexual identities without fearing being alienated.

Then, MUBI also positions itself as a supporter of diversity: “Because at the core of who MUBI is, there is the idea of giving visibility to underrepresented titles, but also, via this curation, give access to the widest variety of content.” (Lebrun, 2020) The focus on the diversity and variety of their content, as outlined in the previous part, is a key characteristic of MUBI’s brand identity that separates it from the mainstream. That focus also offers an image of the platform as comprehensive of the complexity and heterogeneity of the queer identity spectrum. In fact, displaying the versatility of queer cinema helps open up the framing of identities occurring on the platform and makes it a valuable platform for the queer community as expressed by Camille when asked about whether she values MUBI when looking for queer cinema:

It makes it interesting. Because there's, well, there's not... There are many queer experiences, like, different queer experiences that are shown, I'd say, yeah, that exists. (Camille)

Within this diversity of experience, there’s a focus from MUBI on international cinema and in turn cultural diversity. Many point to MUBI as a trustworthy platform when it comes to displaying the myriad of queer representations existing around here. There is a trust that what is consumed on MUBI helps to broaden horizons, as it displays a diversity never seen before. Going back to this opposition to the mainstream, interviewees decry the American and European focus emanating from mainstream platforms, and express a renewed excitement for the myriad representation of cultures on MUBI:

Q: Okay. And do you consider MUBI to be a valuable platform when looking for queer cinema? Specifically?

A: Yeah, yeah. It's because... Mostly because the, the diversity in terms of like, nationality of the movies, I'm not sure if that's something you can say. (Camille)

And that's, I think, actually, that's one of my favourite things about MUBI, it's just like, there's like films from all over the world. It's like other- other streaming platforms are very like very American. If not American just like very European. (Lola)

MUBI’s current approach to content can be considered a “model of artistic patronage,” financially providing support to these minority communities, thus pointing to the importance given to politics by MUBI in its role as tastemaker (Hessler, 2018).

2.1.3 Trusted recommender

MUBI's last important characteristic to bolster its impact on queer identity formation is its position as a trusted recommender, if not a friend. The last two parts directly lead up to this opportune position the streaming platform takes up.

Until 2015, MUBI made use of feedback from its subscribers on a forum called MUBI Social (Hessler, 2018). By offering up a public online space focused on MUBI and its components, negotiations between identity formation and platform politics could relate to one another and be debated on one single plane (Ibid.). The reconciliation of both instances had to have a positive effect on furthering one of MUBI's brand characteristics, a focus on community exchange, both with and within the community (Frey, 2021).

It is the humanity of MUBI that first offers this feeling of trustworthiness and that humanity is created and reinforced by the concept of curation (Frey, 2021). Where Netflix and Amazon pride themselves on having the cutting edge algorithm that will know the subscriber inside out and immediately direct them to the best content they could hope for, MUBI chooses curation and advertises its use of real people rather than computers (Stolz, 2017). This focus on humanity over technology brings a sensibility to the choice of film on the platform. When it comes to advertising and marketing film to the queer community, the fact that the recommendation comes from people is something relayed in the interviews, as multiple participants explained feeling more drawn toward products suggested by their community and close circles:

Well, before watching a film, I just take into account my friends... (Camille)

I've always gone to friends or online communities of similar people to see what they're saying about it, as opposed to like, the big, the bigger reviews. (Emma)

Keeping in mind the link expressed and explained earlier between MUBI and the queer community, this essence of queer-friendliness that is felt by all the participants, helps to understand the singular status of MUBI as a recommender and by extension as a VOD platform. Throughout the interviews, participants often used terms relating to emotions and abstract, personal perspectives, such as "feel" or "trust":

It *feels* like a really good judge of quality of what's on the site. (Emma)

I *trust* that the people who are using MUBI are like, somewhat like, read up on cinema. So I *trust* that, like, you know, I'll get- I'll get like, a decent preview from them. (Sacha)

I think it's the way that MUBI already filters the movies, the films that are on there, helps a lot when it comes to the quality of the things and yet, so... (Martha)

I'm not very good with my memory and also with films so normally what I would do is look at my MUBI. (Donna)

Interestingly, Martha described her position in regards to queer cinema as being “an echo chamber” which filters her consumption to only offer quality queer films:

Probably there's so many bad gay films directed by people that don't know much about it and I just don't know that- don't know of their exist- existence because I have no access to it because my, well, my algorithm picks the films I would want to see. (Martha)

In her words, the critical point for good queer representation is the participation of queer people within the final product, to take into consideration their experiences and their perspectives on queer lives:

Because their inclusion in the cinema scene would be the inclusion of a LGBT- a queer person, and that I feel is more important sometimes in telling the story about fictional queer people. Or if someone... Well, maybe if it a straight or cisstraight person went over their limits to include queer people in the story about them, that would be considered queer cinema. But it's a niche topic, because even then they would need to, like, talk to and research about queer history in concept so much that queer people would be involved in it anyway. (Martha)

This is of particular importance when looking back to the interview with Ms Lebrun from MUBI:

I would say, internally, that's an ongoing conversation, okay. Because as- in the team, as well, we have many team members that are part of this community and are able to surface to us how we should talk about it and all- which- which vocabulary we should use. And for now, it was not raised the fact that we should use queer instead of the nomination that we are using at the moment on the platform, however if it was raised, at some point, we will definitely have that conversation. Together. (Anais Lebrun)

The previous quote highlights the importance that actual queer experiences have within MUBI's decision process regarding queer community-related matters. The inclusion of people coming from the community in this process is both important on a content level and a marketing level to MUBI's subscribers. Indeed, Martha's feelings on this are not exclusive. Five interviewees have voiced similar concerns when probed about the importance of queer inclusion in the making process:

But obviously, first of all, if like, you know, you identify with a film, and then you find out that the director had nothing to do with anything you can identify with, then it's kind of upsetting. But also, I'd have a hard time thinking how, like it's a loss if that's the case, you know, because then all these voices that could have been heard and added to this like identity the film, like made it even more queer anything, weren't there, weren't present. (Romane)

Because I guess because it's like queer stories. But at the same time, it's like I kind of, I'm aware of that a lot of the time. I take that in mind when, like talking, talking to people or recommending films. And then it's like, yeah, it's just not not the same at all, I think. Yeah. Not... Not all the time. But a lot of the time, especially when it comes to like, movies about lesbians, where they're just always they become just like, the sexual objects, you know, and you're watching it through the male gaze. And it's like, then that like sense of relatability. And it's completely gone most of the time, and I'm just no longer interested at all in interacting with it. Yeah, just uncomfortable. (Lola)

The perspective on the importance of inclusion of queer people in queer matters shared between MUBI and its queer subscribers explains the inherent and seemingly untethered trust that was displayed earlier.

Additionally, participants pointed to the presence of a transgenerational audience on MUBI. Two interviewees mention having been recommended the platform by older family members or sharing the account with that same family member:

Yeah, well, actually, I've seen a lot of films on MUBI with my mom. (...) Honestly she watches MUBI like everyday or every other day. (Camille)

I wasn't familiar with the platform. Like I used to stick to mainstream streaming services like Amazon and Netflix, obviously. One day, my aunt comes and tells me Hey, look at this new streaming service and at first I was like, what is that? Because, uh, you know, I browsed the library. I would really, I was really- That was like six years ago. I think so it was before I started studying. And I went to my aunt like, no

one knows these movies. What is this? And my aunt is really big like on French art cinema, for some weird reason she is. She told me like, no, but it's full of French movies? Maybe you should watch some. And I was like, No, I, I don't- I don't like that. I'm not interested. And, you know, I obviously swallowed my words, because the minute she told me to sit down and watch a movie with her. That completely changed my mind like I was. I made a whole fool of myself. And I was like, yeah, sorry. You know, you were right. This movie- this... Yeah, this whole platform is amazing. It's just so different. (Mina)

To have a combination of identity community support and family community support point to the peculiar space within which MUBI finds itself. Community is a particularly important yet disputed space for queer youth. Studies have exposed the importance of support coming from peers during the coming out process (McDermott, & Schwartz, 2013; Poteat, Mereish, Digiovanni, & Koenig, 2011; Savin-Williams, 1994). This support is of particular importance for queer people coming from traditional and or conservative families as those were found more prone to reject their child due to their identity (Newman, & Muzzonigro, 1993). This is where MUBI offers the best of the internet when looking into queer identity development: the support from peers needed can thus be found on a platform, from a transnational audience.

2.2 Ways of impact

Keeping in mind the framework within which queer identity formation is analysed, i.e. MUBI's interface, it is important to state that identity being something so personal, the incalculable ways in which distribution framing impacts it are, indeed, incalculable. In this sub-section, I wish to display the main ways in which my interviewees were impacted by MUBI's stance on queer content and inclusion.

2.2.1 Visibility of queerness

The connexion between sexual/gender identity, visibility, and media has been a crucial point of research within media and queer studies alike (Dhoest, 2015; Barnhurst, 2007; Gross, 2007). The convergence of these concepts offers the possibility of representation within society at large and as such creates opportunities for support from the bigger community of queer people transnationally. As outlined earlier, the support coming from the internet has already been posited as being crucial to queer youth's identity

development. Specifically, personal identity and self-esteem are highly dependent on those representations during the processes of sexual exploration and coming out (Kivel and Kleiber, 2000; McKee, 2000; Szulc and Dhoest, 2013). Identity development does not limit itself to age, however. Following Hall's impactful theories on identity and its continuity and perpetuity, visibility's importance is never-ending (1979).

Queer cinema is historically known to be found in the margins (Hart, 2012). From the strong repression and censorship of non-normative identity under the Hays code in early Hollywood to the current laws and perception of those same identities in certain cultures and countries, queer representation is sensitive and chronically suppressed (Mennel, 2012). The result is the perceived invisibility of the community on screen. However, representation, as outlined earlier, is key in identity formation and development, especially in minority communities that might not have the privilege to witness same-sex couples be happy in their surroundings. The lack of representation that felt valid and real surfaced in six interviews:

And there are so few contemporary examples of interesting nuanced, queer, female led women led relationships, a lot of them get put into period pieces. (Emma)

I saw a film that's called mysterious skin with Joseph Gordon Levitt's made by Gregg Araki, and you have a queer character. But the narrative goes beyond that, like, okay, this character is behaves like this, and he's gay and whatever. But at the same time, there's a story that flashes out there's a story that evolves. There's like this whole character that has this, this enormous journey about himself and learning about himself, and in a very, in a very realistic and respectful way. And that's why I found that these films are not getting enough recognition. And only the mainstream ones like love Simon, people are like yeah, this is this is the whole queer community right into a film. But it's like, no, of course not. You cannot think that just because you saw love Simon, do you understand everything? And that's what people really don't get into their minds. (Rose)

And yet, five expressed great joy at the discovery of representation on various media such as Twitter and cinema:

It was freeing for me seeing the Handmaiden. (Camille)

And it was just reassuring to see queer lives played out in the everyday in the totally ordinary. And I don't see that much of that in film at the moment. (Emma)

It is very nice to see, like, art made by like, trans people or art made by you know, like, well, you know, bisexual people or that like, relatability. Like even- even learning about the early stuff like my what, like, one thing that was really helpful for like, helping me come out was the documentary, Paris is Burning, because it was just fascinating to see those people and like that culture that existed around them. (Sacha)

Since representation is actively understood as a vital part of their identity development, MUBI comes forth as a propeller for queer identity development. The space given to queerness on the platform was made obvious in the first section, as well as in the previous parts. The rise in queer visibility on MUBI, or rather brought forward by MUBI, does not imply a strong or consistent search for this queer content coming from the community. Rather, Camille and seven others, when probed with the question "Are you actively looking for queer cinema on MUBI", expose the presence of queerness on the platform as something they have noted, and appreciated, without having gone looking for it:

I wouldn't say specifically. I mean, I mean, I'm not sure if it counts, but like I would be looking for- I'd be looking for a certain movie that is queer. I wouldn't be looking for like generally queer movies. (Sacha)

