Women in the dark: representation of lesbian images in films

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Women in the dark: Representation of lesbian images in films

by

Hye-Jin Lee

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Program of Study Committee:
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2003
This is to certify that the master’s thesis of

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has met the thesis requirement of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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ABSTRACT

There has been a great increase of visibility of lesbian characters in movies over time. However, many studies have focused on examining the representations of gay men under the name of homosexuality. Due to the lack of examination on lesbians and lesbianism in films it is important to examine how lesbians and lesbianism are represented in various movies. The purpose of this study is to examine how lesbian images and lesbianism have been represented in films. Instead of looking into lesbianism as a matter of sexuality, this study looks into lesbianism as both gender and sexuality issue. Examining both gender and sexuality issues embedded in lesbianism and lesbian images in films, this study uses both lesbian feminism and queer theory as the theoretical background. For thorough investigation of the lesbian representations in films, three aspects of lesbian representations are examined in this study: signs/symbols of lesbianism, lesbian representation types, and lesbian representation in five different time periods.
INTRODUCTION

"It is lesbian sexuality which (usually, and, incorrectly, "included" under male homosexuality) is seen as requiring explanation.
(Rich, 1977)

"There is a danger in using the term 'lesbian spectator', or even worse, 'lesbian identity', which assumes a coherent, unified position of identification among all lesbians despite wide cultural, racial, class and generational differences.
(Weiss, 1992)

"Lesbians are either exscribed from mainstream film or included only as stereotypes."
(Dobinson & Young, 2000)

With the history of more than a century, films have dealt with various issues and themes. In order to gain people's attention, movie industries have periodically tackled controversial issues. Unlike television, which is very conscious of "family viewing," movies with their stricter rating system have been able to address radical issues that seem still a taboo for television (Dyer, 1984). Controversial issues, such as politics, wars, and conflicts within and outside various ethnic groups have been chosen as the subject matter in many different films. However, among the various issues that films have touched upon, no issue seems to be more controversial and yet highly visible nowadays than homosexuality.

More homosexuals are "coming out" and fighting for their rights every year. Even though homosexuals are still a minority group, this sub-group of the general population is
gradually growing as more homosexuals are coming out and more policies about gay rights protection are emerging in political campaigns. Movie industries could have seen the gay population as their new target audience and started to produce films that deal with what this new target wished to see. According to Levy, as soon as money can be made out of gay products, the movie industry "began to garner an unprecedented response from producers" (1999, p. 460). However, even though there has been an increase of homosexual characters or issues in films, the discourses of homosexuality have been mostly about gay men, and not lesbians, because homosexuality in movies has always been perceived in terms of what is or is not masculine (Russo, 1987). In a western society based on patriarchy and male chauvinism, femininity in men seemed to be a threat to the myth of male superiority, while masculinity in women seemed to do just the opposite. Therefore, in this culture, lesbianism has never been seen as a threatening reality any more than femininity of other kinds (Russo, 1987).

Generally, when both men and women’s sexuality and sexual orientation are examined simultaneously, male experiences are acknowledged as the norm while various and unique aspects of women’s lives are neglected (Garnets & Peplau, 2000). Many studies ignore the fact that female sexuality or lesbianism is not formed in the same way as the male homosexuality and continue to explain homosexuality in the form of male homosexuality (Jagose, 1996). Therefore, regardless of the increase of visibility of lesbian characters in movies, many studies have focused on examining the representations of gay men under the name of homosexuality. Due to the lack of examination on lesbians and lesbianism in films it is important to examine how lesbians and lesbianism are represented in various movies.
The purpose of this study is to examine how lesbian images and lesbianism have been represented in films. Examining both gender and sexuality issues embedded in lesbianism and lesbian images in films, this study will use both lesbian feminism and queer theory as the theoretical background. Examining lesbian representations in films through the perspectives of both lesbian feminism and queer theory will bring out various aspects of lesbianism and lesbian experiences. Specifically, three aspects of lesbian representations will be examined in this study: signs/symbols of lesbianism, lesbian representation types, and lesbian representation in five different time periods.
CHAPTER 1: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Importance of Studying Films

Gathering information and news is accomplished mostly through interpersonal channels in regular daily life. The received information and news influence people in constructing their thoughts and perceptions. However, this experience has its boundary, for there is a limit in time and space that people can afford. According to Baukus (1999), “an individual’s perception of the world is based on direct experience and is cultivated through social relationships, but the mass media provide the potential to expand this horizon” (p. 89). Mass media have played the role as a nervous system of transmitting the knowledge of the “wide world” to many people (Gross, 1991). Among all the mass media channels, film is one of the most powerful medium in influencing one’s perception of his/her world and beyond the world of the others. As an excellent storyteller, films have also played an important role in providing a glimpse of the world of the others. hooks (1996) explained that films function as “the perfect vehicle for the introduction of certain ritual rites of passage that come to stand for the quintessential experience of border crossing for everyone who wants to take a look at difference and the different without having to experientially engage “the other”” (p. 2). Dyer (1984) also emphasized the importance films have in forming and reflecting one’s thoughts, feelings, and ideas. He claimed that films have “acted as a repository of images of how people are and how they should be, images that are both produced by and help to produce the general thought and feeling of our culture” (p. 1).

Generally, people build their sense of the world by interpreting, constructing, and understanding their experience with hundreds and thousands of stories and narratives
including new stories and narratives from other people (Delgado & Stefancic, 1995). With their function as a storyteller, films act to let audiences feel and think from the stories that have been conveyed. Through the images on screen, the audience members who have the ability to choose and pick the messages conveyed through films, consciously or unconsciously accept certain messages. With the audience’s background, the received messages are used in understanding the world around them.

Being a comprehensive form of art, films involve so many different elements, such as spectacle, performance, photography, music, speech, montage, movement, and mostly people (Dyer, 1984). These elements are the source of films’ powerful visual imagery enabling films to vividly represent a certain part of the world, social groupings, and culture. Representations in films influence people in the way they see and perceive the world. This is especially true when the movie is dealing with issues that the audience is not familiar with or representing the world or culture that the audience has little knowledge about. According to Gross (1991), “the contributions of the mass media are likely to be especially powerful in cultivating images of groups and phenomena about which there is little first-hand opportunity for learning; particularly when such images are not contradicted by other established beliefs and ideologies” (p. 22).

Class, race, gender, and sexual orientation are the four basic categories in understanding the social world (Wartenberg, 1999). The real world is stratified along the lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Therefore, no human being’s social identity can be formed or shaped without fitting into the category of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Because films are about human beings and the world they live in, films have frequently touched upon the issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Many different social
groupings have been represented throughout many films while films tackled issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Various representations of people and culture have enabled films to become a very good pedagogical tool in understanding the world and lives of many people. However, not all representations in films have always been fair or true to reality. Many representations have been negative and misleading through stereotyped images and biased messages. This led many people to wrongly believe that stereotypical representations of a particular type of group or person in films can be applied to the entire group. False and misleading representations of certain group of people or culture in films can lead people to prejudice and misperception of that type of group or culture. Potential danger of hate crime or unfair treatment towards certain minority groups can exist because certain acts and behaviors are rooted in certain perception.

As a popular medium, films take a dominant place in society; this alone can be the reason films need to be studied seriously (Buckland, 1998). Films reflect and shape society and social perceptions as well as create cultures (hooks, 1996). Therefore, intentionally or unintentionally, examination of where certain people, a group, and culture stand in the real world and how they are defined and perceived in society can be done through watching various films.

Dyer (1993) has explained the importance of true representation by claiming that how people are seen somehow determines how people are treated and the way people are seen comes from representation. In other words, misrepresentations lead to misperception, and misperception leads to misbehaviors. This gives a perfect reason to study films. The purpose of studying films is to critically examine how and why certain people, social groups, and cultures are portrayed in films as they are with an anticipation to expose and possibly
eliminate the injustice being done through repetition of negative and stereotyped images. Hopefully, critical film studies can bring out various issues encompassing social domination and enable people to have a clearer conception of social justice and to work toward it more effectively (Dines & Humez, 1995).

**Homosexuality and Films**

Even though the increase of homosexual characters in films seems like a recent event, homosexuality has been one of the movie’s fascinating issues from the beginning. As early as 1903, an innovative American director, Edwin Porter, used a transvestite posing before a mirror as one of his subjects. Even in 1895, the very year that the world’s first movie came out, William Dickson made a movie at the Thomas Edison Studio showing two men dancing a waltz (Russo, 1987). However, even though homosexuality had been portrayed in the early movies, it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that many gay filmmakers (Kelly, 1999) and films that really discussed and addressed gay experience (Levy, 1999) were introduced. Until the late 1990s, moviegoers had limited options of seeing gay or lesbian fare and were shown most through avant-garde or experimental films (Levy, 1999). In the early 1990s, a controversial independent film movement known as “queer cinema” began to emerge, bringing attention to Hollywood about the potential that gay movies have in money making (Levy, 1999).

The success of *Philadelphia* triggered more mainstream movies to contain gay issues or gay characters. *Philadelphia*, which came out in 1994, became one of the biggest successes in featuring gay characters and dealing with gay issues. In this vehicle, Tom Hanks played a gay lawyer dying of AIDS. The movie was about Hanks’ character’s battle
with himself, his illness, and his employers who fired him because of his disease. The role won Tom Hanks the Academy Award for best actor in 1995, gaining approval from one of the most conservative organizations for playing a gay character. With the commercial success of *Philadelphia*, more adventurous gay films were able to thrive in the marketplace (Levy, 1999). The realization of audience appeal that gay characters can have on the audience made the movie industry to earnestly proceed to make movies that either dealt with gay issues or had gay characters, either in main or supporting roles. Moviegoers certainly came to see many more images of homosexuals/homosexuality and gay characters in movies recently.

Before the success of *Philadelphia* most gay films were low-budget independent movies made by gay directors themselves to fight for their own identities. Todd Haynes’s *Poison* (1991), Gus Van Sant’s *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), and Gregg Araki’s *The Living End* (1992) are some good examples. Realizing that gay characters could appeal to the audience, the industry proceeded in earnest to make movies that either dealt with gay issues or had gay characters. Moviegoers certainly saw more and more gay men and lesbians on-screen in major studio movies in 1999 (Kilday, 1999); e.g., *American Beauty*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, *Boys Don’t Cry*, and *Being John Malcovich*.

Even though the representation of homosexual characters in films has existed since the early years of film history and seems to be increasing, lesbian characters have been less visible and appeared less in the discourse of homosexuality than gay men. According to Russo (1987), homosexual behavior onscreen has mostly been "cast in male terms" (p. 4). This has allowed homosexuality in films to be seen in terms of what is or is not masculine (Russo, 1987). In Russo’s argument, an effeminate man is a bigger insult than a masculine
woman, therefore, perceptions of homosexuality are rooted in sexism. Russo (1987) states, "weakness in men rather than strength in women has consistently been seen as the connection between sex role behavior and deviant sexuality...In celebrating maleness, the rendering invisible of all else has caused lesbianism to disappear behind a male vision of sex in general" (p. 4-5). When lesbians or lesbianism are rendered as invisible and are explained exclusively in male terms a notion that sexuality is the proper domain of men can be created or reinforced (Russo, 1987).

Because homosexuality has been discussed in terms of masculinity, lesbianism has never been discussed properly. There is more to lesbians and lesbianism than masculine women or tomboys. When studies define and confine lesbians merely as women who are strong and masculine, or tomboys, those studies are only reinforcing and mystifying the stereotype of lesbians and lesbianism. As a result, not many studies have provided an in-depth analysis and discussion of lesbians and lesbianism. To acknowledge and understand the representation of lesbian characters and lesbianism in films, a speculation on the definitions and meaning of lesbians and lesbianism or as Claudia Card (1995) puts it as "lesbian-ish" should be done beforehand.

