



Perceptions of LGBT Films: Mainstream Versus Independent Cinema in Popular and Public Opinion

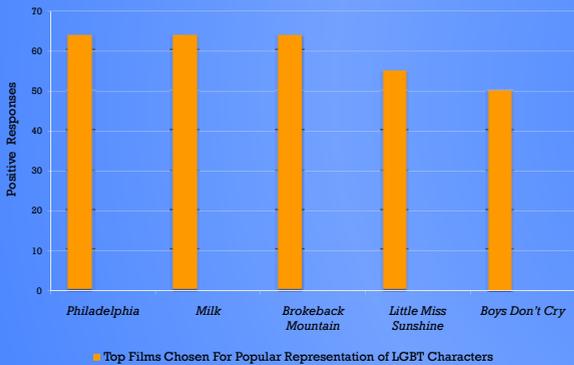
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RESEARCH QUESTION

- Does the mainstream film industry hurt LGBT individuals by perpetuating LGBT stereotypes and being not as progressive as the independent film industry?
- Mainstream films garner a larger audience and are more profitable than their independent counterparts, but it is the independent films that gain most of the attention from critics and receive the majority of awards. However, independent films do not get the same level of attention, despite their generally positive and realistic representations of LGBT characters.
- Mainstream and independent films were differentiated by stating that mainstream films were backed by a big production company (Universal, Paramount, Columbia) and independent films were funded by smaller companies (Focus Features, Alberta Film, Fox Searchlight Pictures)

PUBLIC OPINION



Data Collection Method: Sixty-four individuals were surveyed and given a list of mainstream and independent films, and asked to indicate which films they had seen and which portrayed LGBT characters in a positive light.

The list given is as follows:

A Mighty Wind, American Beauty, As Good As It Gets, Boat Trip, Boys Don't Cry, Brokeback Mountain, Elephant, I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry, In & Out, Little Miss Sunshine, Mean Girls, Milk, Normal, Philadelphia, The Break-up, Transamerica, Y Tu Mamá También, and Yossi and Jagger

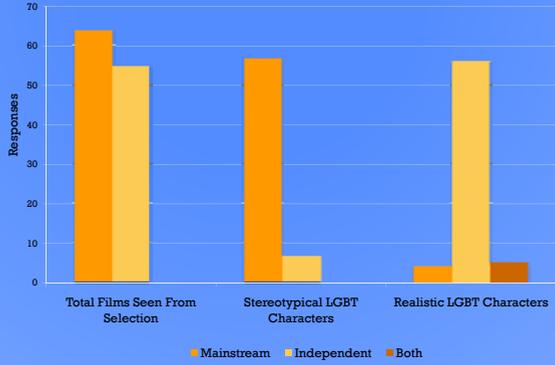
LGBT STEREOTYPES IN MAINSTREAM CINEMA

- The "fake gay" character that are just for comedic relief.
Examples: I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry and Boat Trip
- The typical gay character
Examples: The Birdcage, Mean Girls, and As Good as it Gets
- The obsessive killer
Example: The Talented Mr. Ripley

LGBT STEREOTYPES IN INDEPENDENT CINEMA

- The tough-as-nails gay character
Example: Brokeback Mountain and Yossi and Jagger
- The disturbed murderer
Example: Monster and Elephant

STEREOTYPES IN FILM



Data Collection Method: After dividing the films into mainstream and independent categories, individuals were asked if there were stereotypical and/or realistic LGBT characters in each category.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

After the interviews and surveys were conducted, the results were tabulated and compared against each other, which lead to the findings.

FINDINGS

Stereotypical representations of LGBT characters are seen much more prevalently in mainstream films, whereas independent films consistently contain higher frequencies of realistic/positive representations of LGBT characters.

IMPLICATIONS

➤ As the interview with the LGBT organization stated, there have been positive improvements in representation of LGBT community in mainstream film. However, for every positive LGBT character there are numerous stereotypical characters within the same medium.

➤ The online survey showed that out of the films the participants chose as portraying realistic gay characters, four of the films were independent and one film was mainstream. This implies that mainstream studios are playing it safe. Their films are meant to appeal to as broad an audience as possible, existing for the sole purpose of revenue for the studios.

➤ In 1989, *Philadelphia* aimed to expose viewers to issues concerning the LGBT community, but since that time, mainstream film has not been as progressive. Now, film companies pursue more accessible films, pushing LGBT characters into the background. Independent LGBT films on the other hand are often edgy – not commercially polished or lacking a marketable message. These films do not necessarily cater to a mainstream audience, but still further an LGBT-positive message.

➤ Mainstream companies look at LGBT issues through a fiscal lens. The merits for the independent films are there (Oscars and other awards), but the mainstream companies don't acknowledge the wants of the public and the issues of LGBT individuals.

Funding for this poster was provided by UWEC Differential Tuition

Sources:
The Internet Movie Database (IMDb). 2009. IMDb. 08 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.imdb.com>>.
Pellett, Erin. "LGBT Interview." Personal interview. 06 Apr. 2009.