There's a category called Pride and Prejudice, LGBTQ+ plus cinema. So sometimes when I'm browsing through the platform, I do like, click on that specific category. I'm not like, when I see a movie, I'm no- I'm never like, certain, like in the mood for specifically a queer movie. It's not something that I think about in that way. But when I see the category, sometimes I click on it, and I'm like, "Oh, yes. Right. I'd like to see a queer movie." (Camille)

No, no, no, no, but whenever I think that... Well, I think it was last week, the newsletters said something about queer cinema in here and there and this author and this director, and I remember, vividly remember clicking on it, like, as it, as it got to my email. So... Well, I think that if it's handed to me on a silver platter, I will get happy about it. Yeah. (Martha)

The way they express themselves makes evident their appreciation for the platform. Explicit queer presence on the site allows them to feel seen and included on a stage that has for so long been violently dominated by heteronormative expectations of romance and sexuality. It is complicated to directly correlate the watching of a film on a platform to the effect it has as said effect is evidently the result of a myriad of personal probes. That being

said, the emotional reaction to queer representation in their youth comes back often from six interviewees:

Yeah, I was like, because at that point when when that video came out, I was just like very in denial of my of my sexuality, because I realised quite early and then I also discovered homophobia quite early on. I remember I just watched that and I cried. Fully, like started sobbing and I was like, "Why am I feeling like this?" But then it became something comforting. Yeah. I think. (Lola)

Three have expressed particular attention to their gender. Although both sexuality and gender are understood when talking about queerness, non-normative gender identities are thought to be more about people's perceptions:

And I was quite happy being perceived as like a cis woman, even though I didn't really feel it necessarily to be true, but I didn't find it -not offensive- but I didn't find it uncomfortable. (Emma)

It was kind of like, with sexuality, it was kind of like, you know, men are hot, sometimes, I guess. It was very much like- it was a lot easier of a conclusion to come to, I guess. Yeah. Because it was just like, Okay, I'm bisexual. All right. Now I just kind of like, you know, that was it? Yeah. Yeah. It was, it was a lot easier. You know, I feel like it would be a lot easier to like, be bisexual then too. Because like with gen- with gender, there's so much you have to go through to change and to get into who you want to be. But with like sexuality, your just bi, you know, there's no surgery to make you feel more gay. Yeah, at least I think there isn't. (Sacha)

Sacha is a trans woman. She expresses being particularly happy seeing opportunities for gender non-conforming identity on screen more so than seeing bisexual people on screen as she appreciated knowing that transitioning, something impossible for her to do at the moment, is not mandatory as a way to feel part of the community. The opportunity to be on a platform that provides this form of representation enables discussions and questions to arise. As such visibility comes through as the most important part of queer presence. It is the normalisation of the spectrum of identities, words used by MUBI itself, that, concurrently with the implication of MUBI as a safe space laid out earlier, provides key material for identity formation.

2.2.2 Broadening of horizons

Internet as a pivotal element in the spread of various texts and images of queerness is undeniable (Murray 2002). That being said, in Hollywood as much as amongst academia, white and western voices prevail (Mitra, 2010). The transnationality of the queer community is seemingly invisible on mainstream platforms bridging the gap between consumers and media products.

This brings the analysis to the second important identity development side of MUBI: the broadening of the horizon of its subscriber pool. Diversity in all its terms stands tall as MUBI's word of honour. This understanding of the platform is both actively curated by its team and employees, and understood and appreciated by its subscribers, as heavily pointed out in the previous part:

There are certainly films that I would otherwise not have heard of, or not have thought about seeking out because they were recommended on the site. (Emma)

And also, like I was always more inclined to watch the festival films, and I was really interested in the film festivals in Turkey. So the selection really amazed me. I wasn't aware of this platform before, I even like recommended it, like that's why I'm still so high about MUBI. (Donna)

This forces populations to look beyond their culture and their expectations to encounter other forms of existing available to the community. This diversity or even the complexity of queer identities is already echoed throughout multiple interviews. Simplistic representations have been strongly criticised, as exposed in the first part of this section. Many joined the platform hoping for the pool of queer cinema to be bigger than on classic mainstream platforms. Going further, when asked about the importance MUBI has had in expanding their exposure to queer cinema, many provided positive answers. Hesitation could be felt as some debated on whether they had been seeing more films post-subscription to MUBI, but all agree on MUBI's impact on the diversification of queer cinema.

In fact, diversity is taken as a particularly important facet of cinema in its most simple form as well. To be presented with a media product that we always agree on prevents us from forming opinions through the questioning of what is seen on screen. This component of diversity is thus embraced by some participants:

Because all content is interesting even to know that, or at least to me, even to know that you don't agree with it. (Camille).

I just carry on engaging with it, because it's interesting seeing what people write and have to say. (Emma)

Through learning, from their own research, their occupation (student or not), their surroundings etc. queer youth are reclaiming the space allocated for them on the big stage of cinema. Actually, rather than reclaiming it, they broadened it. MUBI, in this regard, is of distinct importance. The variety of options and perspectives on what makes queer *cinema* only echoes the variety of makes queer *identity*. Intersectionality is here the key term to understanding the complexity of queer identities. Indeed, identities are made up of the articulation of multiple sides of one person -i.e. gender and sex, yes, but also culture, upbringing, interests...To forget that identity, queer identity, is found at the intersection of those multiple levels is to disregard a full pan of the community's existence.

MUBI's exposed diversification of queerness then allowed certain people to see themselves in a cinema that had primarily elevated cis-male, white, and western voices. On MUBI, subscribers are offered films related to queerness on some level that expand the importance of the identity within one's daily life:

There was sort of films that featured straight relationships, but were still considered queer under the playlist like, the Joanna Hogg film, the souvenir. (Emma)

To understand abstract films such as *The Souvenir* (dir. Hogg, 2019) as queer programs is to have opened up one's mind to the importance of queering films, and the aesthetic of queer cinema historically found in codes (Mennel, 2012). In this quote, Emma points to a form of queering in cinema. It is no little feat to allow relatability outside of the confines of sexuality. This broad approach to queerness that is suggested by MUBI echoes feelings of queerness as being more than a sexual identity. Rather, participants see it as something that impacts their lives in general, and their relationships, both romantic or platonic.

Scholars have often pointed out how research on queer representation has excessively been focused on a western and white perspective of queerness (Kohnen, 2016; Atay, 2019). To go further, it also regularly focused on normative identities, namely either gay or lesbian, continuing to limit the spectrum that makes up queer identities. The

increased presence of international cinema, coupled with the human curation illustrated in the film of the day allows queerness to be explored outside of the previously established boundaries. Unfortunately, not all of the community perceives that diversity in the same way. When asked about the importance of relatability in representation, Camille posits a fear of diversity in its largest definition as something that can negatively impact representation of the few:

Because even though that's not the case, because it's just it wasn't maybe meant for me specifically, but so I see somebody who is supposed to be like me, because maybe they're queer or something. And their life and their vision and queerness or being a lesbian or things like that is so different than mine, that I feel like I should not share mine, or express mine, because this is not what it should be like, you know.
(Camille)

In other words, she presents the traditional understanding of queerness as limiting. The diversity becomes alienating. The increased production of queer cinema in many ways can thus both be interpreted as a promising happening, a trend in cinema production that opens the door to the deconstruction of heteronormativity. Yet, to still struggle to find a relatable image within this new large pool of content imposes alienation of said under-represented minority.

2.2.3 Self-validation through trusted qualitative content

Identity as a process is continuous yet tumultuous. Gender and sexual identity are particularly good examples to expose these characteristics. Taking from anti-essentialism, it is important to keep in mind that identities are not a static shared essence but rather a place dependent on discourse and practice, unique to each and everyone (Barker, 2016). Butler's ideas on the fact that gender is not something we 'are', but rather something we 'do' or 'perform' help us understand why positive and complex representations have such a strong impact on identity formation (1990). Through the multiple examples of identities offered throughout queer cinema, people can construct their own versions of their identities.

To go further, by using the lens of the sociological subject brought forth by Hall (1992), MUBI is displayed as a significant other, one that, as exposed by the part 2.1, helps mediate values, meanings, and symbols that arise in its platform and in its content.

As shown in previous studies (Hanckel & Morris, 2014; Alexander 2004; Hillier et al. 2010), online queer spaces not only provide support but also provide information about social and political issues and opportunities for engagement in identity politics. MUBI was outlined as a trusted recommender, a queer-friendly space, and thus almost a part of the community. In these terms, MUBI can then be understood as a queer space for its queer subscribers. The particularity of this characteristic is the correlation with the perceived quality of its content. By being positive, the importance of content consumed in regards to one's identity then rises. By believing that the platform is good, the takeaway from a majority of the interviewee is the existence of MUBI's content as qualitative, more-so than its competitors:

Sometimes I'm in the mood for a smart movie. This is how I think, you know, sometimes I'm in the mood for like, a movie that I'm going to, like, yeah. For relaxation. And sometimes I'm in the mood for thinking. And in this case, I'm going to try to MUBI most of the time. (Camille)

I watched it on MUBI. And I thought it was just really, really, really good. And it did leave like, I feel like it left a mark. Kind of because I- after watching it, I went and wrote a song based, like inspired by it. But it's a really complex film. And I think it's really good and you should see it. (Lola)

Based on the ones that have watched I, I do think- I mean, MUBI is just a great platform in general, but the queer movies that they have on there are really, really, really amazing. (Mina)

Throughout interviews, the concept of "good representation" has been brought up again and again: what makes "good" queer representation? That is a continuous question that is ultimately personal and subject to each individual's personal experiences. What comes through throughout the interviews is that, particularly in the early stages of acceptance, any and all queer representation on screen is highly formative, be it positive or negative, with participants explaining they were seeking any image of queerness they could find:

Because when I was younger, when I discovered the internet very late, it was much more about like, feeling represented. (Martha)

Because normally when it's very common for the young people that are coming to terms with their sexuality to feel lonely, you know. They, they only have the social

media, they only have films in order to feel represented. And in the moment, they see a film with a character that has like those same characteristics, and that has like the same way of living, like, live their identity. They're like, Oh, my God, I can also live that kind of life, you know, I can also feel safe. I can also fall in love. (Rose)

Outlining MUBI as qualitative cinema, or in the words of the interviewees, as smart and good cinema, has a substantial impact on the reception of a film, namely it frames it so that there are expectations of something good. Although those expectations might be let down at times, the final result on reception is made evident in the words of the interviewees who, despite having watched varying numbers of queer films on the platform, all recall those films in affectionate, positive terms:

Every movie on MUBI feels like it would at least be like a six or a seven out of 10 for me. (Sacha)

I liked the idea of a curated platform. Because at the time, it was still just the 30- the month, where they just had, what was it, like 30 movies just for the month. And so I sort of like the idea that it was restricted enough that you didn't have endless scrolling. And that you were, you were presented with "here are some really good curated films that are interesting, that you won't find on anything else, or unlikely to find on anything else." (Emma)

Through experience and continued learning, interviewees then self-explain their identities as "settled" or express comfort in their difference from the heteronormative. This is consistently presented as a process, a journey towards accepting one's sexual identity in a world that is not always kind to non-normative identities:

So it's like, when it's a period piece, it always has to be something that's hidden or like, it's wrong. And I feel like, we need to have stories where it's okay to be queer, and it's okay to be out. And it's okay for people to know. And I see that like, for myself, personally, I'm okay with watching these things. Because I think I'm like, I'm at a point in my life where I understand my identity, and I'm okay with it. But for younger people, I don't think it's healthy for them to just be seeing, like interacting with media that's telling them that they shouldn't let people in and let people know about their identities. (Lola)

But yeah, the place queer has in my head in my life, I would say that time and the films that I saw in that date would be more effective than now. I mean, I'm still interested and excited to see. But I think I'm a lot now and more of a settled place. (Donna)

The presentation of good queerness is used by the interviewees as a bridge between straight and queer, exposing the myriads of ways queer exists. By championing “real” queer films, queer people feel accurately represented and express a positive perspective on the consumption of queer content by straight people on MUBI:

And I think one of the, one of the things I really liked for example, about Mubi, I saw a film that's called mysterious skin with Joseph Gordon Levitt's made by Gregg Araki, and you have a queer character. But the narrative goes beyond that, like, okay, this character is behaves like this, and he's gay and whatever. But at the same time, there's a story that flashes out there's a story that evolves. There's like this whole character that has this, this enormous journey about himself and learning about himself, and in a very, in a very realistic and respectful way. And that's why I found that these films are not getting enough recognition. And only the mainstream ones like love Simon, people are like yeah, this is this is the whole queer community right into a film. But it's like, no, of course not. You cannot think that just because you saw love Simon, do you understand everything? And that's what people really don't get into their minds. (Rose)

MUBI is presented as being memorable. Many remember when a film was discovered on MUBI. In a sense, they give the impression that MUBI almost has a watermark, a key marker of the authenticity of a specific motion picture. Additionally, it also reveals the “emotional investment” put into the platform as a trusted and cherished place for content consumption and thus identity formation (Henriques et al., 1984).