Lesbians / Lesbianism

The most popular definition of lesbians have been "women who are attracted exclusively to other women and who claim an identity on the basis of that attraction" (Stein, 1995, p. 139). Weiss (1992) in her study uses the term lesbian to refer to that "aspect of identity which involves a woman’s sexual desire for another woman, in all the myriad ways that desire is named or unnamed, expressed or repressed, combined or conflicting with other
aspects of identity” (p. 3-4). Cavin (1985) also defines lesbianism as “a state of intense sexual and/or emotional attraction and/or love relationship between two or more females” (p. 2). However, this is only a limited perspective of seeing lesbians/lesbianism. Not every woman who acted upon a sexual relationship with other women is labeled as lesbian or the other way around. Women who have sex with other women do not necessarily call themselves lesbians, and, if they do, they are never lesbians in the same way (Harding, 1994). For some, lesbian may be just one of the constituencies of her identity and “lesbianism” may not necessarily be her first or most important element of her identity (Harding, 1994). Lesbians do not all share some common feature (Calhoun, 1996). For many women, the relation between sexual orientation/identity and sexual practice is unstable and complicated (Stein, 1995).

Defining the term “lesbian” is not a simple task. The meaning of being a lesbian is never the same, but changes over a lifetime as law, practices, and institutions change (Card, 1995). With the understanding that the meaning of lesbian and lesbianism cannot be stagnant and can differ according to individual’s interpretation, many scholars have tried to define or find the meaning of lesbian and lesbianism in their own terms. Foucault’s (1990) interpretation of lesbian is taken to be a social construction that emerged out of psychiatric and medical discourses at the turn of the century. Meanwhile, Ferguson’s (1991) understanding of lesbian is in terms of cultures of resistance.

Card (1995) argues that the meaning of lesbian exists only when sexuality is constructed, in other words, institutionalized, specifically, when woman-loving practices and relationships are institutionalized. Based on this idea three interconnected families of “lesbians” can be found in Western histories: the amazonian, the sapphic, and passionate
friends (Card, 1995). According to Card (1995), “amazons, sapphists, and passionate friends have been drawn to each other, in every combination, in relationships ranging from brief erotic flings to lifetime commitments” (p. 31). Amazons are referred to as a group of women who come together in order to resist patriarchy in every aspect of life from pair bonding and daily tasks to government and law (Card, 1995). Sapphic is an adjective, a term that refers indirectly to the erotic content of the poetry of the poet, Sappho of Lesbos (Card, 1995). Finally, passionate friends are somewhat like romantic friends (Faderman, 1981), but in their relationships, friendship is more emphasized because choices and values are at the center of the meaning of the relationship (Card, 1995).

The definitions and meanings of lesbians and lesbianism range from erotic love between/among women to female bonding and pure friendship. In fact, most of the definitions and meanings of lesbians and lesbianism revolve around two elements: desire and identity. Mayne’s (1990) definition of lesbianism explains how lesbians and lesbianism is understood. Mayne (1990) defines lesbianism as both “identification and desire,” both “the most intense form of female and feminist bonding” and “distinctly opposed to heterosexuality”, both the “projection of patriarchal – and feminist – fantasies” and “another register of desire altogether” (p. 115, 154).

Defining who is a lesbian or not is far from self-evident. Many women who have or had sexual and romantic relationships with other women do not necessarily view themselves as lesbians while there are women who engage in bisexual relationships, but self-identify as lesbians. There is no direct relationship between sexual desire/orientation and sexual identity even though many assume there should be (Stein, 1995). To understand what constitutes
lesbianism, both the essentialist and constructionist positions should be taken into consideration in the discussion.

Essentialist views of lesbianism are ahistorical and acultural while constructionism sees it as both culture-bound and time-bound (Halwani, 1998). Essentialists see identity as "natural, fixed and innate", while constructionists consider identity as "fluid and is the effect of social conditioning and available cultural models for understanding oneself" (Jagose, 1996, p. 8). In the essentialist point of view, lesbians are the women who have never had a significant sexual and romantic relationships with men or those who relate to men only to hide or deny their lesbianism (Stein, 1995). These lesbians are also called the "primary lesbian" because their experience of lesbianism is more of a compulsion than a choice (Stein, 1995). Meanwhile, constructionist consider lesbianism as a choice rather than a given. In the constructionist point of view, women who choose women as their sexual and emotional partners, even though they had sexual attraction towards men and might have had significant relationships with men, and sometimes were even married, are considered lesbians (Stein, 1995). This type of lesbians can be also labeled as "elective lesbians" (Stein, 1995).

Even though the viewpoints of essentialism and constructionism are different, understanding what constitutes lesbianism should not be based on only one position. As Halwani (1998) argues, both "essentialism and social constructionism are equally probable in the face of historical evidence" (p. 26). The term "lesbianism" and "lesbian" are polysemous, containing multiple meanings and different understandings. As many debates on what constitutes lesbianism and what it means to be a lesbian have occurred, how lesbians and lesbianism are represented in films throughout the history of films has been interrogated in various aspects, and "what 'lesbian' signifies has been highly contested" (Arroyo, 1997).
Lesbians in Films

Lesbian images in films have been and still are virtually invisible (Weiss, 1992). Lesbianism has been repressed in many films, especially in Hollywood movies, to manage variations on heterosexual romance (Weiss, 1992). Meanwhile, Mellen (1973) argues that the reason not many lesbian characters are on screen is that the “societal prejudice and horror at female homosexuality, and in fact, at female sexuality itself” (p. 74).

However, no matter what may be the reason for the invisibility of lesbian characters on screen, when lesbians appear on screen, the effect is far more negative than their simple absence. Visible lesbian characters tend to be portrayed mostly as “the lesbian vampire, the sadistic or neurotic repressed woman, the pre-Oedipal ‘mother/daughter’ lesbian relationship, the lesbian as sexual challenge or titillation to men” (Weiss, 1992, p. 1) or “predatory” with “possessive, jealous, hateful and sick” characteristics (Mellen, 1973, p. 74). The negative representation of lesbian characters in films is because lesbianism is usually shown as “an aberration, an individual psycho-social problem, which may not be the condition of every lesbian in the audience, but may help to precipitate a few into believing that it is” (Sheldon, 1984, p. 5).

The negative images of lesbianism in films have been controlled mostly through stereotypes. Halberstam (1998) defines stereotype as a constitution of “set of traits within an individual as representative of the behavior and appearance of a particular (often minority) group” (p. 180). The problem with stereotypes does not lie on whether the representation is true or false, but rather that it “reduces the heterogeneity of any given group to a select few types” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 180). The purpose of stereotypes in films is to make the process of identifying a specific social group member easier for the film viewers through a
set of recognizable characteristics (Halberstam, 1998). The two most common stereotypes that are used to represent lesbians or the lesbian images are “butch” and “femme.” (Ciasullo, 2001).

Discussing “butch” and “femme” stereotypical representations is a very complicated job. “Butch” and “femme” posit themselves on opposite sides in many social aspects such as class, race, and sexuality. “Butch” is the type that most of people associate lesbianism with (Ciasullo, 2001). According to Laporte (1992), “a butch is simply a lesbian who finds herself attracted to and complemented by a lesbian more feminine than she, whether this butch be very or only slightly more masculine than feminine” (p. 4). Before such a movement as “queer cinema” emerged, it was mostly the “butch” types that constituted lesbian characters in Hollywood cinema (Halberstam, 1998). When lesbianism is associated with the “butch” types, many lesbians are seen and thought of as women who are tomboyish and masculine with a very independent and strong personality. In other words, lesbians are mostly thought of as women who have the qualities that are generally thought of as men’s. Unfemininity and nonfemaleness are the characteristics of the butch (Ciasullo, 2001).

Even though the butch is the type that many people associate lesbianism with, there are not many representations of butches in films or in any other cultural landscapes (Ciasullo, 2001). Unlike the femme, who can pass as heterosexuals with their emphasized femininity, the characteristics and the appearances of the butch are very visible. Their mannish attitudes and behaviors are portrayed as deviant and subversive. The butch is considered neither a woman nor a man, in other words asexual. The butch’s inbetween status associates her with deviance.
The butch who does not fit the normalized sexual boundary has the reputation as being both unattractive and unsexy (to the straight men). To the heterosexual men, butch is not desirable for she does not present herself to fit into the male gaze, but rather seems to be a challenge and a threat to the masculinity of the heterosexual men (Inness, 1997). According to Inness (1997), “butches fail to fulfill heterosexual ideas about what is attractive and sexually appealing in women” (p. 200). The masculinity in the butch characterizes them as ugly and unattractive which leads the butches to be seen with hatred and derision and even as pathological (Ciasullo, 2001).

As mentioned above, the butch is very invisible, regardless of the visible characteristics the butch carries. The invisibility of the butch onscreen is greater when the butch is particularly non-white and working class. The non-white butch of working class status threatens and disturbs the social order on so many levels that she becomes “virtually unrepresentable within the dominant culture” (Weiss, 1992, p. 146). In addition, the unfemininity of the butch is reinforced when the butch is represented to be an ethnic minority, especially black, and a member of the working class. According to Halberstam (1998), “lesbians of color tend to be stereotyped along racial, as well as sexual, lines: the black lesbian, for example, is often stereotyped as the butch bulldagger or as sexually voracious” (p. 114).

In the white supremacist patriarchal society, the notion of femininity and masculinity is connected to the perception of skin color. While light skin is depicted to be beautiful, weak, fragile, and powerless, dark color skin is represented as sexual, strong, ugly, and powerful. Because masculinity is connected to the dark colored skin, mainstream films do not have problems in showing dark skin colored butches. According to Halberstam (1998),
"the perceived inherent masculinity of blackness allows for the production of credible butchness" (p. 228).

While representations of the butch are subversive, the representations of the femme are normalized-heterosexualized or "straightened out" (Ciasullo, 2001). When lesbian characters were depicted in films, their images were created for the heterosexual male viewers and to appeal to male voyeurism about lesbians (Weiss, 1992). Femme is the type that provides the satisfaction to the heterosexual male viewers' fantasy of lesbians. Femmes, who are mostly white and middle class, are made to satisfy the desire for straight male audiences with their extreme femininity and heterosexualization (Ciasullo, 2001). With her femininity, the femme can pass as an attractive straight woman. Because of their femininity, there is no guarantee that the femmes in films will be recognized as lesbians (Whatling, 1997). According to Hamer (1994), "always, it has been the butch woman who is constructed as the authentic lesbian; rarely is the femme seen as such. Traditionally, the femme has been constructed as essentially feminine and heterosexual; her lesbianism at most a passing phase, resulting from seduction by a predatory butch or a temporary retreat from men after some damaging experience" (p. 70-71).

Because the main characteristic of the femme is extreme femininity or, in other words, hyperfemininity, most of the femmes are depicted as white who are positioned in the middle class. Writing on the subject of the characteristics of femmes, Jetter (1997) claims that "they're white. They're middle class. And they seem more interested in makeup and clothes than feminism. In short, they're femmes, or what the straight world prefers to call lipstick lesbians" (p. 88). The femme body is for the white body, therefore, a black lesbian cannot be a femme (Ciasullo, 2001).
The most common stereotyped depictions of lesbians are butch and femme. As a matter of fact, the butch and the femme were the types that were represented as lesbians most often in the 1950s and 1960s (Ciasullo, 2001; Dobinson & Young, 2000). However, it is not easy to make a clear-cut distinction between the butch and the femme any more. The old school femmes and butches still exist but the types of lesbians have diversified and proliferated (Fisher, 1996). As Fisher (1996) said, “butch and femme, in their conventional sense, exist alongside dozens of other styles” (p. 27).

If the lesbian characters in the past have been either non-existent or represented in stereotypes, many lesbian characters in present films are represented through lesbian sensibilities. There are still many films that depict lesbians in a stereotyped manner. This is especially true when the lesbian characters claim herself as a lesbian and lets the audience know she is a lesbian by letting her onscreen acquaintances know. Movies such as Chasing Amy, Set it Off, and The Basic Instinct are just some examples. However, when the women characters do not reveal themselves as lesbians in the films, but can be read as lesbians because of various hidden codes and symbols or what Tasker (1994) calls “hints of perversion,” the characters are depicted rather fairly and without prejudice.

According to Stein (1992), “lesbian culture is founded upon resistance to gender and sexual norms” (p. 51). Any women characters that do not fit into the conventional female role or are perceived as “gender bending” have the potential to be read as lesbians (Dobinson & Young, 2000). Even though the characters have not revealed themselves as lesbians, female characters that are portrayed as strong, self-reliant and independent are all capable of being seen as lesbians. Butch imageries of Sigourney Weaver in the Aliens and Linda Hamilton in the Terminators, make them to be read as lesbian characters.
Along with the gender bending, unisexual appearances of the female characters, strong friendship and bonding between women can be associated with lesbianism. According to Dobinson and Young (2000), “films depicting female bonding, friendships, or associations are also considered prime sites for lesbian identification” (p. 101). In the lesbian community, friendship and sexuality are often blurred and it is hard to separate the two (Holmlund, 1991; Vickers, 1994). The lack of clarity of the boundary of friendship and sexuality provides a strong friendship between and among women to be read as lesbian characters. According to Dobinson and Young (2000), “empathy or affection between women in all forms is considered ripe for lesbian reading (Straayer, 1990; Vickers, 1994), as are “hints of perversion” (Tasker, 1994) between female characters, communities of women (Mayne, 1991) and women living together as a family (Doty, 1993)” (p. 101). Female characters in films such as Fried Green Tomatoes, Thelma and Louise, The Color Purple, and Bagdad Café can be examples.

Representation of lesbians/lesbianism can differ depending on the perspectives that the films take. Sheldon (1984) suggests that four different factors can have effects on the representation of lesbians in films: the genre of the films, films in general, films made by men, and films made from women’s (lesbian’s) perspectives.

First, Sheldon makes a point that the “criminality of homosexuality correlates with its greater visibility in films only partially available to the general public” (1984, p. 8). Homosexuality seen as outside society and the law becomes the reason that homosexuals are portrayed mostly in underground movies such as avant-garde and hard porn. However, sex difference operates in determining the genre of the movies that will be used in portraying homosexuality/homosexuals. While the avant-garde has largely been concerned with male
homosexuality, lesbianism has largely been portrayed in porn films (Sheldon, 1984). This is mainly due to the existence of and taken-for-granted inherent sexism in the patriarchal culture. Sheldon (1984) says,

Both male and female homosexuals are defined by the patriarchy primarily in terms of their sexuality, and women in general are defined by their sex role. Heterosexual men escape this system by being primarily defined by their activity in society at large, i.e. by their work, though under capitalism other terms denoting inferiority are often used, such as of race or class (also additionally applied to homosexuals and women). This is an agreement with homosexuals and women being defined in relation to men: this relationship is basically one of sex-object to subject. In this lies the key to the discussion of the preponderance of first, lesbians in pornography, and second, male gays in the avant-garde (p. 8).

The reason pornography is heavily used in portraying lesbianism is connected to the double-definition of lesbian sexuality, which means that “lesbians as women ‘should’ be available to men and yet are ones who make love to other women” (Sheldon, 1984, p. 9). This double-definition of lesbianism emphasizes the sexuality/sex-symbol of women and encourages the audience to create and believe in the myth that lesbianism is for women who are great in bed. Along with the double-definition, voyeurism is also another reason that lesbianism is a popular theme in the porn market.

Voyeurism, meaning derivation of sexual gratification from observing the naked bodies or sexual acts of others, especially from a secret vantage point, is an essence in porn films. Porn films are mostly designed for men to experience the nature of women’s
(lesbians’) sexuality voyeuristically by creating a distance between the onlooker and the screen.

Double-definition of lesbianism and voyeurism are all from the perspective of heterosexuality. They are both put fully at the service of heterosexuality and to complete the myth that lesbians are lesbians until they meet the right men (Sheldon, 1984). When examined carefully, the theme of lesbianism in movies is almost the same: lesbianism is nothing but an experiment that some women practice until they meet the right men.

However, Sheldon forgets to acknowledge that there are different styles, types, and even different situations to lesbian characters. It is true the lesbian body is exploited under the heterosexism of male patriarchy and, therefore, the genre of pornography seems to be the major domain for lesbian characters. However, not every type of lesbians can fit into the pornography genre. The butch type, which is considered the most deviant and subversive because of its in-between status and gender inversion, mostly appears in the horror film (Halberstam, 1998). It is hard to imagine the butch style to be in pornographic films even though it is not impossible (Halberstam, 1998). In addition, the femme, whose style seems to be the perfect fit for pornographic films, because she is in fact, no different from the heterosexual attractive woman, is also dominantly shown in the film noir genre. Femme (fatale) who is generally created to depict the dangerous woman character who uses her sexuality and her passing as the attractive straight woman to manipulate and destroy men. Film noir with the mix of the serial killer genre is the best fit for specifically the crime narrative (Kaplan, 1998). In this case, the genre of film noir intensifies and reinforces the dangerous character of the femme (fatale).
When the focus of lesbianism is on the relationships or associations between women, the so-called “chick flicks” become the genre of choice (Dobinson & Young, 2000). Chick flicks mostly consist of drama because drama is the genre that can portray the relationship between women in the most serious and ordinary manner.

Sheldon (1984) also looks into how lesbians are portrayed in movies generally. There are two ways that lesbianism is depicted. One way, as mentioned earlier, is by portraying lesbians to be strong and independent. These qualities of lesbians are symbolized through two elements: money and age. This is especially true with the earlier films that depicted lesbianism. When lesbians are portrayed to be strong and powerful (especially through social and economic status), the portrayals are done according to the conventional formula that emphasizes the value of patriarchal heterosexual society. In the patriarchal heterosexual society, power is defined through money and authority that one has from either social position or age. The strong and powerful lesbians were just another form of heterosexual men who have the privilege of power, while the weak and powerless women, who were the prey of these lesbians, were another form of powerless women in general. This is called role-playing. Role-playing is based on heterosexual models for it takes on oppressing or oppressed role-models which does not change the balance of power (Sheldon, 1984). Lesbian feminists have criticized this way of depiction of lesbianism in movies for it is no different from the depiction of heterosexual relationships in movies.

The second general way in which lesbianism is depicted in films is done through emphasizing female bonding or what some feminists would call “sisterhood.” This depiction focuses on the equality that exists in the relationship between two or more women. While the first portrayals were more common in the earlier films, the latter portrayals became more
common in recent movies. While buddy films such as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* or *Easy Rider* are not normally read as gay films, movies that portray strong bonding and close relationship between women are often read as lesbian films. Even though movies such as *Themla and Louise* and *Fried Green Tomatoes* do not explicitly portray lesbianism or lesbian relationships, some critics and movie viewers consider these movies as lesbian films. The reason can be attributed to the fact that while male homosexuality is associated with the sexuality itself, women’s homosexuality, in other words, lesbianism, is frequently associated with feminism. The most common definition of feminism is “the belief in the full potential of women and the equality of the sexes” (*Zimmerman*, 1997, p. 147), even though the notion of feminism is much more complicated than the definition itself. Feminism can be a political position, a theoretical methodology, a personal lifestyle, or even a mode of interpretation (*Zimmerman*, 1997). No matter where feminism posits itself, the basic understanding to feminism is that it is about women’s common struggle under the patriarchal society through female-bonding and women’s association with one another. This is the reason that even though certain movies do not explicitly show lesbianism or lesbian sexuality on-screen, but merely tight female association and friendship, they are read as lesbian films. How *Atkinson* (1974) referred to lesbianism might be a good explanation as to why lesbianism has a bigger spectrum than male homosexuality.

Lesbianism for feminism is not just “another” issue or “another” example of human oppression. Nor is lesbianism about “autonomy.” Lesbianism is pretty clearly about “association” not about aloneness. If lesbianism were about aloneness, it could hardly be relevant to anything in a political sense (p. 132).
Third, Sheldon (1984) looks into how lesbians are portrayed in men’s movies. When she talks about men’s films, she is referring to films that are made by male, either gay or straight, and are targeted for heterosexual males. In these films, lesbians are mostly “victimized by the twin processes of stereotyping and mythologizing” (Sheldon, 1984, p. 12). The myth comes from what was mentioned earlier as the “double-definition of lesbianism” that lesbians are good in bed and lesbianism can be cured when lesbians meet a decent man. While men have fantasies about lesbians and their sexuality, they also have deep fear of them, especially the solidarity that can exist among women. This is the reason that lesbians or lesbianism in men’s films are mostly portrayed as castrating bitches or sadists. By portraying lesbians in this manner, men are able to maintain divisions between women on the basis of sexual orientation (Sheldon, 1984).

Sheldon (1984) looks into the portrayal of lesbians in men’s films in three different ways. First is the butch/mannish lesbian type. The characters who fit this category are mostly portrayed as the bar dyke/foot-stomper, often working-class and dominant in her relationships with other women. Second is the sophisticated lesbian type. These characters are often older women, who are rich and successful in a man’s world. Third is the neurotic lesbian type. They are often portrayed to be femme or as closeted. Sharon Stone’s character in Basic Instinct is a good example of the neurotic lesbian type. According to Sheldon (1984), these three different types are often combined to form one lesbian character. She also points out that lesbian characters in men’s films hardly ever show solidarity with other women. This is consistent with male assumptions or beliefs that women do not get along among themselves, based on their fears about women allying. In males films, lesbianism is never women-identification in any way (Sheldon, 1984).
Lastly, Sheldon (1984) looks into how lesbians are portrayed in women’s films. Women’s films, here, means films that are made by women filmmakers. The most common idea based on these films is rejections of heterosexuality in a patriarchy. Many women’s films show how the women’s assumed roles at the service of patriarchy in movies have been unsatisfactory and reject the assumptions of the heterosexual norm as destructive and shallow. Lesbianism in these films is used as a positive alternative to the normative definition of womanness in a patriarchy (Sheldon, 1984). Also, because these films are more about love and intimate relationships between women rather than about sex, these films are unvoyeuristic, especially when compared to men’s films.

Women (or lesbians) were able to make films about women-identified women due to the emergence of lesbian feminism. Before lesbian feminism emerged, even though quite a few lesbian filmmakers existed in the film industry, there were very few films about lesbianism. One reason is the fact that there were not many supports from the alliance of lesbians who were proud and open enough to fight against the social force of gayness as taboo. However, the larger reason is that strong political motivations were absent in making lesbian films. When women made films, making feminist statements was already enough; however, to comment on lesbianism was asking for a total rejection. Lesbian feminism, however, was able to change the situation. Lesbian feminism opened many political reasons for women-identified women to make movies in relation to their politics, and a growing audience for explicitly political lesbian films (Sheldon, 1984).

From invisibility to visibility, representations of lesbian and lesbianism have changed over the period of time. Depending on the social atmosphere and situation, lesbianism on-screen has ranged from mere cross-dressing and other distinctive visual codes to refer to
gender inversion to intimate relationships between women. Many representations have been subtle while others have been explicit in forms and expressions. Many representations have been done in a stereotypical manner (mostly through the butch-femme binary) while some representations of lesbians and lesbianism have been done rather positively or in a fair manner. Whichever the representations of lesbians and lesbianism have been in films, the images of lesbians and lesbianism have never been universal. In each representation of lesbian characters in films, there is a "historical specificity of lesbian identity" (Holmland, 1991, p. 165) and the historical specificity of lesbian identity has changed over time. As Weiss (1992) claimed, "representation changes over time, and there are complex historical reasons why lesbian representation appears as it does in particular historical moments" (p. 73). Among many important historical moments, the advent of gay and women's liberation movements in the late 1960s and the 1970s and the queer movement in the early 1990s have greatly influenced the representation of lesbians.