2.3 Limitation of impact

2.3.1 Lack of engagement means lack of feeling part of

The Internet and new media have then offered multiple new ways to engage with peers in a transnational context, which creates great opportunities for identity formation in minority youth (Wellman, 2001; Bond, 2009). Interestingly, engagement on the MUBI social platform is low. Most interviewees admitted to neither rating, reviewing, nor creating lists on MUBI, which are the primary ways in which to engage with the platform and its community.

On top of the lack of usage, there is a crucial flaw, for now, in the way MUBI is making itself understood by its subscribers. An overwhelming majority of the participants were entirely unaware of many of MUBI’s quirks as a VOD interface. Most are aware of

ratings, some of the reviews, but almost none of them were aware of the possibility to make lists outside of the watchlist. This lack of engagement on the platform is absolutely key to linking back to interviewees' perspectives on the community.

There are multiple ways to understand the community in relation to queerness, or rather gender and sexual identity. Already here, people expose a discrepancy between the online community and offline community. What concerns us is the direct correlation that all make between active engagement and an active feeling of belonging:

Um, I'm not sure whether it's created a community, maybe just because I don't engage with the like, yeah, the engagement part of the site, I use it as a platform more than anything to watch videos, rather than to engage with discussions because I do it in other places. (Emma)

So not so much as a community because I'm not that active on Twitter. But this- this mutual acknowledgement, at least Yeah. (Martha)

This correlation comes forth as the key for MUBI to enhance its place within discourses of identity formation in minority communities, in particular the queer community.

It is crucial to realise that the multiple ways in which MUBI promotes engagement are linked to marketing, as well as to the retention of their pool of subscribers. The more people engage on the platform, the more a community forms, a support system, a place to come to that confers a sense of belonging, of chosen family. Unfortunately, if engagement is foregone for whatever reason, any hopes of a sense of belonging are essentially impossible:

Um, um, I wouldn't... I'm not sure, actually, I wouldn't say so. I'd say that, um, I'm not sure how much like communicating would be happening within like MUBI, because although people would like, leave reviews, I wouldn't know how many, like, how many people would be like, you know, how many people would be like communicating within MUBI? (Sacha)

Of similar importance is the existence of strong competition in the field of online cinema review, most importantly Letterboxd, mentioned earlier in this paper. The lack of engagement with MUBI's reviewing system and organisational endeavours is explained by the participants as resulting from their pre-existing use of letterbox.

No, but I do look into them. I do go read the reviews and the ratings. But unfortunately, no, I write the movie down. And I go do it on Letterboxd. (Martha)

Yes, but not on MUBI. I read reviews on Letterboxd. Yes. (Camille)

I just watch... Yeah, I use letterboxd. So I won't post reviews on two different websites. (Lola)

MUBI's social platform is a format as of yet untapped by the mainstream streaming platform. Resembling Letterboxd and other sites of popular film criticism, its creation entails the formation of a community of like-minded individuals within the platform itself, as opposed to the fragmented concept of watching on one platform and criticising the other. Unfortunately, the general line of thought coming out of the interviews reveals a lack of engagement on this platform. Although users appreciate the idea and concept of MUBI-based reviews, most still use alternate websites, such as Letterboxd, or simply keep their engagement with cinema to themselves and their friends offline. This is a regrettable missed opportunity from MUBI to further frame the reception of their films.

2.3.2 Intersectionality as differences within the community

The queer community has too often been understood in essentialist terms, more often than not having been limited to gay and lesbian identities. Rather, as explained earlier, diversity is the keyword when trying to understand the whole of the queer spectrum (Butler, 1990). There is no normal, as scholars have previously established, and there is no global homogenous understanding of how to represent and understand queerness (Anderson 1983; Hall 1997). This is made evident due to two particular differences: the multiple sexual identities existing, and the multiple cultures present in the community.

2.3.2.1 Sexual identity differences

A key difference hinted towards earlier in this thesis are the inner divisions within the queer community. Refusing forms of essentialism helps to break down the multiple identities within the said community and furthers the freedom of expressing and performing one's identity outside of the constrict of societal expectations.

For example, just identifying as a lesbian makes it easier for me to interact with other lesbians and feel part of a specifically lesbian community with specific questions that may not be shared with other people of the queer community as a group, and may not be understood as well. Because it's not just a question of

sharing. It's also like, what, I don't know, what kind of violence we can still demonstrate towards one another. (Camille)

Although the queer community has been tightly-knit, as evidenced by events such as the Stonewall riots in the United States, the creation of June as pride month, or the globalisation of terms such as queer, it would be foolish to believe in its homogeneity. Taking again from Butler's idea of gender and sexuality, spectrums imply an infinite number of identities (1993). Expressed through Camille's interview, in particular, is the erasure of intersectionality's importance when looking at a community. In media, the division between lesbians and gay men had for the most part enforced particular invisibility on the lesbian image, making the gay man the image of cinema (Bradbury-Rance, 2018). Knowing this, the reception of gay men media by Lola being less impactful than lesbian ones can be better understood in the bigger scheme of queer media. Although she keeps an interest, she notices the lack of direct causality in her understanding:

But like, when it comes to like media with gay men, it's like, sometimes it's just not relatable at all. So I don't feel any connexion to it. And then I tend to look at it more in terms of like, like, from like, a film perspective, like, was this a good film or a bad film? (Lola)

Alternatively, divisions within the community online also prevent certain people from engaging with the community. If there is no engagement within the community, there cannot be a levelling with one another:

Yeah, the thing with the online community, what I've found over the years is that it's just almost full of... It's like, just a lot of discourse and people arguing over what, what's okay and what's not okay, and like, just micro analysis of everything. And even now, like, it just feels a bit overwhelming. (Lola)

2.3.2.2 Cultural differences

The unimaginable infinity of cultural differences is at stake in the world at large, so it is no surprise to find it within the queer community. However, as persistently pointed to in this thesis, representations on the big screen of that community have been overwhelmingly white in their transnational iterances (Kohnen, 2016). The frozen singularity of the queer person as a character has directly been experienced by POC interviewees as evident and renders some of their experiences watching queer cinema uncomfortable:

The main thing for me, I think, is, I feel like there's a rather White definition of queerness that I maybe don't identify as strongly as I do when a non white person talks about their queerness. (Camille)

I don't see my normal life, for example. Even for most of the parts, it was very outside. Everything I see is very different, in every sense. So of course my queer was different, or... (Donna)

Being at odds within their own community proved to be a conscious experience enhanced by a lack of diversity on screen which limits one's perspective. This difference is then felt in the reception of queer cinema. *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (dir. Sciamma, 2018) was acclaimed by four participants for being a great film, at times the reason for their joining MUBI. Yet, Camille points the finger to it fitting this image of the vintage white lesbian, as such missing an element of relatability to her personal lesbian reality:

And so this I feel has played a big part in my understanding of my queerness because in France, when you're lesbian, you have to love Celine Sciamma, just- it's just, it's the way it is mostly. And I'm saying you have to, but actually, it's mostly in white communities. But there is this idea that she understands the female gaze and the lesbian gaze and the kind of relationships you can have that are just softness and butterflies and things like that. And I've liked some of her movies. That's not what I'm saying, like, and maybe I've had a good time, even, in front of some of them. But I have never felt like this was the depiction of what I felt being lesbian was like, and it's actually quite far away from it. And so I think the fact that it's just such a big part of the lesbian French culture today has made me realize that okay, so I'm not a Celine Sciamma lesbian. And so what kind of lesbian am I, you know. (Camille)

Expectations from society then also have a strong impact on identity formation (Barker, 2016). When it comes to minority communities, societal acceptance can come at the cost of safety. Although this research did not focus on intersectionality, it is critical to highlight that three participants coming from more conservative families felt its impact on their queer identity:

It's a complicated question for me. Half, on the most part, yes. But then it's like, because of where I'm from, it's just like, I can't be out for like safety reasons. So it's more of like I am on the most part, but then it's like, when I'm interacting with, like, people from back home, I just don't talk about it. Yeah, that's kind of it so and like online I'm not technically, like out online. But at the same time, it's like, I don't really believe in coming out. So it doesn't matter that much. (Lola)

I've always struggled when it came to my, you know, when it came to my sexuality, because, you know, as- well, Mexican culture is really conservative. And it's very, very religious. So, you know, queerness has never had a place in religious households, you know, it's a topic that's completely off the table, and it's very looked down upon. So that part of myself, I never really had the chance to, you know, explore and discover it. (Mina)

Identity cannot be understood through singular terms. Although queerness has helped certain people rally together and form a supportive community, each person is made up of many sides. Culture and nationality come to play in these instances and expose the clear differences between members of a community (Fornäs & Xinaris, 2013). Without being the end-all of the queer allyship, intersectionality has continuously been proven as key when approaching societal and cultural issues (Ibid.). The case of queer identity formation and affiliation to a queer cinematic community is no exception, as evidenced by the contrasting opinions on a queer film's relevance to one's identity.

Conclusion

Answers to the Research Question and Relevance

Queer production studies had already ventured, thanks to Bryan Wuest (2018) and Candace Moore (2013), into the importance of distribution and industrial practices when it comes to the queer meaning of a media text. As such, the research at hand expands on this idea by taking into focus a platform that against all accounts finds itself blessed ground for queer media to be found and queer identity to be created. The presence of queer cinema on MUBI is unmistakable. From a catalogue category to a platform-made playlist on the front page, interviewees are all aware of the support coming from MUBI towards the community. The site comes forth as a particularly interesting ground when looking into the impact of distribution on queer identities. Indeed, their involvement in the community and in the broadcasting of queer cinema is made evident through both the discourse they upkeep about themselves and the analysis of their interface.

Outlined in this paper is the direct causal effect between the reputation of a platform and the credit given by the queer community to the film consumed on said platform. The analysis pointed toward three of MUBI's key characteristics that explain why MUBI's platform and brand identity have a substantial impact on queer identity

development. Firstly, MUBI positions itself as an opposition to mainstream platforms and content that have been continuously exposed for their limiting perspective on queerness. This identity is highly related to mainstream media's perspective on MUBI. The opposition then bleeds through the content offered on MUBI which is presented by the website as niche and unique. Interviewees understand MUBI as the champion of unique cinema, a place where minority voices are uplifted and listened to. In fact, the platform is discursively included within the queer community as an ally, an entity that is well versed in the community's culture and language and as such offers a safe space for the consumption of queer media. Both characteristics then unearth the trust that is put in the platform. From the recommendation of films from MUBI to its subscriber to the recommendation of MUBI from subscribers to the rest of the community, the platform is understood as a place in which they will be offered qualitative films that are then taken seriously in regard to the formation of one's queer identity.

Visibility of queerness -or lack thereof- in cinema has been highlighted by both scholars and interviewees as lacking from the mainstream offers (Dhoest, 2015; Barnhurst, 2007; Gross, 2007). Thus, by making queer cinema evident on the platform, MUBI allows for a greater impact on identity forming. Seeing themselves and their community on screen then can extrapolate the myriad of ways in which to grow with your queer identity and the even bigger pool of opportunities possible. In correlation with MUBI's focus on international cinema, amongst other things, the platform counters the hegemonic American-European lens of contemporary cinema and is seen as offering space for the queer community to express its transnational tendencies (Szulc, 2020). Opening itself to a diverse array of cultures creates an open world for non-western queer youth and offers processes of identification on-screen and off-screen. By making visible the diversity of the queer spectrum, identities that until then had been uncomfortable can then become sites of solace within a community that embraces them (Butler, 1990). As such, one's identity can feel more credible, something personal and complex, that is displayed as being valid and important.