Before the gay and women's liberation movement, lesbianism in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, was depicted as a social deviance, a disruption to the heterosexual order, and a sexual threat. The gay and women's liberation movements in the late 1960s and 1970s enabled lesbian representations to become more positive and disassociated with deviance by making lesbian characters look more attractive and normal. Lesbian characters were no longer confined to frightening, dangerous, and malicious figures. Instead, not to be accused of defaming lesbian characters in films, many films choose to limit lesbian characters to the positive portrayals of female friendships rather than the negative and stereotyped portrayals. The positive portrayals of female friendships are done by depicting relationships between women as supportive, intimate, and warm (Harding, 1994).
Because the movement was focused on identity politics with a common purpose of fighting against the dominant culture of heterosexism and patriarchy, the movement happened to eradicate all the individual experiences in the process of struggle. The eradication and negation of the individual experiences made the movement focus on the agenda of white women in the upper middle class. By the 1980s, women and lesbians of color and the working class started to raise voices against feminist politics for denying their experiences (Jagose, 1996). According to Weiss (1992), both “working class lesbians and lesbians of color found themselves excluded from both the luxury of utopian, separatist lifestyles and from a ‘universal’ lesbian mythology extrapolated from specific, personal lesbian identity” (p. 144). The explosion of lesbians of color and working class lesbians triggered lesbian experiences to be analyzed and discussed from diverse and multidimensional perspectives. Representations of non-white, working-class lesbians, who were once considered to be a threat to the social order in multiple ways and, therefore were made invisible within the dominant culture, started to appear on screen more frequently.

In the 1990s, the lesbian characters on screen became more diverse and complicated. The queer movement, which is against identity politics, denies that the binaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality and sex and gender exist (Kennedy, 1994). Therefore, the notion of gay or lesbian identity has also been erased and denied through the queer movement. The boundary between heterosexual and homosexual became blurred and defining the lesbian experience became a difficult task. Because queer “shifts the focus from sexual identity to sexual performativity” (Kennedy, 1994, p. 139), there is a high potential of conflict in reading what is queer or not. What one may read as a lesbian experience or a
lesbian relationship may not necessarily mean the same thing for the other. Queer has enabled to expand both the meaning and the reading of lesbianism.

Based on the literature review, three things will be examined in this study. First, this study will examine what signs and codes have been used to represent lesbianism and the meanings behind the use of the signs and codes that have been used in films. Second, this study will examine the representation types of lesbianism in films. Lesbian images and lesbianism in films have never been represented in the same manner. The representations can differ depending on the attributes of the film, such as the plot, film character, and so on. The factors that influence the representations of lesbian images and lesbianism in films will be verified. In this study, class and race will be considered as two “attributes” to the representations of lesbianism and lesbian images in films. One of the main problems that many previous studies examining lesbians and lesbianism is that lesbians have been discussed as a homogeneous group that share the same experience. This problem has lead many of the discussions to revolve exclusively around the “white,” failing to include lesbians of color in the discourse (Pellegrini, 1997). Lesbians, in fact, exist in every racial and ethnic group and in different socioeconomic statuses. Therefore, in this study, how race and class contribute to the representation of lesbians in films will also be discussed.

**Statement of Purpose**

This research examines how lesbians and lesbianism are and have been generally portrayed in movies from the perspectives of both queer studies and lesbian feminism. To achieve this goal, the study will first examine the signs and symbols that are used in films to signify lesbianism. Next, this study will examine how lesbianism and lesbian images have
been represented in various films. In addition, the “attributes” that influence the representation of lesbianism and lesbian images in films will also be examined and discussed. In this study, how race and class contribute to the representation of lesbians in films will also be discussed. Looking into race and class attributes will bring out various aspects and dimensions of lesbianism in films. Next, this study will examine how the representations of lesbians/lesbianism in films have changed over time. How the lesbians and lesbianism are defined and interpreted influences the way lesbians are portrayed in films. As the meaning and the definition of lesbianism have changed over time, so have the representations of lesbianism in films.

**Theoretical Assumptions**

Lesbian feminism and queer theory will be used as the theoretical background for this study. Most of the studies that have focused on examining lesbian images and lesbianism in films have used feminist film theory as the theoretical background. Feminist film theory, however, in the process of focusing on the issues in relation to women, has left out and neglected the interest and issues of lesbians. Lesbian feminism is the theory that can assist in examining the issues and representations of lesbians in films by focusing on lesbian’s “sexuality” rather than the gender binary as many feminist film theorists have done. Lesbian feminism may be effective in examining the representations of lesbianism and lesbian images in films. However, because lesbian feminism emphasizes the “collectivity” and “commonality” among lesbian identities, this theory negates the different experiences that exist among lesbians, especially the experiences of lesbians of all colors and working classes.
Queer theory, however, challenges identity politics. Erasing the identity politics enables queer theory to accept differences and different experiences. With queer theory, experiences of lesbians of all colors and working classes can be projected. However, because queer theory places its focus on “sexuality,” many lesbians feel queer theory puts its agenda more on gay men’s experiences rather than lesbians’.

Lesbian feminism focuses more on the “gender” aspects and issues of lesbianism while queer theory focuses much more on the “sexuality” aspects of lesbianism. However, even though conflicts and tensions exist between lesbian feminism and queer theory because lesbianism cannot be explained without looking into both “gender” and “sexuality,” this study will use both lesbian feminism and queer theory as the theoretical basis. Hopefully, by taking both lesbian feminism and queer theory as the theoretical basis, diverse aspects of lesbianism and lesbian images can come into notion.

**Lesbian Feminism**

The origin of the gay liberation movement is the Stonewall Day when the police raided a gay and drag bar called the Stonewall Inn in New York. People who identified as gay resisted the raid, leading to a weekend of riots. With their efforts, gay liberationists worked on challenging the status quo and made sure their “gay” identity was seen and noticed (Jagose, 1996). The aim of the gay liberation movement was to liberate the oppressed people who are enslaved by male supremacy, racism, and economic exploitation, in other words, capitalism (Young, 1992). Small number of women and lesbians participated in the gay liberation movement, but because the gay liberation movement was about “gay male” agenda, many lesbians felt marginalized and left out of the movement (Jagose, 1996).
The feminist movement, whose aim was to secure equal rights for women did not have a welcoming environment for lesbians either, even though feminism tried to include various women as allies. The feminist movement tried to distance itself from lesbianism and even failed to acknowledge the existence of lesbians (Jagose, 1996). This is mainly due to the heterosexism that was prevalent in feminist studies. Scholars such as Adrienne Rich (1980) complained about how feminism erases the existence of lesbians and lesbianism in its scholarly feminist literature, which ends up bringing the consequence of anti-feminism. And this consequently leads to distort the experience of heterosexual women as well.

Before lesbianism was examined under the microscope of feminism, it was considered merely as female version of male homosexuality. This equation of lesbianism with male homosexuality made female reality to be erased and denied once again. Separating women who are so-called “gay” or “homosexual” from the continuum of female resistance to enslavement and attaching them to a male pattern falsified women’s history (Rich, 1980). When lesbians are seen separated from the history of reality of women and seen to share a kind of social life and common cause with homosexual men, the differences that lie between lesbians and homosexual men may be overlooked. First, lesbians face more severe oppressions than homosexual men just by the fact that they are women. Lesbians not only have to face the fact that they are women, but also the fact that they are lesbians (Rich, 1980). Sexism in the patriarchal capitalist society results in women having less economic and cultural privileges relative to men. Women are mostly given the entry-level and lower mid-level positions, while the upper ranks of management are usually reserved for men (MacKinnon, 1979; Blau, Ferber, & Winkler, 1998). This reality enables women to enjoy
the economic and cultural privileges they lack only when they are able to find men who can provide them these necessities.

Also, women are defined as women generally when they are able to produce their own child through pregnancy. When lesbians refuse men as their companion they are refusing to be women. In other words, women can only be complete women with the help of men. Biological determinism is often used to sustain the heterosexual hegemony and procreative sex confirms the naturalness of heterosexuality (Weiss, 1992). While men’s superiority is expressed through their “sperm,” (Weiss, 1992) women’s womanhood is expressed through pregnancy and child bearing. hooks (1989) explains that while male homosexuals were often known, talked about, and were seen positively and played important roles in community life because of the material privilege they had, it was quite opposite for lesbians. She says that homophobia directed at lesbians was rooted in deep religious and moral belief that women defined their womanness through bearing children and the prevailing assumption was that to be a lesbian was “unnatural” because one would not be participating in child-bearing (hooks, 1989, p. 121). This is the reason that lesbians face more severe oppressions from heterosexuality than homosexual men. Second, there are qualitative differences in female and male relationships such as the prevalence of anonymous sex and the justification of pederasty among male homosexuals and the pronounced ageism in male homosexual standards of sexual attractiveness (Rich, 1980).

Lesbian feminism acts to dissociate lesbian from male homosexual values and allegiances. It also becomes the microcosm of discussion and action on the linked oppressions under patriarchal capitalist society for the fact that lesbians come from all kinds of class and racial backgrounds, as well as having very different statuses in society (Sheldon,
1984). According to Sheldon, lesbian feminism implies "a certain analysis of the power structure in which sexism is the primary oppression and lesbianism is defined as a political and emotional choice" (1984, pg. 5). Lesbian feminism first emerged in the early 1970s throughout the most radical sectors of the women's movement (Stein, 1992). Because lesbianism implied a clinical and limiting ring (Rich, 1980), young women who came out through feminism attempted to broaden the definition of lesbianism. They tried to transform it from a medical condition, or a sexual "preference" into a collective identity which transcended prevalent individualism and its excesses as well as compulsory gender and sex roles (Stein, 1992).

Lesbian feminism considers sexism to be the cause of all systems of discrimination (Grabber, 2001). Lesbian feminists acknowledge the fact that lesbians have not only heterosexism to struggle against, but also sexism. The early lesbian feminism saw gender as the primary basis of lesbian identity and men as the source of the power imposed on them (Stein, 1995). With the ideological association of feminism, many lesbians fought and struggled against men and the patriarchal society. In fact, many women chose to be identified as "lesbians" believing that lesbians are the best feminists (Grabber, 2001). In the process, lesbian feminism brought a broader definition to lesbian/lesbianism. The definition of lesbianism broadened from "sexual attraction and sexual practice between women" to "female bonding" and "collaboration among women to resist against imposed gender/sex roles."

Lesbian feminism rejects male-identification and accepts woman-identification in understanding the self and the world. Because male-identification sees the world with men's needs, desires and cultural hegemony, it can operate according to the Freudian archetype of
the weak, self-hating woman, the lesbian who must play a male role since her self-definition is based on her relationship to man’s ‘natural’ position of power (Sheldon, 1984). Meanwhile, woman-identification means having pride in being a woman and having self-confidence based on a genuine and growing sense of powerfulness and identity. This leads women to identify themselves in solidarity with women’s struggles for an autonomous identity, social position and new consciousness. This is connected to what Rich (1980) refers to as *lesbian continuum*. Rich uses this term not simply to include the fact that a woman has had consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman, but to include a range of woman-identified experience through each woman’s life and throughout history (Rich, 1980). Lesbian continuum enables women to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women by solidifying against male tyranny and the giving and receiving of practical and political support.