MUBI and its subscribers have formed a strong base of trust between one another. Giving them space to voice one's opinions on the public space, through reviews, ratings, and comments, creates the basis of a community. The creation of a *queer* community however remains unclear and uncertain. Although participants express hope for such an opening,

there remain many concerns, from the internal division of the queer community between labels to the general division of society illustrated by racism, sexism, or homophobia, even within minority communities. Added to this is the interviewees' lack of engagement with the particularities of the interface, which then limit the impact that MUBI's communal endeavours could have.

Ultimately, the thesis furthers our understanding of identity formation among queer university students and helps pinpoint media consumption and resulting reception as key moments during which identities are formed, moments thus moulded by the distributor's reputation and/or brand identity.

Limitations and Further Research

The conduction of the interviews was forced to be particular, due to the current health restriction, as well as geographical limitations. To have all interviews conducted online most definitely impacted the answers received, particularly due to enforced breaks within the process caused by internet complications among others (Tremblay et. al., 2021). Although my outspoken familiarity with the community partly helped my interviewees feel comfortable, the lack of physical proximity took a toll on my understanding of their body language and made me feel less comfortable, as expected (Krouwel et. al., 2019). Additionally, time constraints and difficulty finding participants forced the data collection process to be shorter than expected, as well as yielded results coming primarily from European students. Additional research on the subject should be mindful of researching a more general population, and should potentially try to recruit a more varied group of participants to accompany the transnational aspect of the queer community and the lack of non-white queer representation (Atay, 2019; Kohnen, 2016). Finally, my involvement in both the queer and the MUBI communities is important to keep in mind as my pre-existing opinions are bound to have had an impact on my understanding of the results. My own bias, although conscious, is key in framing the data collected.

From this thesis, a crucial question arises: how to define queer cinema, and what comes into play for the general public's opinion? Throughout the interviews, each participant gave their own perspective on queer cinema and what makes a film take on such a mantle. Their sensibilities displayed key similarities but also irreconcilable differences,

particularly in the presence of a cis-straight director. Furthermore, MUBI is but a case study of distribution processes, one that has a particular hold within the queer community. Further research on more mainstream platforms should provide interesting additions to our yet limited understanding of this specific level of meaning encoding.

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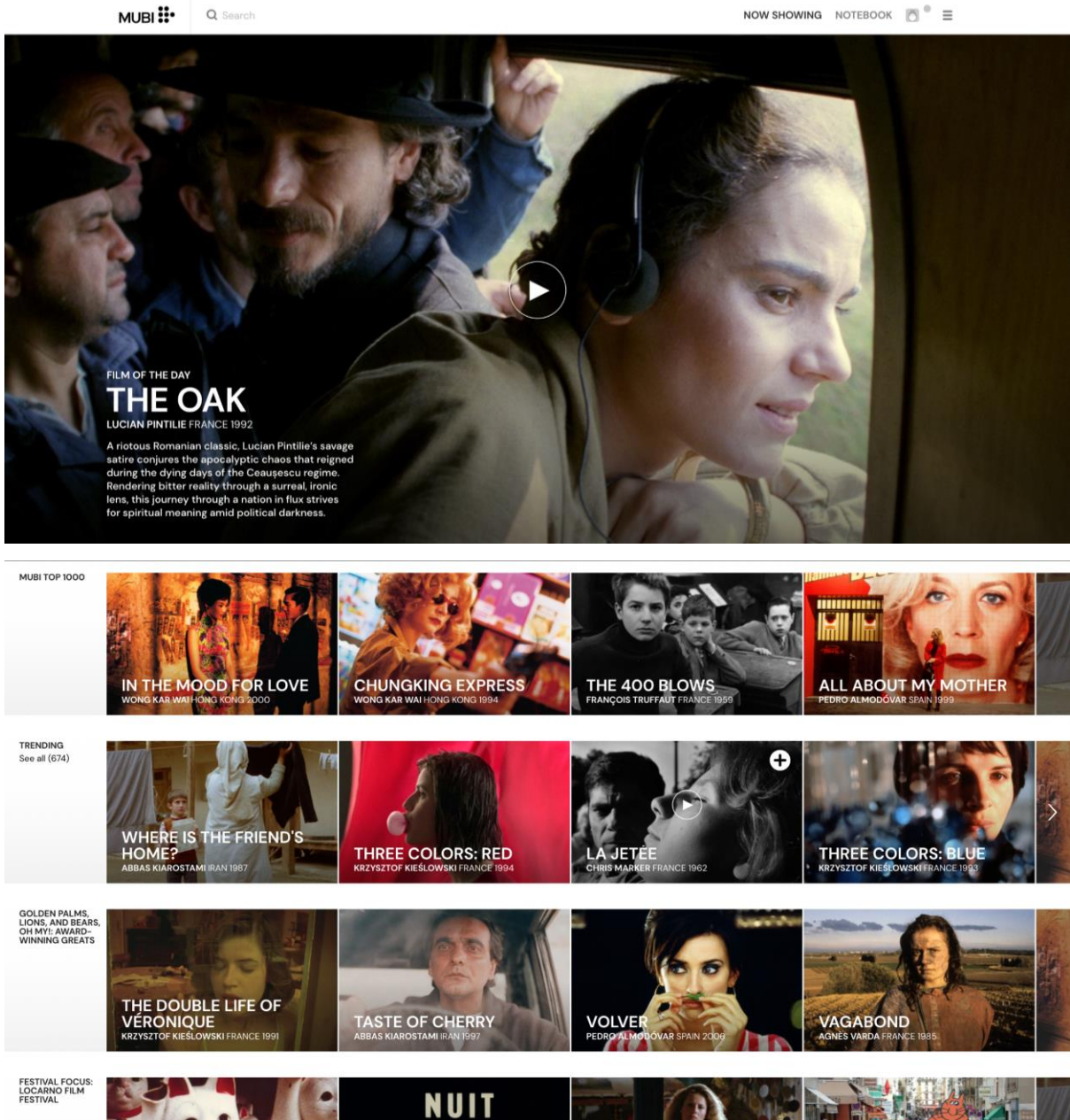
Wuest, B. (2018). A shelf of one's own: A queer production studies approach to LGBT film distribution and categorization. *Journal of Film and Video*, 70(3–4), 24.

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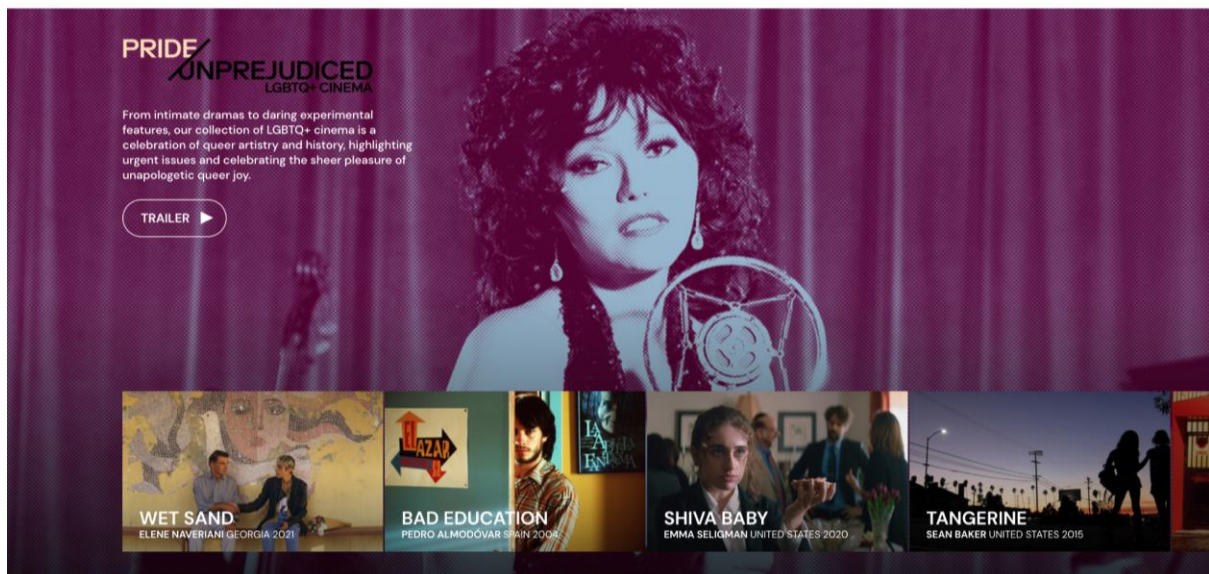
Appendices

Appendix A. MUBI's Interface

Appendix A.1. "Now Showing" and opening page



Appendix A.2. "Pride Unprejudiced - LGBTQ+ Cinema" the Queer MUBI-made playlist - "now showing" text & playlist's introductory text