Even though lesbian feminism was organized to give lesbians and the women-identified-women, “the power to create female societies free of hierarchical sex, race, class, age, and heterosexist oppressions” (Cavin, 1985, p. 21i), the movement failed to integrate race and racialization into its discourse. Because the focus on lesbian feminism was on collectivity among lesbians and women-identified-women, the movement was organized by a single defining feature, race was perceived only as an “insubstantial, or at best, additional category of identification” (Jagose, 1996, p. 63). Women and lesbians of color criticized the movement for considering race as insignificant when defining group affiliations, personal identifications, and political strategies and endeavored to mesh the racial and sexual identities (Jagose, 1996). The emphasis on similarities and collectivity among women and lesbians became an obstacle in understanding the different experience among the individuals.
**Queer Theory**

Many queer theorists and scholars have studied and tried to explicate homosexuality. Queer theory, which emerged to deconstruct the dominant ways of categorizing gay and lesbian identities, has been inclusive to sexual minorities of all kinds (Keister, 1998). Queer theory discarded the old but powerful notion of sexual binary, that sexuality is divided merely into two: heterosexuality and homosexuality. This idea has enabled queer theory to bring in transsexual, transgender, and bisexual individuals to the study. Additionally, queer theory has acknowledged the fact that people’s identity is defined not only by sexuality, but also by the intersection of class, race, gender, ethnicity, and all the other possible facets of life (Keister, 1998).

Queer theory denaturalizes gender and sexuality (Jagose, 1996). Queer theory questions and resists identity categories and problematizes the normative consolidations of sex, gender, and sexuality (Jagose, 1996). Even though the resistance to identity categories seems to allow different experiences among individuals to be heard, the erasure of identity categories has also provided many feminists to complain about queer studies.

Many feminists have complained that “queer” is not as inclusive as it seems. The main reason can be due to the term “queer.” Because the term “queer” is often used in describing abnormal sexual practices and sexual perversion, many gay men and lesbians feel uncomfortable being associated with it (Keister, 1998). Many self-identified gay men and lesbians do not think nor are persuaded that “queer” can be the new category to describe or represent them (Jagose, 1996). Also, the term “queer,” which is mostly applied to explaining homosexual men seems to conceal a generic masculinity neglecting the gender difference between gay men and lesbians (Jagose, 1996). By negating the gender identity,
many lesbians and feminists have felt that queer studies have put lesbianism back into where it had started: a female version of male homosexuality. By making a false assumption that lesbians and gay men have and deal with the same problem, lesbians are used in the queer movement only to furthering a masculinist agenda (Parnaby, 1993). In other words, queer is used only to “provide an arena where men and women work together to fight men’s battles” (Parnaby, 1993, p. 14).

If queer studies have put an emphasis on sexuality, lesbian feminism has its emphasis on gender (Graber, 2001). Lesbian feminism emphasizes the “similarities” and “collectivity” among women and/or lesbians. This emphasis somehow functioned as a barrier in taking in the issues embedded around race, class, and ethnicity in lesbian feminism. Meanwhile, queer studies emphasize the “differences” among individuals in the group. Queer can be described as “anti-assimilationist” (Jagose, 1996). This allows queer theorists to examine lesbians and gay men not only along the line of sexuality, but also through race, gender, ethnicity, class, and all the other possible facets of life (Jagose, 1996). According to Hennessy (1994), queer movement is “an effort to speak from and to the differences and silences that have been suppressed by the homo-hetero binary, and effort to unpack the monolithic identities “lesbian” and “gay” including the intricate ways lesbian and gay sexualities are inflected by heterosexuality, race, gender and ethnicity” (p. 86-7).

As mentioned before, lesbian feminism has its emphasis on “gender” while queer studies focus on “sexuality” (Graber, 2001). The conflict between lesbian feminism and queer studies has existed for a long time. However, because gender and sexuality cannot be experienced separately, examining the experiences of gay men and women should not be done through one study (Barale, 1997). With this understanding, this study will take in both
perspectives of queer studies and lesbian feminism in examining the experiences of lesbians and lesbianism represented in movies. This study will not only look into the broader meaning of lesbianism, but also interrogate how a variety of forms of oppression interwine systemically with each other. There is a rich variety of differences that exist among lesbians and when the intersections of race, class, ethnicity with sexuality are examined, multidimensional aspects of lesbianism will come into relief.

**Justification of Study**

The theme of lesbianism has appeared in films since the early years of the cinema. According to Weiss (1992), “lesbians and the cinema made their first appearance in the western world at the same historical moment” (p. 7). However, regardless of the long history of lesbian existence in films, lesbianism and lesbian experience in the cinema have not been given much critical attention. When lesbian experiences in films were given attention, lesbian representations were examined as a secondary subject in feminist film studies and gay studies. Gay studies, unfortunately, when examining issues surrounding homosexuality, have mainly focused on the gay man’s agenda. The dominant culture of patriarchy makes the male experience as the norm, therefore, when both men’s and women’s sexuality and sexual orientation are examined simultaneously, women’s experiences can be simply neglected (Garnets & Peplau, 2000).

Vito Russo’s (1987) *The Celluloid Closet*, which is considered the encyclopedia of homosexuality in films, has exhaustively mapped the history of representations of homosexuality in films. However, under the name of homosexuality most of his work is focused on the representations of gay men and not lesbians. Russo (1981) explained, “the
popular definition of gayness is rooted in sexism” (p. 4). The existence of sexism in the studies of homosexuality is associated with the notion of masculinity. Russo’s (1981) insistence is that while it is important to study men who lack masculinity, in other words, gay men, studying women with masculinity, in other words, lesbians, is not as crucial, for the masculine women only reinforce the myth of masculinity. The stereotypical notion of lesbianism is that lesbians are always masculine, the women who are trapped in men’s bodies. However, lesbianism does not always reflect masculinity and masculine women are not always lesbians. Lesbians can be feminine and may not appear to be different from heterosexual women. Russo’s insistence, therefore, not only marginalizes lesbianism but also stereotypes it in the studies of homosexuality.

Feminist film studies have not been quite the answer to examining lesbianism, either. Feminist film studies have not done much work on lesbians and popular film (Graham, 1994). Feminist films studies were mostly focused on examining psychoanalytic readings of heterosexual femininity and male spectatorship (Graham, 1994). According to Arroyo (1997), “early feminist film theorists raised crucial questions of representation, narrative, address, spectatorship, identification and desire in relation to women, but often took heterosexuality as an unquestioned given. They utilized notions of cross-dressing, transvestism and the masquerade while resolutely ignoring lesbianism” (p. 76-77).

Lesbianism is not the only subject matter that feminist film studies have not examined. Experiences and lives of women of all colors and classes have also been erased and ignored in feminist film studies. The focus of feminist film studies has been on the similarity between women, femininity and womanliness, and difference between men and women. In the process, diverse voices and multiple dimensions of women’s lives have been
excluded. According to Rodowick (1991), "what one gains by positioning the singular specificity of "feminine" experience is achieved only at the cost of glossing over the variegate possibilities of hetero- and homosexual identities and pleasures, not to mention the multiple dimensions of subjectivity defined by class, race, and nationality" (p. 45).

The lack of examination of lesbians and lesbianism in films makes examining how lesbians and lesbianism are presented in films an important task. Even when lesbianism and lesbian images in films are examined, the deviant sexuality is mostly associated with the notion of masculinity. The connection between lesbianism and masculinity inhibits further scrutiny of lesbianism and only reinforces the stereotype of lesbianism and lesbian images. In order to examine multiple meanings of lesbianism and different images and representations of lesbians in films, this study will not associate lesbianism with masculinity but will seek various elements, symbols, and signs of lesbianism in films.

Another important task of this study is to see how the representations of lesbian images and lesbianism in films have changed over time. Social perception and ideologies have influence on representations of certain groups in the media and vice versa. The way the public thinks and perceives changes over time, is interconnected to the changes in the representations of lesbian images on screen. The task of looking at the changes of representations of lesbian images and lesbianism in films may provide some information on the cultural significance, interpretation, and implications of the changes of lesbian images and lesbianism in films.

As aforementioned, when lesbianism and lesbian images in films are examined, the factors of race and class and their influence on the portrayals of lesbian images are hardly investigated. When lesbianism is examined, most studies identify lesbians in a single
category. This approach renders the different reality of lesbians depending on their race/ethnicity and economic and class backgrounds as meaningless. When lesbians are lumped into a single category due to their sexuality, sexuality is elevated to a position of privilege over all other social and environmental factors in the construction of the subject, while gender, age, race, class, and economic power are relegated to subsidiary roles (Medhurst, 1984).

To examine various aspects of lesbianism, this study will use both lesbian feminism and queer theory as the theoretical basis. Lesbian feminism, with its focus on commonality and collectivity among lesbians may not explain the different experiences that exist among individual lesbians but may explain lesbianism in female’s terms and perspectives. Meanwhile, even though queer theory is criticized by many feminist circles for focusing too much on the gay men’s agenda when examining the issues embedded around homosexuality, it respects individuality and individual experiences, especially experiences along the lines of race and class. Regardless of the opposite stance the two theories take, this study adopts both lesbian feminism and queer theory as the theoretical base for the complementary purpose. There are many studies that have tried to examine how lesbians and lesbianism are depicted in films. However, most of the studies have focused on examining only certain types of lesbian representation rather than trying to bring various representations into notice. This study, with both lesbian feminism and queer theory as the theoretical basis, will try to bring out various representations of lesbianism and lesbian images in films.

Chapter two will delineate the research methodology used in this study. Chapter three will contain the findings of the symbols and signs that have been used to represent lesbianism and how lesbianism and lesbian images have been represented in films. In
addition, chapter three will present how the representation of lesbianism and lesbian images in films has changed throughout film history. Chapter four will bring in the discussions that can be made from the findings. Chapter five will contain some concluding thoughts, implications and limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

**Research Questions**

Three research questions will guide the study.

1. What signs and symbols have been used to represent lesbianism in films?

2. How have lesbianism and lesbian images been represented in films? How do race and class contribute to the representations?

3. How have the representations of lesbianism and lesbian images changed over time, especially during the advent of gay and women's liberation movement and queer movement?
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Methodological Considerations

This study examines the signs that are used to signify lesbianism in films, the representation types of lesbianism in films, and how the lesbian representations have changed over time with lesbian feminism and queer theory as the theoretical bases. By using both lesbian feminism and queer theory, lesbian sexuality can be understood in terms of both gender and sexuality. Understanding gender and sexuality is a complex task because both sex and gender are polysemic. The polysemic nature of the study requires a methodology that allows exploring the subject matter with various perspectives and understandings. Qualitative research allows a close and deep examination of the representations of lesbianism and lesbian images in films along with the meanings and significance of the representations from different and multiple perspectives.

There have been many definitions and qualifications of what is qualitative research. The broadest and possibly the most general and simple definition of qualitative research may be the definition by Strauss and Corbin (1990). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), qualitative research is “any kind of research that produces findings that are not arrived at by any means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p. 17). Meanwhile, Lofland’s (1971) definition of qualitative research explains the goal and purpose of qualitative analysis well. According to Lofland (1971), “qualitative analysis is addressed to the task of delineating forms, kinds of social phenomena; of documenting in loving detail the things that exist” (p. 13).
There are various ways in conducting qualitative research. However, Pauly (1991) explains that qualitative research can be done in a five step process: choosing the topic of the study, formulating research questions, gathering the evidence, interpreting the evidence, and telling the researcher’s story. Many predominant qualitative methodologies exist: ethnography, ethnomethodology, reception studies, ecological psychology, symbolic interactionism, cultural studies, and textual analysis (Potter, 1996). Among all the qualitative methodologies, textual analysis seems to fit as the methodology to be used for this study.

Textual analysis has literary criticism and structuralist linguistics as its roots and has hermeneutics and interpretation as the primary axioms (Potter, 1996). In textual analysis there is no need of interview or observation of the audience members to gather their interpretations, because textual analysis acknowledges that texts themselves can be viewed as the cultural influencers (Potter, 1996). Texts never have fixed or determinate meanings. The meanings can change and differ, depending on how the reader interprets them. According to Larsen (1991), the text should “not be regarded as a closed, segmented object with determinate, composite meanings, but rather as an indeterminate field of meaning in which intentions and possible effects intersect. The task of the analysts is to bring out the whole range of possible meanings, not least the “hidden” message of the text” (p. 122).