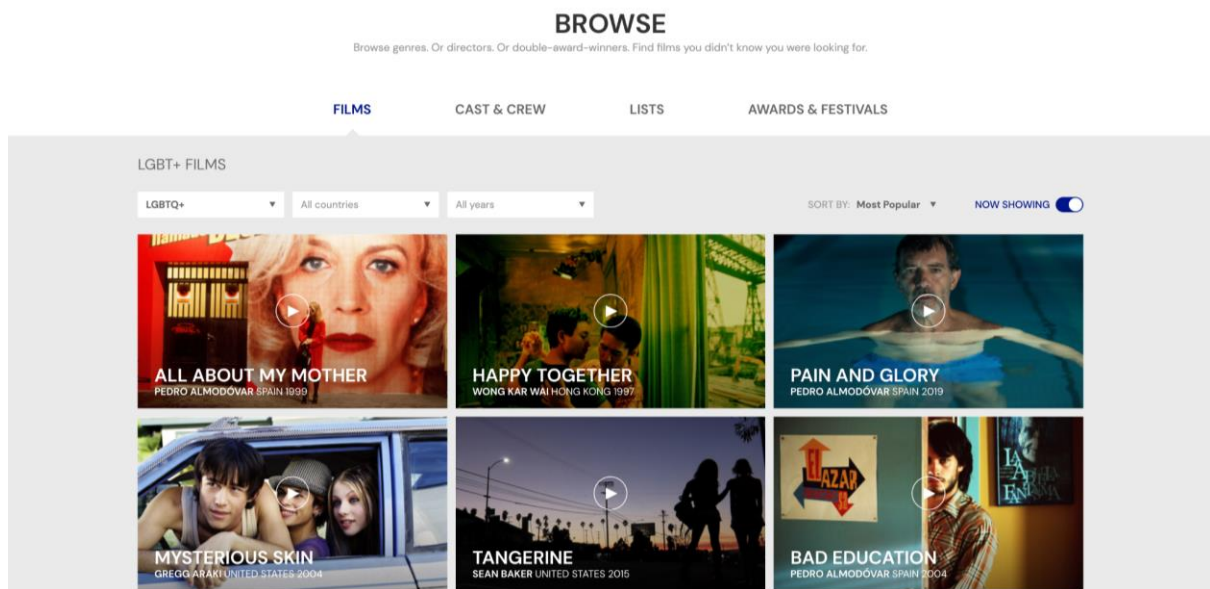
PRIDE UNPREJUDICED: LGBTQ+ CINEMA

TRAILER ▶

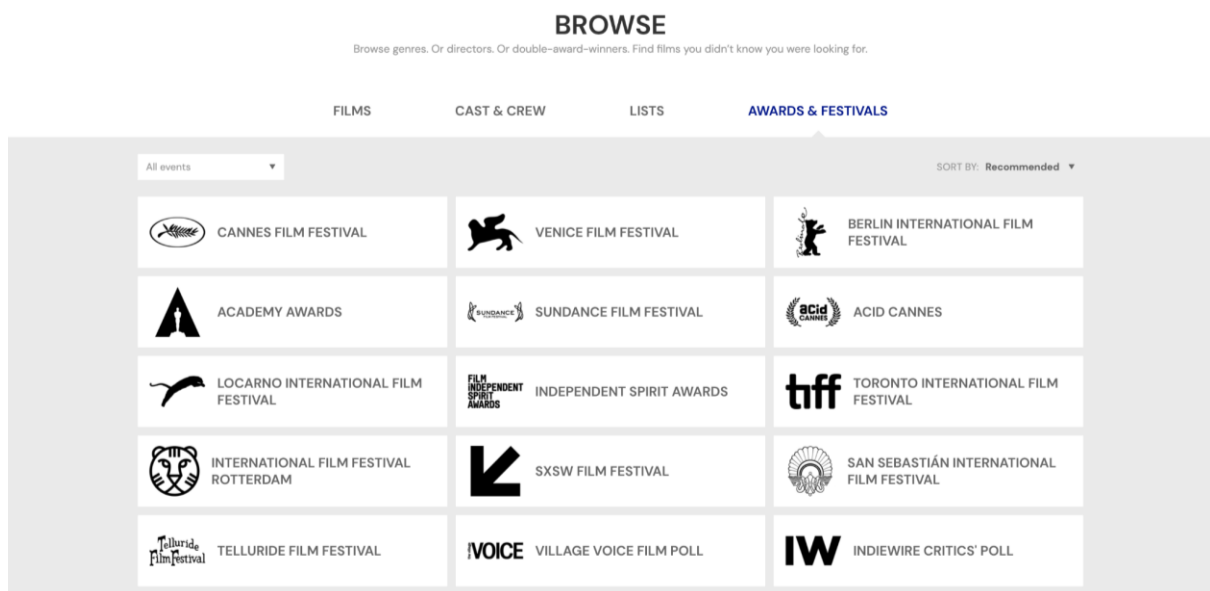
Stepping out of the celluloid closet, LGBTQ+ representations in cinema have become increasingly robust, diverse, and multidimensional. From intimate character studies to boldly experimental features, the eclecticism of queer cinema not only illuminates the richness of our collective human experience but also daringly subverts filmmaking conventions. Just like the delightfully broad spectrum of genders and sexualities, cinematic renderings of queer experiences are cultural mosaics that rise above attempts at classification and categorization. Reflecting this formal dynamism, our electric offering of LGBTQ+ cinema is a celebration of queer artistry and history, spotlighting urgent social issues and the sheer pleasure of unapologetic queer joy.



Appendix A.3. "Browse" tab "Films"; genre "LGBTQ+"



Appendix A.4. "Browse" tab "Awards & Festival"



Appendix A.5. Search Bar “queer” Films & Lists

The image shows two screenshots of the MUBI website's search results for the term "queer".

The top screenshot displays a grid of film posters. The navigation bar at the top includes the MUBI logo, a search bar containing "queer", and links for "NOW SHOWING", "NOTEBOOK", and a menu icon. Below the navigation bar, there are tabs for "FILMS 2625", "CAST & CREW 3", "NOTEBOOK", and "LISTS". A "NOW SHOWING" toggle is visible in the top right corner of the grid. The film posters shown are: "QUEER EYE" (David Collins, United States 2018), "QUEER AS FOLK" (Michael DeCarlo & 11 More, United States 2000), "QUEERAMA" (Daisy Asquith, United Kingdom 2017), "QUEERS" (Mark Gatiss, United Kingdom 2017), "QUEERCORE: HOW TO PUNK A REVOLUTION" (Yony Leyser, Germany 2017), "QUEER JAPAN" (Graham Kolbeins, Japan 2016), "RELUCTANTLY QUEER", "QUEER AS FOLK" (repeated), and "FABULOUS! THE STORY OF QUEER CINEMA".

The bottom screenshot shows a grid of list cards. The navigation bar and tabs are identical to the top screenshot. The list cards displayed are: "FOX AND HIS (QUEER) FRIENDS" by Joe Bowman (9574 films, 5687 followers), "QUEER" by Harendt (352 films, 100 followers), "QUEER SENSIBILITIES" by naydn (150 films, 101 followers), "NEW QUEER CINEMA" by Alyssa Blackmon (89 films, 135 followers), "UNWATCHED QUEER" by Garçon Manqué (830 films, 65 followers), and "QUEER FILMS -- PERSONAL LIST" by barbaragpires (217 films, 259 followers). Each card features a collage of film stills.

Appendix B. Topic Lists & Interview Guides

Appendix B.1. Interview with MUBI executive

What do you make of the queer community on the platform?

What drew MUBI to create an “LGBTQ+” section?

Since when is there a “LGBTQ+” section on mubi?

To what extent do you actively try to provide queer films on the platform?

What comes into play when you decide to put a film in the queer section?

Do you find that different countries have a different demand when it comes to queer cinema?

Why did you choose the word LGBTQ+ as opposed to queer or another term?

Appendix B.2. Interview with Participants

Opener

Name

Age

Nationality

occupation/studies

(Queer) Identity

What do you identify as?

How has this evolved within your life?

Do you feel part of the queer community?

When did you start feeling like part of the queer community?

Are you open about your association with the queer community in your daily life?

Are you interested in queer culture as a whole, such as music or art associated with the queer community?

Relation to queer cinema

What constitutes a queer film in your opinion?

Has your opinion of what constitutes a queer film evolved?

Do you feel that queer cinema has had a place in your own understanding of your identity?

Can you name a queer film that was influential to you? ---

Do you consume other forms of queer media, such as TV shows or social media pages?

Usage of MUBI platform

Engaging with cinema

How often do you use MUBI in a week?

In which instances?

What drew you to MUBI?

Do you consider MUBI a valuable platform when looking for queer cinema?

Are you actively looking for queer films on MUBI?

Has MUBI increased your exposure to queer cinema?

Are the queer films in the queer section representant of queer culture in your opinion? -
phrasing

Engaging with other parts

Do you give ratings for the films you have watched on MUBI?

Do you write reviews?

Do you engage with other people's reviews?

Do you make lists on MUBI?

Do you engage with lists made by other members?

Do you read MUBI's "our take" section before watching a film?

How do the added features of MUBI (reviews, lists, notebook) affect your opinion of a film
you could watch?

What about a film you have already watched?

Do you take certain opinions on the site more into account than others?

Would you say that the social platform within MUBI has offered space for the creation of a
queer community?

How would you say this community is represented?

Do you believe to be part of a queer community on MUBI? Why?

Do you have a streaming service you favour when it comes to queer films?

Appendix C. Interview with MUBI Employee, Anaïs Lebrun

Interviewer 7:10

And how do you decide to tag a film LGBTQ?

Anaïs 7:19

That's a very good question that my team is not totally in charge of, it's the database team who is in charge of that. And so, when something is tagged LGBTQ plus there is there is a check that is done by the curation team, to see if that corresponds indeed to the to the film or not, because sometime something could be tagged very quickly, but then at the core of the, of the meaning, you realise that is fairly superficial. So right now we have in an approach, which is to tag as many film as possible with with with the LGBTQ plus, but then when we do a focus during the pride months, for example, we make sure that this is not on because two secondary characters of a love story. And the couple is gay, for example. So we make sure that this is at the core of the conversation and the topic of the film. And and we also try to to get the title exclusively to create more, you know, noise around the film and have some press looking at the film as well, to have a stronger promotion around the data due to the exclusivity factor.

Interviewer 8:51

Yeah, of course.

Anaïs 8:52

So right now we have an approach about the tagging which is broads, if they could be tagged. They could be tagged easily. But then when we do a focus outside of that film group that is available all year long. When we do a focusing on a specific period of the year, we make sure that the theme is really covering that topic. At the core of the experience.

Interviewer 9:24

Yeah. And that's a question that I don't know if you could answer but I was wondering if you knew if there was a difference depending on the countries that you're offering the movies in regarding the demand for queer films, because I know that Netflix all platforms have to give-offer different films be depending on the country due to legal rights and everything right. So yeah, do you know if there's different queer demands?

Anaïs 9:51

I can tell you definitely that there are some countries where you can see that we haven't met human rights. Respect, I can tell you this into that. It's something that is not

integrated... Because we are a global platform. And if you are available globally, in some country that I'm not going to name, because I don't know what you're going to do with the interview or the the answer. But in some country, being gay is still illegal. And that's horrible but we are confronted to that in terms of the viewing pattern. Like I can see that it is creating a drop in views in some countries, when we should also feel that much the LGBTQ plus theme.

Interviewer 10:58

And when it comes maybe more to Europe, do you see a difference in or not?

Anaïs 11:04

Not- not in Europe. In Europe, it's I haven't I've not noticed, I can tell you in Brazil rather that's something that the audience is very keen on. But in Europe is- the audience is open minded. There are other challenges to tackle, the question of racism, for example. But but in terms of, of LGBTQ plus, it's, it's more positive.

Interviewer 11:41

Yeah. And I was also wondering about the term LGBTQ plus that you use, has there been a discussion on using LGBTQ plus, as opposed to queer, for instance, or other terms, or like gay because there is a bit- bit of a discourse, right on, let's say, the legitimacy of each term. And I was wondering if that was taken into account when, during the decision?

Anaïs 12:09

Definitely, when we created that tag in the database, which was years and years ago, I think the tag that we had was just LGBTQ only. And then letters were added, etc. But so that's, I would say, internally, that's an ongoing conversation, okay. Because as- in the team, as well, we have many team members that are part of this community and are able to surface to us how we should talk about it and all- which- which vocabulary we should use. And for now, it was not raised the fact that we should use queer instead of the nomination that we are using at the moment on the platform, however if it was raised, at some point, we will definitely have that conversation. Together.

Interviewer 13:06

Yeah. It's very interesting, because all platforms I've looked at have LGBTQ plus. No one is using the term queer. But in literature, academic literature what I've been find, have been finding is a lot of movement towards queer as opposed to LGBTQ plus, but potentially maybe for easiness. As as you said, LGBT keeps adding letters.

Appendix D. Interview with Camille

Interviewer 20:32

Okay. Yeah. And it's interesting, you were saying that for you, what you look for, not exactly what you look for. But what you essentially get out of these artists that you look for that you, you, you you relate to is a form of representation is what you were saying? Because that's something that you've had a hard time finding in mainstream queer representation. Queer communications

Camille 20:55

Medium. Yeah, yeah. Yeah... Maybe it's, it's not just that.

Interviewer 21:02

Okay.

Camille 21:03

Well, I think representation goes further than just the fact of being like, "Oh, that's so me", though, that is part of it, too. But this makes, I don't know, this makes you or at least, this makes me more prone to like, listening to what these people have to say, what more these people have to say, because I feel like we have some kind of connexion, because we live similar experiences. And I feel like, this creates such a strong bond, that also makes me want to express myself because I am thinking, oh, this person has shared their experience in an artistic way. And this has touched me so much, and so profoundly, that I want to do something like that. Also, for them, and for others who are like me or not exactly. But yeah, so this is what representation creates, for me, the thing like, as opposed to like representation, where I feel is- that I feel is silencing me. Because even though that's not

the case, because it's just it wasn't maybe meant for me specifically, but so I see somebody who is supposed to be like me, because maybe they're queer or something. And their life and their vision and queerness or being a lesbian or things like that is so different than mine, that I feel like I should not share mine, or express mine, because this is not what it should be like, you know.

Interviewer 22:47

Okay, that's interesting. Um, with this in mind, I feel like this is the right moment to move on to the the your relation to queer cinema specifically.

Camille 22:57

Yeah.

Interviewer 22:57

And to start with, before we get more in depth with- in relation to kind of what you were saying, because I'm very interested in knowing how it relates to cinema specifically, I'd like to ask you, what constitutes a queer film, in your opinion?

Camille 23:16

Um, it's a good question. It's a big question.

Interviewer 23:20

It is a really big question.

Camille 23:22

Yeah. I'd say that it's a film that... Can I talk specifically about fiction films? Because I feel like these are the ones that I have seen mostly in queer cinema. I honestly don't really have knowledge of queer documentaries. So I'm going to talk about fiction. I feel like it's a movie that depicts queer contents that profoundly shapes and transforms the experience of the queer subjects in the world.

Interviewer 24:06

Okay. Can you elaborate a little bit?

Camille 24:10

Yeah. So it's like, you have movies where when a character is gay, for example, and the movie is a rom-com. I think about love Simon, I don't know why, but this is what I'm thinking about...

Interviewer 24:27

Of course!

Camille 24:28

Because I've been so disappointed in that movie. And it's a- it's a rom-com as I have seen 1000s of because I'm first before... Well, the first cinema I've- I've watched and loved was rom coms. And so it's just- it's a straight rom com. But he's gay. So the people he falls in love with are boys. But this is it. This is where, you know, so it's like sometimes there was like something that is complicated with the family. You know, because the character is gay, but that's mostly it. And it doesn't change anything about the way they- they act or they interact with other people and the world and they have friends the same way that straight people do, they have the same relationship with their families that straight people do and things like this. And so I feel like the movies in which I'm like, "Oh, this is a queer movie", really, and even in movies, I do not like specifically, but I feel like this is a queer movie- movies in which the fact that the character is part of the queer community makes them have relationships with others, even not just romantic relationships, but like friendships and relationships with family that are specific to their queerness. Like, it's... Because honestly, the- well people that I've talked with, and that I kind of agree on some kind of queer perspective -and even if we don't agree on other things in real life- like I mean, kind of, at some point, you have to be okay with the fact that you being queer is going to change the way that you live your whole life. Because it changes... Because it changes the rights you have, and also the biology, the biological possibilities that you have, as opposed to when you're like cisgender, and straight and things like that. And also, the way people are going to perceive you will change. And so at some point, you have to be like, "Okay, this will change, and I'm gonna be an actor of this change and make it for the better for me, but my life is

really different." So the movies that acknowledge that are really the queer movies, in my opinion.

Interviewer 26:59

Okay. Then, basing myself on this definition, in your opinion, a movie portraying straight people cannot be a queer film.

Camille 27:13

Well, no, not really. A movie portraying straight cisgender people... Yeah, I don't think can be a queer movie. But that being said, a movie portraying straight relationships but like, there are queer subjects in the movie can be a queer movie, you know?

Appendix E. Interview with Emma

Interviewer 18:00

And do you feel like this opinion as to what constitutes queer film has evolved, with your learning and with your experiencing?

Emma 18:10

I think, yeah, it must have evolved because simply like by the amount that you can- the more that you consume, the more of an understanding you can grasp. And the more connexions you can make between stuff. So like, I remember watching call me by your name and being able to draw references from a lot of like, queer films from the 80s that had very similar aesthetic. I mean, yeah, call me by your name was set up, like earlier in that period, but during a lot of what's the film I'm thinking of? There's like three films. Let me just Google it, because I can't think of the title of the film now. But yeah, once you are versed in queer literature or film, it's really fulfilling being able to pick out references and nods to various things.

Interviewer 19:10

Yeah. And is that something that you've learned through university or school? Or is that something that you've learned through your own research, whether there's like literature and queer literature and queer cinema that you've come to know

Emma 19:24

It's a bit of both. Throughout my studies, I've always sort of been drawn more towards the arts anyways, so like, when I was in school, I did like English Language and Literature at A level. I've done extra electives in Western literature and art history. And so when you're able to be taught those things, that feed, that inform upon your sort of wider interest anyway, because I read a lot. And I'm just sort of generally interested. I've been able to pursue sort of academically the stuff that I was inherently interested in. Yeah.

Interviewer 20:13

All right. And do you feel like queer cinema has had a space in your own understanding of your identity?

Emma 20:22

Yeah. There's something sort of reassuring about seeing parts of your life reflected back at you. Or films being able to articulate something, but you've not been able to, or finding comfort in similar shared experiences or shared pain. So yeah, queer film, cinema is massively informative, and even, I even sort of subconsciously, it's just reassuring that it exists, even if you're not going- even if it's not a direct representation of how you think or feel, or what you've experienced, the fact that it merely exists is comforting and reassuring.

Interviewer 21:16

Can you maybe name one queer film that was influential to you then, growing up as queer? Growing up or even just recently? I mean, we're always growing up in a sense, I guess.

Emma 21:28

What's been the most...

Interviewer 21:33

Doesn't have to be the most, any that marked you.

Emma 21:39

So, the one, all the ones that come to mind are ones that I've ended up having big arguments or discussions about and whether they were that important, like... I mean, there's been a whole sort of reevaluation of sort of call me by your name, or even portrait of a girl on fire. About sort of independent queer, artsy films. I can, yeah. Now, it's funny, like now I remember watching call me by your name at the time, and thinking, wow, this is really important film, it really made me cry. And there was something very special about it. Now, I feel totally differently, mostly because of who was in it, the way it's been made. But I'm very grateful for finding that film at the time that I did, even though I feel differently about it now. And the same goes for like, Portrait of a Lady on fire. There's a real frustration that I have about, especially lesbian relationships that are so often depicted in period pieces. And there are so few contemporary examples of interesting nuanced, queer, female led women led relationships, a lot of them get put into period pieces. The same with what was... Ammonite like there was another... The Saoirse Ronnan film, another lesbian relationship that was put in the context of 200 years ago, and you want to go like "women on women relationships exist in the 21st century, you can show them and it doesn't have to be like Blue is the Warmest colour, which is horrible."

Interviewer 23:21

I wrote my thesis on it.

Emma 23:27

And so those films are really reassuring and beautiful and heartfelt. But you want to go, this isn't enough, we need something else, we want- I want to see something new. It's not a film, but I watched- there was a Dutch series that came out a couple of years ago, Anne+, and it was not revolutionary in the way it depicted queer relationships, but... And it wasn't particularly political. But it was just following the life of like a young 20 something Dutch woman going to or finishing her degree and going through relationships and her friends... with other women. And it was just reassuring to see queer lives played out in the everyday in the totally ordinary. And I don't see that much of that in film at the moment.

Interviewer 24:30

I see. That's- It's very fair. But... Okay I'll move on with the interview but I just did want to say that it's something that I keep reading, be it in academic literature or in general literature, this- the same kind of blaming the lack of lesbian, actual lesbian representation. Nice, but with this in mind, then I want to talk now about your usage of the MUBI platform, which is the one that I've never actually asked, but first, I want to see how you engage with the cinema on the platform. So how often do you say you use movie in a week?

Emma 25:08

In a week? Very rarely. So I've had the subscription now for probably two years. And I suspect I watch about maybe one or two films a month.

Interviewer 25:23

Okay.

Appendix F. Interview with Sacha

Sacha 6:49

Yeah. And it's very easy to like, like, because, you know, a lot of, you know, you know, gay stuff is kind of out of the norm. Like, you know, gay people have their own bars. They have their own cafes? Or recently they opened gay cafes here.

Interviewer 7:07

Yeah.

Sacha 7:08

Yeah. So like, you know, it's, it's very easy as an outsider who is like, a bit- bit off to find solace with these other outsiders who have kind of been, you know, or at least like, you know, I mean, yeah, I mean, like, recently, I'd say gay people are more accepted, but like, for a long time, you know...

Interviewer 7:31

It's been tough.

Sacha 7:32

So it's very, it's very easy to find solace in these, like, very colourful people. Yeah

Interviewer 7:36

Yeah. No, definitely. When did you start feeling like part of this queer community?

Sacha 7:43

Um, Jesus, I'd say, around 19 or 20... Because I was- I wasn't really like, I was kind of in denial about it. I was in a very- I grew up... Like, when I was growing up, especially around like 14 or 16, I was, I won't say, right wing... I was very, like, you know, I wasn't like a- I was very much one of those like, oh, you know, I don't care what they do, as long as you know, I don't see it types of fucking 14 year olds.

Interviewer 8:29

Yeah.

Sacha 8:31

So I guess that kind of stilted my growth a bit within the community and wherein like, kind of discovering myself. So, you know, so like, around like, 20 or something. I was like, kind of like, you know, fou- you know, gotten to college and kind of like met some more people who were, you know, who were queer and were open about it and especially like, my, my my friends kind of became more open about their sexuality. I, like, kind of, they're looking into it and you know, getting to where I am now, I guess. So, yeah.

Interviewer 9:13

It's essentially the community around you that has made you feel part of them.

Sacha 9:18

Yeah, it was also just... It was also just like, being around them helps, almost like, break away from these- some, like preconceived stereotypes or even like not even stereotypes, just like- like for example, I used to be very like you know, annoyed by like, very like effeminate gay men, you know, who put on like the, the "yass", the... I'd get really like,

annoyed by that. Yeah. And then like, it was just- there was a lot of like internalized stuff as well. I will admit, like, you know, internalized misogyny and stuff like that. And then I kind of like, I won't say I'm completely out of it. But like, as I learned that, like, you know, where that came from it slowly kinda like you know... I became unbothered by it. And then like, you know, I began looking into like, drag culture and you know, it wa- it's a bit cringe, but like, like watching RuPaul drag race and stuff, because I know RuPaul drag race isn't exactly like the, you know, the highest Action form of drag culture, but you know, it helps.

Interviewer 10:30

Yeah, it's the first toe for a lot of people.

Sacha 10:33

Yeah, it's just yeah, I know. A lot of people are like, Yeah, look, it's very much the tip of the iceberg of drag culture. So like, I don't want to act like I'm an expert when I've watched like, six seasons of it. I haven't even finished it all. Sorry, I keep them going on like tangents, are these like properly answering your questions, or..?

Interviewer 10:52

This is great! Seriously, you don't have to worry. I- honestly this is- take this as like a convo. I really just want to learn more about you, how you feel about the community, and that sort of thing, so for me as I speak as much as you want, I'm very interested. It's great.

Sacha 11:06

Yeah, totally. Yeah, I forgot where it was.

Interviewer 11:11

We were talking drag, but I do have a question on that, then. Do you do drag yourself? In either way, like, you know, because...

Sacha 11:20

I don't. I wouldn't have the performance talent for it. Also, like, god, could you imagine? I can't imagine doing anything in like, six- in those heels, nevermind all the stuff that they're doing. So like...

Interviewer 11:36

I don't think I could handle it either.

Sacha 11:38

I don't think... Like I've tried heels on and I can barely stand. Nevermind, like walk. So like, you know, that's, you know, no chance. So.

Appendix G. Interview with Martha

Interviewer 7:43

All right. And would you say that you're interested in queer culture rather as a- as a whole? So including music, the arts, the people that are part of the queer culture?

Martha 7:58

Yeah, very much so.

Interviewer 7:59

Yeah. Anything in particular?

Martha 8:02

Well, probably representation in media, from- look to... Well, I search for media that represent- represents the queer community. And well, I love- I like reading so when... But right now I've been reading nonfiction. Yeah, so... So works about the queer community. Right now, I am reading a book about design, graphic design and how it can be inclusive towards the queer community and minorities, something that we wouldn't think about in the graphic web. So yeah, nonfiction. Representation, and, well queer music, very much. Yeah.

Interviewer 8:45

All right. Nice. Ah, all right. With this in mind, I want to talk to you specifically about your relation to queer cinema. Yeah, and we're going to start with the big question, for which there's no clear answer, but it's always interesting to know what everyone thinks, which is, what constitutes a queer film, in your opinion.

Martha 9:07

A film that has been directed by a queer person or that... Yeah, because I don't think movies about well, lesbian porn directed by a cisgendered heterosexual male wouldn't be queer cinema for me.

Interviewer 9:28

I see. But a film about straight people directed by a queer artist would be? Potentially?

Martha 9:35

Yeah.

Interviewer 9:36

Yeah?

Martha 9:36

Because their inclusion in the cinema scene would be the inclusion of a LGBT- a queer person, and that I feel is more important sometimes in telling the story about fictional queer people. Or if someone... Well, maybe if it a straight or cisstraight person went over their limits to include queer people in the story about them, that would be considered queer cinema. But it's a niche topic, because even then they would need to, like, talk to and research about queer history in concept so much that queer people would be involved in it anyway.

Interviewer 10:27

Okay. And what about films that are not necessarily lesbian porn, but lesbian, lesbians... Well, queer people in their daily life, directed by a straight person, but, you know, the

reception of the film is- is positive from the queer community, I can think of a couple of examples of that sort of film. Would that still potentially qualify to you?