The primary tool in textual analysis of films is observation and analysis, and to perform the task the individual film is broken down to its smallest components (Mayne, 1993). It is then possible to discern the film structure. Small component parts of a film vary from an image/sound, to a dialogue, to a single shot. Every individual component functions as a sign or a code with certain meanings attached. In this study, textual analysis will focus
on the signs and codes of lesbianism in particular films and show how the signs and symbols are used to contain certain meanings.

Another qualitative approach that is used for this study is cultural studies. The main purpose of cultural studies is to examine "how people interpret their culture and how they interact with it through the creation and use of symbols" (Potter, 1996, p. 60). With cultural studies, it is possible to identify certain elements in the text of the film and provide them as evidence of cultural patterns (Potter, 1996). Thus, in this study, cultural studies can examine how the representations of lesbians in films have changed over time and the cultural implications of the changes especially in the periods of gay and women's liberation movement and queer movement.

**Research Questions**

In this study the qualitative methodologies of textual analysis and cultural studies will be used to examine the following questions:

1. What signs and symbols have been used to represent lesbianism in films?
2. How have lesbianism and lesbian images been represented in films? How do race and class contribute to the representations?
3. How have the representations of lesbianism and lesbian images changed over time, especially during the advent of gay and women's liberation movement and queer movement?
Methods

Evidence Gathering Method: Documents Examination

For both textual analysis and cultural studies, text becomes the focus of the research. Examining the documents becomes the primary task of the study, when the texts are the focus of the investigation (Potter, 1996). Documents can vary from a simple letter and a memo to a longer and more complicated product of articles, manuscripts, and books, an auditory tool of audiotape to visual imageries of photographs, videotapes, and even films (Potter, 1996). Potter (1996) defines documents as those that are "any preserved recording of a person's thoughts, actions, or creations" (p. 95). Whatever forms the documents may take, documents are always the primary source of data when conducting textual analysis (Potter, 1996).

Document examination is the core method to this study. Because the purpose of this study is to examine the phenomenon of how lesbians and lesbianism have been portrayed in films, films and videotapes become the main documents to this study. Because every film is not obtainable and there are numerous films with lesbian themes, lesbian characters, lesbianism, or lesbian sensibility, secondary data, such as articles and criticisms of the films in magazines, newspapers, or the Internet will also be taken into consideration. The secondary data will not be used to review the films, but to assist in mapping out the representations of lesbian images in various films.

Sampling of the Document

The main goal of this study is to examine the representations of lesbian images and lesbianism in films. In order to do so, texts within various films will be examined. In this study, films and videotapes are the main documents. However, it is not possible to examine
every film that has been produced to investigate the representations of lesbian images. Therefore, twenty-eight films, which have been considered to carry lesbian overtone, characters, themes, images, relationships, and sensibilities will be selected for examination for this study. Out of various films that can be used as evidence for the study, the films that are well-known for their lesbian content or sensibility are chosen for this study. The films that have been chosen for the study are mainly U.S. films. However, among the films that have been chosen for this study, three films are international films. *Pandora’s Box* (1929) and *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931) are German films and *The Killing of Sister George* (1968) is a U.K. film. Despite the origins of the country, these films have been chosen in this study because these films have been widely distributed in the U.S. and are well known for lesbian characters, relationships, overtone, or theme. The films in this study have been chosen because they seem to best capture the essence of what this study wants to illustrate.

The films that are chosen for the study are produced in different time periods. In order to examine the representation of lesbianism and lesbian images in films in different time periods, the time periods of film history have been divided into five: 1895 (the beginning of cinema)-1930s, 1940s-1960s, 1970s-early 1980s, 1980s-early 1990s, and 1990s-to date. Each film that is examined in this study is considered as one of the representative films of a certain time period. For instance, *Morocco*, which was produced in 1930, is chosen as the representative lesbian film for the time period of 1895-1930s, while *Boys Don’t Cry*, which was produced in 1999, is chosen as the representative lesbian film for the time period of late 1990s-to date.
The films that will be examined for this study are as follows:


**Methods of Analysis**

Textual analysis is conducted mainly from a literary point of view (Jensen, 1991) with the use of discourse analysis, narrative analysis, genre analysis, and so on (Potter, 1996). According to Potter (1996), methods can be “used separately, but more likely they are used in combinations created by the researcher to fulfill a particular purpose” (p. 134).

The performance of textual analysis is based on the understanding that a film is the product of a combination of component parts with a variety of interlocking functions (Mayne, 1993). The purpose of textual analysis is to understand how the component parts of a film function and the various meanings that are produced by their functions. In order to perform textual analysis, three different analytic methods will be used in this study:
semiotics, narrative analysis, and historical analysis. The analysis methods that are used in this study will assist in mapping out various representations of lesbian images in films.

**Semiotics/Semiology**

In textual analysis studies, texts are regarded as polysemous and the meanings of the text can change depending on the reader and the situation. Therefore, interpretation of the text becomes a very important task in the textual analysis. Signs are the smallest and the most basic units that are used in the text to convey meanings. The meaning of the sign can be derived by interpretations. The primary task of semiotics is to interpret an object or text to derive its immanent meaning (Potter, 1996). Semiotics or semiology refers to the scientific analysis of signs and their functions in texts. Semiotics is regarded as a very important method in textual analysis (Potter, 1996). Semiotics is basically understanding “how meaning is generated in “texts,” the way signs communicate, and the rules that govern the use of those signs” (Potter, 1996, p. 135).

Meanwhile Orr (1991) defined semiotics as “the study of signs in a systematic fashion or framework, or the scientific study of the properties of artificial or natural signaling systems (p. 358). Language is the most important unit in studying the signs, but in order to see how meanings are generated, semiotics also needs to look into other factors such as gesture, fashions, or narratives (Bywater & Sobchack, 1989). In fact, the (lesbian) characters’ attires, manners, and certain acts and behaviors along with the language they use are often used to signify lesbianism. Generally, films contain various signs to convey certain meanings. Generally, signs are used for a particular reason. Therefore, it is an important task to examine how lesbianism has been represented in films by analyzing the signs that have been used in films to indicate lesbianism.
Narrative Analysis

If semiotics looks into the basic units of the text, signs, narrative analysis looks into the bigger unit of the text, storyline or plot. According to Orr (1991), narrative refers to “an event or a series of events” and the term can apply to “an entire text or just to that portion of a text which presents event or a summary of action” (p. 304). Because of the importance of events and happenings that occur in the text, narrative analysis focuses on looking at the plot or the storyline of a work and the function of the character’s role in the work (Orr, 1991).

Narrative analysis is used to find the messages from the storylines or plots in the text. The characters and the events are the devices that are used to convey the message of the storyteller. According to Potter (1996), narrative analysis is made under the assumption that “all messages follow the conventions of a story” and narrative analysis is used to “find the story and illuminate its structure” (p. 139).

There are two ways in conducting the narrative analysis. First is to examine the signs in sequence. This method is applied by “looking for the sequence of events and establishing individual links between events until the overall structure is illuminated” (Potter, 1996, p. 139). Second is to investigate the meaning behind using certain characters and places in the story. After all, every character and background is used for a certain purpose and for a particular meaning. With the narrative analysis, this study can examine how lesbianism and lesbian images are used in films by looking at the characters and the occurrences in the film and even the use of the genre type of the film.

Historical Analysis

Because one of the goals of this study is to see how the representations of lesbian images in films have changed over time, historical analysis is a very important method that
should be used for this study. Historical analysis is particularly important in examining the influence of social movements, such as gay and women's liberation movement and queer movement on the representations of lesbian images in films. Historical analysis enables to see the changes of representations throughout the time period along with the sense of social and cultural values at the given time. In order to conduct historical analysis, semiotics and narrative analysis must be conducted first. Once the signs, characters, scenes, storylines or plot of lesbianism and their meanings in films are investigated, historical analysis can be conducted by arranging the findings according to the time period and examining how the representations of lesbianism have changed over time. Historical analysis cannot be conducted without examining the content of the text first.

According to Levy (1999), “over the decades, the treatment of homosexuals in movies has shifted from light and humorous in the silent era to nefarious and abominable in the 1950s to a more liberal depiction today” (p. 442-443). Levy’s comment supports this study’s purpose in looking at the changes of representation in lesbian images in films over time. Culture is a big contributor to human behavior and social perception (Wilson, 1994) so the changes of representations may be in tandem with the social perception of lesbianism prevailing at a particular time period. Films reflect the sensibility of society and its culture and therefore provide a mirror to hold up to society (O'Connor, 1990). Therefore, cultural phenomena prevailing during the identified time periods will be taken into consideration when looking into films in different time period.

Cultural phenomena also affect the movie industry and the contents of the movies produced in a particular era. For example, when AIDS became one of the most serious health
threats facing society in the late 1980s, the movie industry started to reverse the trend of showing promiscuous sex and began returning to old-fashioned romance (Wilson, 1994).

According to O'Connor (1990), “when dealing with the analysis of a specific moving image document, it makes sense to preserve a chronological approach by looking at the production history first” (p. 11). Films have a history of more than a century. In this study, the representations of lesbian images in films will be examined in five different periods in chronological order according to the production date:

- First period: 1895 (the beginning of cinema)- 1930s
- Second period: 1940s-1960s
- Third period: 1970s-early 1980s
- Fourth period: 1980s-early 1990s
- Fifth period: late 1990s- to date.

Various films from these five different time period that contain lesbian themes, characters, storylines or plots, and sensibility will be examined in this study. The time periods were divided into five according to the historical or social events that were influential to the film industry. The first period (from 1895 to 1930s) was the beginning stage of the history of cinema. While the first gay men or gay theme was introduced to the cinema in the year of 1895, the first lesbian character was not introduced until the year of 1929. This was the period when the support for homosexual rights was invisible in the United States. The Society for Human Rights, the first American gay liberation group, was founded in 1924 by the State of Illinois, however, due to the fear of homosexuality, the group was disbanded within a year (Russo, 1987). However, the laws that banned homosexuality did not include lesbianism because homosexuality was considered as an act between men (Russo, 1987).
Lesbians and the act of lesbianism were simply ignored and omitted in the history of the first period. The second period (from 1940s to 1960s) was the period of cultural, political, and social oppression due to McCarthyism. In this period, the censorship authorized by Hollywood’s Motion Picture Production Code was in effect and many lesbian images were limited to no representations or portrayed in a stereotypical way. The third period (from 1970s to early 1980s) was when the liberation movements of all kinds occurred, changing the social, cultural, and political perceptions. The fourth period (from 1980s to the early 1990s) was when the AIDS issue emerged. The issue of AIDS had a huge impact on the way films dealt with the issue of homosexuality, and lesbianism was also under the radar. It also was the period when many women of all colors and classes started to voice out their marginality in society and the media. The fifth period (from 1990s to this day) is the era of the advent of the queer movement and postmodernism, which have influenced many aspects of the film industry: from the film production to film criticism.

Summary

Because the core purpose of this study is to examine the representations of lesbian images in films and their changes over time, a qualitative methodology was chosen for this study. There are many qualitative methods but because the focus of this study is on the text of the film and it aims to investigate the representations of lesbian images, textual analysis and cultural analysis were chosen as most appropriate approaches. Through textual analysis, this study seeks to find the meanings of lesbianism by examining various signs and symbols that are used in films. Meanwhile, cultural studies will be used to examine the cultural implications of the representations of lesbian images in films and their changes over time.
Because the study will be conducted with textual analysis and cultural studies, the text itself becomes the data for this study. The physical existence that contains the text is called documents and when the texts are the core of the investigation, examining documents becomes the primary task of the study. Because the purpose of this study is to examine the representations of lesbian images in films, films and videotapes will be the primary documents. However, film articles and criticisms in magazines, newspapers, periodicals, and other print materials will be used as secondary data in examining the representations of lesbian images in films.

To perform textual analysis and apply the cultural studies approach, three analytical methods are used in this study: semiotics, narrative analysis, and historical analysis. These analytical methods are commonly used when the purpose of the study is to examine “texts.” These three analytical techniques will be used to examine the representations of lesbian images in films and to bring out their significance and meanings. In order to examine the representations of lesbian images in films thoroughly and to see how the representations of lesbian images have changed over time, five different time periods have been delineated according to the historical, social, and cultural occurrences and events that had an impact on the film industry at the micro level, and the society at the macro level.
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

In this chapter how the representations of lesbianism and lesbian images have been made in various films is examined. Specifically, this study will analyze the signs and the symbols that have been used to represent lesbianism, how lesbian images have been represented, and how the representation of lesbian images in films have changed over time.

Signs/Symbols

Throughout film history, many symbols and signs have been used to represent lesbianism. Some signs and symbols have been obviously used to represent lesbianism while other signs and symbols have to be looked at carefully to understand their use for representing lesbianism. Primarily, the signs that are found to signify lesbianism in this study are based on the social concept of masculinity. The heterosexual social order is based on the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, when a female character does not fit the feminine role, her sexuality becomes questionable. The general characteristics of masculinity are “male aggression, strength, hardness, roughness, and competitiveness” while the characteristics of femininity consist of “female nurture, weakness, softness, smoothness, and co-operativeness” (Dyer, 1997, p. 264). By looking into signs that convey masculine characteristics, this study has found five different types of signs and symbols that have been used in films to represent lesbianism: attire and clothing, name, occupation, location, and gestures and behaviors.
Attire/Clothing

Attire and clothing are one of the elements in this society that people use to express themselves. Attire and clothing are also one of the materials people rely on to make assumptions and judgments of others. They are very important in films to symbolize the character's personality, characteristics, interests, and so on. Attire is one of the symbols and signs that many films have used to represent lesbianism.

The oldest and the most common attire that represents lesbianism may be clothes that are masculine, in other words, men's attire. When women characters are wearing men's clothes, for instance, a suit with a top hat, the purpose is to show gender inversion. The best example to explain this case is Marlene Dietrich in the film *Morocco* (1930). In this film, there is a scene where Marlene Dietrich is dressed up in a tuxedo and a top hat. After dressing like a man she goes out on stage with a cigar in her hand. She then suddenly kisses a woman on the lips who is sitting down at table. Another example of a woman dressing up in a man's clothes is in the film *Queen Christina* (1933). In *Queen Christina*, Greta Garbo is always dressed in a man's attire. Garbo's dressed in man's attire not only represents Queen Christina's ambivalent gender characteristics, but also presents her status as the queen with more authority and power. In the film, *Sylvia Scarlett* (1935), Katherine Hepburn's character, Sylvia is dressed in man's attire only for the purpose to disguise herself as a boy. By dressing herself in a man's suit, Sylvia Scarlett is transformed into Sylvester Scarlett. In *Sylvia Scarlett*, man's attire is used merely for a gender transformational purpose, however, with Hepburn's star image-androgynous image that contains both femininity and masculinity-being dressed in man's attire provides sufficient lesbian sensibility.
Bagdad Café (1988) is another film that uses man’s attire to symbolize lesbianism. In the film, Jasmine (played by Marianne Sagebrecht) mistakenly picks up her husband’s suitcase when she leaves her husband after a fight in the desert. When Jasmine opens the suitcase, there are only men’s clothes in the suitcase. With no other choices, while she is staying in Brenda’s (played by C. C. H. Pounder) motel, she is stuck wearing her husband’s clothes. In this film, men’s attire is used to indicate Jasmine’s gender role in her relationship with Brenda.

Another type of attire that symbolizes lesbianism in films are suits and uniforms. This is especially true for films that were made in the 1950s and 1960s. Suits and uniforms generally consist of a tight skirt, a dress shirt, and a jacket. Suits and uniforms represent rigidity, oppressiveness, and authority/power of the character. These characteristics, especially authority and power, are normally considered to belong to men. Women who display male characteristics are generally thought of as “unnatural,” and therefore, as lesbians. In addition, the emphasis on unnaturalness, power, and authority of the lesbian characters portrays them as predators. These predators are most likely older lesbians chasing after younger girls.

The Killing of Sister George (1968) is a good example of this finding. In the film, June Buckridge (played by Beryl Reid) plays a nurse, Sister George, in a soap opera. June is presented as the butch lesbian with her loud and aggressive characteristics. In contrast, her lover, Childie (played by Susannah York), is portrayed as very feminine and childlike (as the name Childie suggests). While June is seen mostly dressed in suits, Childie is dressed in short pretty dresses. Even in the opening scene, while June is seen walking down the streets very aggressively wearing a tweed suit, Childie is seen inside her house wearing a short pink
dress. The suits that Sister George wears emphasize her butchness and her authoritative presence over Childie in the film.

Jeans and flannel shirts are also the attire that have been used in numerous films to symbolize lesbianism. Jeans and flannel shirts have been considered as the androgynous items for a long period of time. They are worn by both men and women, symbolizing sexual ambiguity. Jeans and flannel shirts along with cowboy boots are the products of the old western culture, which was once considered men’s culture. By wearing the clothes and shoes that once dominated men’s culture, women are resisting a culture that constructs gender binary. This resistance can be seen as an act of social rebellion, and women who participate in this act are considered lesbians for their fight against nature. Therefore, jeans and flannel shirts are associated with women’s rebellion from the dominant culture, in other words, they signify lesbianism.

_Desert Hearts_ (1986) is a good example of how jeans and flannel shirts, the western style look, symbolize lesbianism in films. Vivian (played by Helen Shaver), who is an English literature professor, first appears in the film wearing suits with a tightly controlled hairstyle, indicating her uptight and prim characteristics. As she meets Cay (played by Patricia Charbonneau), and the relationship between them grows, Vivian’s style changes. She starts to wear jeans, and western shirts with cowboy shoes and her hairstyle, instead of being held up tightly, she lets her hair flow more freely as the film progresses. Meanwhile, Cay, the butch lesbian, is always seen wearing denim shirts with the collar turned up and her cowboy boots. Her clothes highlights her butchness denies the appearance of womanhood in her.
Along with jeans and flannel shirts, masculine outfits such as leather jackets, leggings, and vests are other types of attire that are considered as ‘masculine outfits’ and symbolize lesbianism in the women characters. Because this attire crosses within and over the gender binary, when women characters wear these types of clothes, the ambiguity of their gender identity becomes reinforced. This attire is especially ubiquitous in the action-thriller genres such as the *Alien* (1979) series. In the last scene of *Alien*, Ripley (played by Sigourney Weaver) is dressed in a vest and black pants facing the last battle with the alien. With her masculine clothing, Ripley’s strength, focus, independence, and most of all, her muscles are highlighted and the audience is more than sure that Ripley will win the battle against the alien for she is no longer a vulnerable woman, but a strong warrior.

Men’s attire, suits and uniforms, and masculine outfits such as jeans and flannel shirts all have the potential to symbolize lesbianism in films. However, this type of attire is mostly used to derive the “butchness” or “androgynous” out of the lesbian characters. Overly feminine attire can also function to symbolize lesbianism in films. Overly feminine attire, which mostly consists of short skirts, mini dresses, and lingerie like dresses, are used to emphasize the sexiness or the sexual power that the character carries. The sexiness or the sexual power that the overly feminine attire contains signifies dangers and conspiracies. Unlike the butch, whose lesbianism can be recognized at once, femmes can pass as heterosexual and the overly feminine attire contributes to their ability to do so.

*Basic Instinct* (1992) is a good example of how the overly feminine attire functions to symbolize lesbianism. In the film, Catherine Tramell (played by Sharon Stone) is a rich, physically attractive, and gorgeous lesbian who is sought by both men and women. Her sexual power is reinforced by the overly feminine attire that shows off her bodyline and
shape. Her sexual power enables her to manipulate the police force, and especially Nick Curran (played by Michael Douglas). Her sexuality as a lesbian stimulates Nick’s desire for her. Her sexuality and her sexual power are the bases of the danger she carries, and the clothes she carefully chooses to wear increase her control and power.

If the excessively feminine and sexual attire of Catherine assists in bringing out her dangerous femme fatale characteristic, the overly feminine attire of Childie in *The Killing of Sister George* operates in quite the opposite way. The feminine attire of Childie assists in emphasizing her innocence and childlike characteristics. The feminine attire functions to show her as the passive lesbian who in the heterosexual world can be considered as the victim of the older and powerful lesbian.

Meanwhile, the feminine attire of Violet (played by Jennifer Tilly) in *Bound* (1996) functions to indicate the gender role in the lesbian relationship. While, Corky (played by Gina Gershon), an ex-con next door neighbor that Violet has a relationship with, is mostly dressed in heavy black boots, dark drill pants, and cotton tank shirt, showing off her toughness and masculinity with a tattoo in her arm. In contrast to Corky’s masculine looks, which emphasize her butchness, Violet is always dressed in sexy and seductive dresses. The overly sexualized and feminine attire functions as the indicator of Violet’s gender role in her relationship with Corky. Violet is a mistress of a gangster and her hope is to get out of the mob life. When she meets Corky, who is obviously portrayed as a lesbian from the beginning of the film, she feels an immediate connection and soon secretly develops a relationship with her. Her femininity and overflow of sexuality enables her to deceive her boyfriend and eventually conspire against him with Corky. As in *Basic Instinct*, the overly
feminine and sexualized attire in *Bound* is used to symbolize the dangerousness of the lesbian character.

**Name**

Name is another element that symbolizes lesbianism in films. Every name has a meaning behind it, and because of this, the names of the characters are carefully chosen in films for a particular reason. *Rebecca* (1940) is a good example of how a character’s name functions to signify lesbianism. Through various signs and indications, it can be assumed that the relationship between Rebecca (whose character never appears on screen for she is killed off even before the film starts) and Mrs. Danvers (played by Judith Anderson), the housemaid, was a special one. Name is one symbolic indicator of their special relationship. Through the recollection of Mrs. Danvers it is known that Rebecca has called Mrs. Danvers as “Danny” with affection. To Rebecca, Danny was the one to whom she could reveal everything, not her husband. By calling Mrs. Danvers, “Danny,” Mrs. Danvers is transformed into Rebecca’s confidante, trustee, and furthermore, a lover.

*Bound* (1996) is another film that uses the protagonists’ names to symbolize lesbianism. The names of the protagonists in the film are Corky and Violet. The name Corky is associated with male’s genitals, representing Corky as the butch. Meanwhile, the name of the Violet is associated with the color violet, which is the color that is used to signify love between women. The names of the protagonists in this film not only symbolize lesbianism but also the gender role (butch-femme) in their relationship.

Another way to use name as the symbol or sign of lesbianism in films is by giving the female protagonists a man’s name. *G. I. Jane* is a good example. The female protagonist in *G. I. Jane* is Jordan O’Neil (played by Demi Moore). Jordan, which is a masculine name for
a woman, is given to the female protagonist with the intention to suggest her androgynous or masculine characteristics to the audience. Even though Jordan is never explicitly indicated as a lesbian, various signs, including her name, hint at the possibility.

**Occupation**

In some films, occupations are used to symbolize lesbianism and lesbian sensibility in films. As with attire, occupation is another important element that people rely on when examining and perceiving others. In addition, as with attire and names, occupation can also be divided by gender roles. While it is not always the case, some occupations are thought to belong to men while others are thought to belong to women. For instance, while a construction worker or a pilot may be perceived as men’s occupations, a nurse or a dancer may be perceived as women’s. Therefore, when one has an occupation that is considered to belong to another gender’s, that person may be perceived as queer. Because occupation types can be divided by gender roles, some films use occupation to symbolize lesbianism.