Martha 11:00

Yeah, potentially. But there's a fine line there. I see so much... Well, not very much in film. I couldn't tell you many examples. But in literature, there are so many books about, especially men, about gay men, written by cisstraight woman, women that even if they're well respected by... Well accepted by the community, they can still feel, not only miss representative, but also fetishizing at times, so I navigated with more... resent- not resentment, uh... Care. More carefully than the opposite.

Interviewer 11:41

I see. And is it something that you ask yourself when you watch a movie regarding queer people? You consider it?

Martha 11:52

Yeah... Well, but often, often, I will know it beforehand, when I watch the film, who directed it. But if I don't, I think that if I felt uneasy, I would ask myself "Wait, who directed this?"

Interviewer 12:05

I see. Do you feel like your opinion on this - on what constitutes a queer film- has evolved then?

Martha 12:16

Yeah, yeah. Because when I was younger, when I discovered the internet very late, it was much more about like, feeling represented. Because I was feeling like other people were feeling what I was... I said, feeling way too many times in this sentence. Or other people were experiencing what I was feeling like, oh, I can... This story is about two gay kids. So I feel less alone as a gay kid. And I wouldn't mind if it was fetishizing because I didn't understand, I just wanted to feel seen. But now I, well, I navigate it with more care because I know- well, I'm, I'm more- I'm more sensitive and less tolerant of bad media in general. Yeah.

Appendix H. Interview with Donna

Interviewer 3:34

I see. Yeah. And do you feel like when it comes to representation, to you, I'm really only asking you your opinion. But do you... Is it reality, like realistic representation that matters? Or is it to use your words from earlier, more deep, emotional depth of the representation that matters?

Donna 3:58

I think that the mainstream turkish... The queer representation is very caricaturistic. So only to make fun of characters that hmm... are paired with being for example, a queer, gay, Turkish man, or something, so I think that those are not... What was the question again?

Interviewer 4:30

If you gave more importance, no, no worries. It's a bit.. If it was like giving more importance to realistic or emotional.

Donna 4:40

What do you mean realistic?

Interviewer 4:41

Um, that's a term that came out in a couple of a couple of interviews that I've had before, wherein the mention certain representation in cinema to be like impossible. I'm, in the sense as you said, cari-carry-cat-you...

Donna 5:03

Caricaturalistic?

Interviewer 5:04

Yeah, that... We know what we mean! And that being in positive or negative sense, and that made them feel uncomfortable because even though the emotion of being queer was trying

to be portrayed, they felt that the situation was so unrealistic that it was misrepresentation. How does that resonate with you?

Donna 5:30

I agree. I agree with that. I mean, I think I'm- I'm also good with any kind of representation, because it's lacking in most of the films. But it's also about like informing the general public and giving them an idea to make fun of in a way, or let me give as an example, with turkish context. So the realistic example... Of course, I am very critical, and most of the like, characters are- or the storyline like I don't feel that's authentic they- that- that's authentic and realistic. So I would say I agree with that. I don't know. I don't like my answer, but...

Interviewer 6:23

No, it's a really good answer... And I just have one one more question before we move on to MUBI specific questions. But I was wondering if you consumed any other forms of queer media, such as TV shows or social media pages?

Donna 6:44

Yeah. The first example that came into my mind was a drag show. Yeah, I watch the drag show. Yeah. But I didn't finish. I think I only watched like four or five seasons. I really enjoyed it when I was... But after a while, I'm not that into it.

Interviewer 6:59

Yeah. A lot of seasons as well. And a lot of variants.

Donna 7:03

Right. Yeah, it's, it's also I think, very popular in turky. There's even like podcasts to talk about in that season, with, like, advisors. And as a social media, I recently started following... I'm not sure if it'... A page... Queer purple happening in the netherland, I don't remember the name... Can I message you after? If that's the case, then I find it. Queer artists... I follow queer podcasts?

Interviewer 8:02

Oh, nice. What did they talk about?

Donna 8:08

Their experiences as queer? And also the... It's in turkey, but it's also even more relatable. And the difficulties that they had and the terms, more academic terms, for example, holo-nationalism, or something. So they're also critic- critical scope? I would say? Yeah, that's interesting.

Interviewer 8:37

Yeah. It sounds amazing, actually.

Donna 8:39

Yeah. And queer artists... I mean, ... Yeah. That's all I think that's all I can think of.

Interviewer 8:51

Yeah, well, that's already substantial. And well, now moving on to the point about MUBI specifically. And I'm going to first I be asking you some questions about the way you engage with the cinema on the platform. And then the way you engage with other parts of the platform is, I'm actually really interested because you say you use MUBI a lot. So a lot of people don't actually use it that much. So I'm interested in your answer.

Donna 9:19

I mean, you will see how much that is. Maybe I am over exaggerating my use!

Interviewer 9:23

No, probably not. I think it's, I mean, I'll, I'll give you some of the like, I'll let you know after the interview some of the things people answered just because it's interesting how usages are so diverse. Anyways, first, I was wondering, how often do you use MUBI within one week? And...

Donna 9:47

It really depends... There are like periods where I heavily use it, like, if there are films that I want to watch in that month' selection, then maybe I I consume five days a week. But there are also periods where I don't watch anything for two, three weeks. That's very periodical I would say for me, but maybe one or two times a week.

Appendix I. Interview with Lola

Interviewer 15:29

And do you- I feel like we've kind of breached that. But do you consume other forms of like queer media such as well, TV shows, we've talked about that but like, do you maybe interact with social media pages that are also about queer-ness, queer community?

Lola 15:47

Yeah. With social media it's like... So on Tik Tok, yes, fully. Yeah, on tik tok it's like, yeah, I interact with a lot of like, I guess, people that talk about, like, queer things. Films or like, I guess like, I don't know. Life, news. It's like my for you page is like there's barely any straight people on there. Like that's, that's as much...

Interviewer 16:29

As it should be.

Lola 16:31

As it should be! But like when it comes to Instagram, because that's like, I mostly use tik tok and Instagram, sometimes Twitter. Instagram, like, I don't follow, like, queer pages, just because it's like anyone can see everyone can see my following. I'd rather not. But then it's like I follow all the like, queer, gay, lesbian, bi celebrities. So you know...

Interviewer 17:14

Yeah. All right. And I want to now talk to you about your usage of MUBI, which kind of the point of that... I know, every time I have an interview, I just end up talking so much about their queer identity, because I'm so interested. But I'm also very interested in the way you use MUBI and I want to first ask you about how you engage with cinema specifically on this platform. And by first asking you how often do you use MUBI within a week?

Lola 17:46

Okay. I used to use it all the time. Like maybe once or twice a week, maybe? Like, over quarantine? Probably more.

Interviewer 18:00

Yeah.

Lola 18:01

Yeah. But now, now I'm just not because... Barely using it just because I'm like drowning in work. Like, yeah, maybe just like once a month.

Interviewer 18:16

Do you know in which instances you're more prone to go use MUBI?

Lola 18:21

If I feel like I have the time?

Interviewer 18:23

Yeah.

Lola 18:25

That's really it!

Interviewer 18:26

Do I have two hours for film? Okay, maybe?

Lola 18:31

Yeah.

Interviewer 18:33

And that... Do you know what drew you to MUBI when you first started subscribing?

Lola 18:39

So I just got MUBI through uni. Because they gave us like a free subscription.

Interviewer 18:47

Yeah, so lucky.

Lola 18:48

I know. It's amazing. So I really liked it. It was like just a free subscription. But then it's like, if I didn't, if I wasn't interested in it, I wouldn't have used it. I really liked how it had... It would give you like a film a day. I thought that was really cool. I think it was quite recently where they just opened it up.

Interviewer 19:17

Yeah. 2021.

Lola 19:20

2021 Yeah. Which is when- when that happened, I was very excited about it.

Interviewer 19:26

Yeah.

Lola 19:28

I was like so many movies that I can watch now. And like I have like kind of more of a choice and, and what I'm seeing and all that. And like honestly, it used to stress me out like, feeling like, okay I have two more hours to watch this movie, so I have to watch this movie.

Interviewer 19:47

It's true.

Lola 19:49

Yeah, it's weirdly stressful.

Interviewer 19:56

The pressure! I understand.

Lola 20:00

Yeah, I feel like it shouldn't be like that, but I just, I'm that type of person... Well, then it's like, I feel like now at this point, I kind of miss that.

Interviewer 20:15

Yeah.

Lola 20:16

Because I feel like just overwhelmed with options. It's like, oh, I kind of want some guidance. And it's cool. Like, I feel like when I'm given like the like, space to like, choose and like, roam through their collection, I ended up choosing films that I would normally watch. And I like, I liked with MUBI in the past how I feel like it was like broadening my horizons, like, I'd end up watching something that never, never would have crossed my mind to watch or like I would never have found on any other platform. But yeah,

Appendix J. Interview with Amy

Interviewer 4:11

Yeah. And while you were questioning yourself, like has other any, any other kind of label that interested you?

Amy 4:26

Maybe fully gay, but I think that's not the case.

Interviewer 4:30

Okay, yeah, I see. And do you know, when you started feeling like, part of a queer community? Like not necessarily when you started thinking about your sexuality, but more feeling part of the community, like the queer community, as you know, like kind of an entity?

Amy 4:54

Yeah, I think I was... I knew I wasn't only interested by men like at the age of.. I don't know maybe seven, eight years old. And then I think I've started to identify the queer community in Tel Aviv, I did an exchange student year in Israel, I went to the gay pride, and that was really exciting. And my flat mates, were like fully engaged in this kind of community so it kind of opened my mind, even if it already happened before in science po. So it's really I think the first step. And then the last one is when I start- is when i- i started to date a girl, and it was four months ago.

Interviewer 5:40

Okay. Yeah. And how did you meet your roommates in Israel?

Amy 5:52

Online. I just posted something on facebook, I mean they did. They both were uh looking for roommates online and I just got the room.

Interviewer 6:05

And how did you feel attending gay pride back then? How did you feel when you attended gay pride in- in Israel?

Amy 6:20

It was really joyful. Yeah. Everybody was so kind. I mean, it's not only the gay pride itself, it's like the Tel Aviv vibe is so like free? And it was just really, really amazing, because like, back then in Paris it's more like conservative. I mean, with my parents that- there's really another world, I was really coming from another world. And then like, Tel Aviv it like, it opened my mind.

Interviewer 6:48

Yeah. But why? Why did you feel like it was? What did you say a small word? I'm sorry. Can you repeat where you..?

Amy 6:59

Like, I'm kind of trying to find like, a real moment like, Tel Aviv like... I thought that the gay pride was really amazing. The whole community gets together to express their identities, I think, really a mind change. But it was also like, like a slow evolution for like a few years, it was not only Tel Aviv, not only the gay pride. But I think it really change people.

Interviewer 7:37

Of course, and...

Amy 7:39

So yeah the fact that it's a whole community that gets together and I could be part of it, yeah, kind of.

Interviewer 7:47

Yeah. And do you feel part of it now then?

Amy 7:56

I feel part of it. But maybe not... 100%.

Interviewer 8:05

Is there...

Amy 8:06

Yeah I do feel as gay but do I feel as part of the LGBTQ community? Yes. But because it's only new, maybe not 100%. But yeah, I would say yeah.

Interviewer 8:17

Okay. That makes sense, of course. And you use the acronym LGBTQ. Do you have is for you queer and LGBTQ interchangeable?

Amy 8:31

Yes, yeah.

Interviewer 8:33

You feel the same way towards both of them?

Amy 8:37

Yes. Is it not the case?

Interviewer 8:39

No, it is! It's- recently some people have just been using more queer than LGBTQ but in some instances, like in France, more people would use LGBTQ because queer is an English term. So it's just interesting to know how people feel about them.

Amy 8:57

But for me like they're both the same. Yeah, yeah.

Appendix K. Interview with Mina

Interviewer 15:19

I very much understand that. With this in mind, I want to move on to the relation to queer cinema that you have. And I want to start this by asking kind of a complicated question where I just really want your opinion on. And it's what constitutes queer film in your opinion.

Mina 15:50

So I feel like queer cinema would ideally be for me a way to express the way queer people. And I see as you know, it's a way to portray queer people in a way that doesn't feel, you know, as if you're mocking them. It doesn't necessarily... Like I know, this is a whole debate, but I don't feel like it necessarily has to be produced or directed by a queer person. But I do feel like there's, you know, there has to be some research or some involvement by someone queer at a certain point, like, I mean, at least if you're a good director, or a very good producer, or a good screenwriter, you're obviously going to do your research. And if it's possible, you're going to include someone queer, because at the same time, I feel like there's not a lot of queer people in the industry. And I know, I know that, if someone

straight is portraying queer stories on the big screen, maybe they're taking, you know, someone's- someone else's place, as you know, maybe there's a straight director portraying something queer, and maybe they would have, they could have chosen like a queer director, but at the same time, I'm just happy there's representation, you know, as long as it doesn't feel mocking or anything like that. I feel like representation is good.

Interviewer 17:34

And what about queer people directing, producing, writing straight stories? Could that be considered queer cinema to you?

Mina 17:46

Yes, just totally. Yeah.

Interviewer 17:49

I see. Do you feel like this opinion has evolved? Especially since you're a film minor? Do you feel like by learning, this has evolved?

Mina 18:05

That is also a really tough one. I don't think it has really evolved. Maybe, you know, I don't like the way some people see queer people as queer being our whole personality. But, and that's why I do think that queer people directing or producing cinema, it's- okay. Wait, let me just start all over again. Yeah, I just made a mess of myself. Like I try to say so many things, but at the same time...

Interviewer 18:49

It's okay. I mean, I'm very interested. I think your opinion is very interesting. I very much agree with it, by the way.

Mina 18:56

Oh, thank you so much. So, you know, okay. Let's start with, you know, the, what I've been saying all along. They, you know, hate when straight people think, Oh, they're queer. So being queer is their whole personality. I hate that idea. But at the same time, there's, you

know, when you're queer, it does have an influence on your life and on your art and whatever you're doing. So, I feel like that translates into cinema, especially if you're directing, writing, producing cinema and you're queer, it's obviously going to translate maybe, you know, not in a really obvious way, you know, maybe just in a personal way, or maybe in a way that no one's really going to notice. But you- you as a creator know it's going to be there. So I don't think my opinion has changed or evolved. But because I've always seen queer people like as a whole, you know, being queer is part of your identity, but it's not your whole personality.

Interviewer 20:07

Yeah, I see. And as clearly you've been watching and interacting with queer cinema for a hot minute, do you feel like it's had a place in your understanding of your identity of your, of your queer identity?

Mina 20:27

I think it does. But mostly, you know, a, a few years back maybe four years ago, I started noticing that this representation was good for me, because I finally feel like, like, I have a place if I could call it that. I mean, it's not that I started watching queer cinema or being familiar with queer cinema just like a few years back. I've, I've always been familiar with it. But, you know, I recently gained that, like, self analysis or self, I was self aware enough to notice that it did have, I wouldn't say an influence, because queer movies didn't make me queer. But they did make me feel safer. Or like I belonged. Yeah.

Interviewer 21:31

Is it seeing people openly queer that's- that's helped feel safe? Feel seen?

Mina 21:45

Hmm... Yes, but they don't have to be openly queer, because, you know, when it comes to real life, maybe people are- don't- don't go around telling everyone they're queer. So, especially some characters that you know, maybe act queer, but they don't.... They're not explicitly... wait... Explicitly? Explicit- Jesus, explicitly... It's just, it's so late that I'm over here doubting myself. Sorry.

Interviewer 22:29

No worries at all.

Appendix L. Interview with Romane

Interviewer 13:16

And do you see, do you feel rather a difference in your identification process between the terms queer and lesbian?

Romane 13:25

Ah, yes, I think, I don't know if I can find it, I had found a definition of queer that I've really adhere to. And I think maybe that'll give you a better idea of what it meant. But it also took me a while to accept the term lesbian like it was a...

Interviewer 13:39

Yeah?

Romane 13:39

Yeah, I think because the portrayal of it is ...if I can find ...is a is really messed up, or not messed up, but like, I you know, when I was like, 12, I felt like oh, like I'm not some like 40 year old short haired butch lady like I'm not I'm not that, so I can't possibly adhere to it.

Interviewer 13:51

I see. Yeah.

Romane 14:06

Here, ill send this to you now.

Interviewer 14:21

Do you remember if maybe there is a something that made you change that portrayal in your mind of lesbians? What made you say to yourself, like, okay, I can still be lesbian, even if I'm not a 40 year old, short haired, butch woman.

Romane 14:39

I think over time, and like meeting people and media and everything, it's a bit. It's a lot of little things. But yeah, definitely. I was speaking to a friend about this. And I think she had a similar experience in terms of not really identifying with the word. But I think also it can, in some ways it was a decision to, to appropriate, its myself as well. Because like if if you, it's, it's part of a reclaiming the word and changing the way people see it. If I claim my claim to be less than other people will then identify with me as well, you know, younger people, and not just, so I think everyone kind of has a role in that. And that's also I think, there has been, like a shift in terms of, you know, me being, like learning and, and like trying to understand, like, my place in the community, and then also, me realising my response, like how, like, no, not that I'm comfortable with myself, like, what is my responsibility in terms of how I can present you know, when very forcefully to present myself as I am, I'm also Catholic. And that's also like something that I've thought about a lot in terms of, you know, just existing as a queer Catholic person, or it's a statement of itself. And it also makes it okay for other people to think about it that way.

Interviewer 16:04

Yeah. Yeah. That's very interesting that intersectionality of religion and sexuality, ultimately working out and being kind of a new representation that you're putting out there. That's very important. I very agree. It's very interesting. And do you feel that this identity has led you to be interested in queer culture as like a whole, so be interested in the music and the art and the thinking of that comes with the queer community, that's made by and for the group and for the queer community?

Romane 16:43

I think somewhat a lot more in London, because like, of events and things like that. In terms of artists, I think less so than some of my friends, you know, who know every single, like, queer icon out there. But no, I remember also, this is just random, but I was like 14, or 15. And I went to a festival and I saw Halsey. And that was the first time I noticed, like, I mean, I didn't, I had no idea like that she was like, an icon or anything. But I remember the audience being like a bunch of like, queer couples. And I was like, that's so cool. And I think that also,

like, brought light to, to that dimension of it for me. But no, it's something I'm really interested in, like, and I will continue to look into and learn about.

Interviewer 17:32

And now when I ask more specifically, about queer cinema, and the first question is quite the biggest one out of the lot, which is what, according to you, makes a queer film.

Romane 17:50

Interesting. So I guess it depends on like your definition of queerness. And it kind of makes me think of this, like this association, I don't know this making a parallel with like, friends, and like an ally, like someone who's just like, super comfortable with anything queer, you know, and just makes it completely normal, as opposed to someone who's straight and like, they don't have to be gay. That's the whole point. But in the same way that they are, like, part of that culture, like part of that acceptance. I guess a queer film doesn't necessarily just have to be like, a bunch of queer couples. But I think it's more of like, I think of the definition that I send to you,

Interviewer 18:50

I just read that

Romane 18:51

in, in the way of like, looking at life interactions and things, and kind of rethinking it, you know. Yeah obviously like, things that would jump to mind would be queer characters and things like that, but it wouldn't, I guess, it wouldn't just have to be, it doesn't have to be limited to that. It could also encompass, like, kind of, like, underlying activism or not, I don't know how to put it, but that like reconsideration of, of norms.

Appendix M. Interview with Rose

Interviewer 22:31

Yeah. Yeah. Makes sense. And you feel like your opinion on what constitutes equivalent, you feel like that's evolved with maybe your studies probably give you some introspection and just you coming to term like, is that? Is that something that you has evolved?

Rose 22:47

Yeah, because like, as I told you, like, I procrastinated my identity for the longest time. So obviously, I was seeing films, I was consuming all these kinds of media with a very different perspective back then. Or whenever I saw a film, that was queer, I was like, Okay, that's a nice film. But I didn't think beyond that. You know, for example, I saw, I saw again, Carol, when I when I was 16 years old. And when I still hadn't, like, thought about my identity at all. And I was like, this is the most fantastic film and everything. But now that I see with this, this different perspective, now that how it has evolved, I see, I see this film even more in the most beautiful sense, because I understand it more like in the aspect of the queer part. And like, okay, the craft, the character is how it has evolved. And I also have investigated a lot about the tropes, that concepts, the definitions. And obviously, when you when you educate yourself about these subjects, you are able to understand it. Like in a wider sense. And also, I appreciate it. Because sometimes you see, like, in a more like, I'm going to watch this film and whatever. But when you see like, more consciously, you're like, Wow, or you see it and you're like, Oh, this is disgusting. So I think that yes, it has evolved a lot. And I'm very happy about that. Because now I can see with a more like critical eye.

Interviewer 24:17

Okay. And then do you feel like realism has a lot to do in terms of what makes good representation for you?

Rose 24:28

Yeah, I think so. Because it falls in the category of representation. And I think that people normally downplay representation. You know, for example, in Mexico, when you see like these, these films were Mexican films that include queer characters, like oh my god, now everybody's gay, and I don't know the inclusivity something that you have to force into films and TV shows. But no, I think that the representation really does matter. Because normally when it's very common for the young people that are coming to terms with their sexuality to feel lonely, you know, they, they only have the social media, they only have films in order to feel represented. And in the moment, they see a film with a character that has like those same characteristics, and that has like the same way of living, like, live their identity. They're

like, Oh, my God, I can also live that kind of life, you know, I can also feel safe. I can also fall in love, for example, that it's something that has always been like this discussion you know that, that usually, queer films that end in tragedy, you know that somebody has to die, somebody has to turn into what their parents want. For example, I remember seeing My Private Idaho with Keanu Reeves in River Phoenix, and you see this tragic ending, and you're like "Noooo!", but at the same time, you say, Okay, I accept that, because the narrative has been telling me these different things, you know, these different aspects in which you can embrace it, but at the same time, they are other films that are like, no, just die. In that sense, you're like, Oh, my God, why, you know, like, I have to die? Why do I have to? Because I'm queer. Yeah. And going back to the killing Eve statement. I remember in Twitter, I don't know you're solely and then because I don't want to spoil it...

Interviewer 26:14

I haven't watched Killing Eve. But I just follow very closely what happens on it, because I love the concept of it. I love both of them. So yeah, I know what happens at the end.

Rose 26:27

Very a lot of tragedy. And I remember that I log into Twitter that whole week. And everybody was like, you know, the fan base is mostly queer people. And they are like, Oh, my God, I can't believe it. I thought that I like with the first seasons, I was going to be myself as a queer person, find new love, like really being able to explore just parts of myself, but with the ending and being. Yeah, they are telling me that queer people can't be happy. So I actually think that that's very important. But I think that people really downplayed, like, Oh, my God, it's just a queer character, you know? And they go side by side, like, Oh, my God it's just the film, and oh my god it's a film, you know, it's life, it's a reflection of life. And you can really latch into it and feel more safe. But also, when the representation doesn't work, you feel more in danger, like feeling.... Yeah, like coming to terms with your sexuality is very tragic actually.

Interviewer 27:24

No, that's very, very insightful, I very much agree. And to ask you that question more precisely, because you've definitely breached that a little bit. But do you feel like we're cinema has had a place in your understanding of your identity, then?

Rose 27:37

Yeah. Because, you know, before I was like, I don't, I'm seeing people on social media and stuff, but I don't see myself represented there. Because they're not having the same experiences as me. But then when I started to watch, like, more queer cinema, I was like, Yeah, this is making sense. You know, this character is having this and I lived through that. So maybe I just started like questioning yourself about things that had happened to me, I think that I began precisely with call me by your name and with Carol, with all those films, I started to see them and I started to see like patterns, you know, like this kind of the way that the characters relate to each other and how they start finding each other and, and mostly Carol, because we're talking about Therese, you know, that she's like, finding that part of herself. Because when we start to film Therese, just like this average girl that's having this relationships and stuff, but when she meets Carol, she's slowly but steadily starts falling in love with her, and she's finding her identity. And I was like, Yeah, that makes sense to me. So yeah, I think that queer cinema has, has had, like, a lot of impact in my life. Yeah.