*Bound* is a good example of how the protagonist’s occupation is used to symbolize her lesbianism in the film. Corky, the butch lesbian in the film works as a plumber. A plumber, which is generally conceived as a men’s job, highlights Corky’s butchness along with many other elements. Corky being a plumber is never seen as glamorous in the film, except when she has sex with Violet and she becomes naked. In order to do the plumber’s work, Corky is almost always wearing dark pants with a muscle t-shirt and black boots, mostly dirt and oil covered, carrying tool boxes and pipes, which symbolize male genitals. Corky’s occupation as a plumber, not only functions as the sign of her lesbianism, but also her gender role in the lesbian relationship with Violet.
Unlike *Bound*, which is full of visual codes of lesbianism, *Alien* films, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), and *G. I. Jane* (1997) never explicitly mention or indicate lesbianism in the text. However, many people read these films with a lesbian context because of the protagonists. Clarice Starling (played by Jodie Foster), Ripley, and Jordan O’Neil (played by Demi Moore) are all engaged in the work that requires lots of physical activity, strength, and most of all, rationality rather than emotionality. Physical activity, strength, and rationality are all conceived as the characteristics of masculine work, tasks that men are suited to perform.

Clarice, Ripley, and Jordan’s occupations are very similar to one another. Clarice is a FBI trainee/agent, Ripley is a warrant officer and a crew member of a space cargo ship, and Jordan is a navy intelligence officer striving to be the first woman to be in the Navy Seal unit. FBI trainee/agent, a warrant officer, and a navy officer are all occupations posited in the male domain. These occupations are considered to be suitable for men more than for women, because these are all occupations that require physical strength and absence of emotionality. In the male-oriented work force, the only way these women can survive or excell in their jobs is to be stronger and tougher than men, if not be like men.

The film, *Silence of the Lambs* opens with Clarice in physical training. With her great performance, she is immediately accepted into the male FBI institution. Her gender as a woman should be a threat to the androcentric institution, however, her androgynous appearance enables her to be accepted in the system. Clarice’s looks and appearance are very asexual. She is never dressed as feminine, but also she is never seen as too masculine. The excellent record of her physical training (she is mentioned to be in the top quarter of her class) indicates she has the physical strength and instinct as an FBI agent, but her strength is
so reserved and covert that it is hard to designate Clarice as masculine. *The Silence of the Lambs* does not rely on the visual codes to indicate Clarice’s physical strength and masculinity as the *Alien* films and *G. I. Jane* do. Unlike Ripley and Jordan, Clarice does not have to show off her muscles or shave her head to prove her strength. Being an FBI agent already implies her physical strength.

Clarice’s asexuality is possible because she is an FBI agent. As an FBI agent, she does not have to appear feminine to prove her gender identity. In fact, being feminine may become a threat to the male dominated and phallic-centered system. Therefore, as a FBI agent, her androgynous looks and appearances do not draw attention to her sexuality.

Among the *Alien* films, the second film, *Aliens* (1986), uses the occupation as an explicit sign of lesbianism in the film. In *Alien*, Ripley was the only female crew-member of the cargo ship, Nostrodamus. However, in the sequel, *Aliens*, another female crew-member is on board, Vasquez. Ripley is portrayed as asexual; there is no indication of Ripley’s sexuality. Meanwhile, Vasquez (played by Jeanette Goldstein), is portrayed as strong and masculine, indicating her as a butch lesbian. In one shot, a hard-muscled body is seen doing pull-ups on a rail in the cabin. The audience later realizes that the hard-muscled body is Vasquez’s. Shortly after, a male soldier teases Vasquez, asking if she has ever been mistaken for a man. Her reply to this man is, “No, have you?” Throughout the film, Vasquez’s butchness is displayed through her physical strength, smart talk, and most of all, her ability to handle powerful firearms. By positing Vasquez, the butch, as the other only female member in the spaceship, it becomes apparent that only men or butch women can perform such a task as Ripley’s.
Jordan, unlike Ripley and Clarice, has a boyfriend who is also a navy officer. However, their relationship is at stake as Jordan joins the Navy’s special Reconnaissance Program, a testosterone festival. As a navy officer, Jordan is very athletic and masculine. The first scene of Jordan shows her kayaking in the river. Her house, unlike many women’s houses, is not furnished but well equipped with materials such as a training bag and boxing gloves. At the Navy’s special program, every inch of Jordan’s body is pushed until the breaking point during training. Regardless of everybody’s expectation for her to fail, she passes every single step of the program, refusing to “gender norm” the physical fitness tests. Gender norming the physical fitness tests is set up to help female to compensate for their lack of strength compared to males. Jordan refuses to be treated differently from any other man in the program and eventually proves she, as a woman, can be as strong as any of the men.

As the commanding officer and Jordan’s colleagues try to keep Jordan from passing the program, Jordan becomes stronger and tougher. To prove that she is not getting any special treatment as a female, Jordan eventually shaves her head and move into the men’s quarters. The moment Jordan gets her head shaved is when she transforms herself into an ultimate warrior. Jordan can no longer be detected as a woman in the crowd of men. Joining the Navy’s special training program has encouraged Jordan to become one of the boys. Eventually, a moment comes when Jordan yells to the drill instructor (played by Viggo Mortensen), whose mission seems to make Jordan quit the program, to “suck her dick.” This short line, “suck my dick,” suggests that Jordan’s mentality is no longer of a woman’s but of a man’s. The only way Jordan can survive as a navy woman, ironically is when she becomes a navy man.
As Jordan becomes more butch, one begins to wonder about Jordan's sexuality. Her on-going relationship with her boyfriend is fragile and weak to prove that she is straight. Jordan's sexuality becomes more questionable through one incident in the film. As soon as Jordan proves her ability as a Navy SEAL and for the first time receives acknowledgment from her male colleagues after the POW training, she receives a false charge that she's fraternizing with another woman. This other woman is Kathy Blondell, a lesbian ensign. Even though their relationship is merely a platonic friendship, Jordan's butchness and Blondell's sexuality make other people look at their friendship otherwise. Jordan denies the charges and to make things easier she quits the program. However, Jordan's denial of the charge does not necessarily mean she is not a lesbian. Jordan may have used the denial of the charges as a strategy to avoid being a victim of a "witch hunt."

As with the Alien films, G. I. Jane posits another lesbian character with the female protagonist sharing a similar occupation. By creating Blondell as a lesbian, instead of just another female colleague, the occupation of a navy officer in G. I. Jane becomes one of the signs of reading Jordan's sexuality in opposition to the film's intention. In addition, Jordan herself proves that her job can be accomplished only when she eradicates all her femininity and becomes one of the men.

Location

Location is another element that many films use to symbolize lesbianism. Location of the happening events in a film is always chosen for a particular reason. Two particular locations are used when creating the "lesbian mood" in films: desert and all women's/girls' institution.
Desert seems to be the most used location in films that contains or hints of lesbian themes. *Desert Hearts, Bagdad Café, Thelma and Louise* (1991), and *Boys on the Side* (1995) all have their settings in the desert. Desert, which is a popular location for old western films, represents the wildness, uncivilization, adventure, and most of all, freedom to be autonomous and finding the true self. For cowboys and the outlaws, desert is the location where they can show off their masculinity or retrieve their masculinity if they have lost it somewhere else by conquering the wild and uninhibited nature and the native/foreign people. However, for women, desert is the place to be free from the domestic confinements and to achieve autonomy of their own body and their own self.

In *Desert Hearts*, the film takes place in Nevada in the 1950s. Vivian who teaches at Columbia University in New York City comes to Reno to get a quick divorce. As a New Yorker and a professor, Vivian is very stiff and rigid when she first comes to Reno. Her appearance, her manners, and her behavior are all civilized and predictable. However, the frequent encounter with Cay, the wild bohemian lesbian, enables Vivian to become more free spirited and let go of herself. Cay, as a worker in the local casino, helps Vivian to gamble and take chances in her life. And the desert, the New World, where Vivian is located, encourages her to absorb the unpredictable possibilities and to enjoy new adventures.

*Bagdad Café* is another film that is set in the desert, as the title hints. For Brenda, the desert is boredom, isolation, and confinement, but for Jasmine, the desert is a place of adventure, opportunity, and a new start. Unlike Brenda, Jasmine is optimistic (despite her break up with her husband in the middle of nowhere in a foreign country), full of interest (learning to throw a boomerang and doing magic tricks), and passionate in everything she does. Meanwhile, Brenda is jaded and does not find life around her as interesting. Brenda is
full of suspicion when she meets Jasmine for the first time. She feels very uncomfortable with Jasmine’s differences and the changes she brings into her small motel/café. However, the isolation of the desert gives an opportunity for Jasmine and Brenda to get to know each other and understand each other’s differences. Once the differences are embraced, Jasmine and Brenda become best friends and more.

Desert in *Thelma and Louise* also has a significant meaning in the film. Being chased by the patriarchal law, Thelma (played by Geena Davis) and Louise (played by Susan Sarandon) move across the desert to find freedom and their independence from the male-dominated system. Desert, which is a substantial element in the western film genre, is used in *Thelma and Louise* as a location for the female protagonists to accomplish self-reliance and self-discovery. The desert is en route to Mexico where Thelma and Louise try to escape to. What Thelma and Louise learn during their trip on the desolate land is that they do not necessarily need men to sustain themselves and men can rather hinder them from gaining their independence. Therefore, when the FBI closes in on them, Thelma and Louise choose to go over the cliff rather than to surrender and live in the patriarchal system that validates domestic restrictions. Thelma and Louise chose their destiny to die together and be free rather than to live and be oppressed. They are not afraid to make the choice because they are not alone. They have each other and they die as life partners.

In *Boys on the Side*, desert is a special location for the three protagonists. Jane (played by Whoopie Goldberg) and Robin (played by Mary Louise Parker) are traveling to California as perfect strangers and on their way they stop by at Jane’s friend’s, Holly’s, (played by Drew Barrymore) who is suffering from an abusive relationship with her boyfriend. Jane decides to take Holly with her on the road, but her boyfriend intervenes and
tries to stop Holly from going. In the process, Holly hits her boyfriend and the three women strap him into a chair. Holly decides to go on her way so Jane and Robin are on the trip alone again. However, when finding out that Holly’s boyfriend has been killed on the day the three women left, Holly ends up joining in Jane and Robin their road trip together. Instead of getting to California, the three women get to share a house in the desert in Tuscon, Arizona.

For Jane and Robin, who are originally from New York City, the desert is an exotic place and a space of fantasy and surrealism. The exotic atmosphere of the desert encourages Jane and Robin to open up to each other and embrace their differences. Robin reveals her secret of dying of AIDS and Jane takes care of her and gives her comfort. Eventually, Jane and Robin exchange their feelings of love for one another, but Robin is dying. The love between Jane and Robin becomes a surreal experience for Jane as Robin dies in the desert.

All women’s institutions, such as all girls’ school or all girls’/women’s prison are also a popular location that films use when trying to create a lesbian atmosphere, theme, or sensibility. In all women’s institutions, men are excluded from the setting. Exclusion of men creates a motivation for women to seek alternative love, lesbianism. Films such as The Wild Party (1929), Mädchen in Uniform (1931), and Caged (1950) are good examples of how the setting of all women’s institutions are used to symbolize lesbianism in the films.

Both The Wild Party and Mädchen in Uniform are set in an all women’s school. Both of these films show the fun and pleasure in the all-girl living situation rather than the dangers of it. In both films, the danger is not in the tight girl bonding between and among the girls but rather the patriarchal society outside of the institution. Women are secured from
the potential danger of the patriarchal system because the patriarchal system is posited outside of the institution.

The Wild Party is set in an all women’s college where the pleasure is only sustained when the women stay inside the all-female living setting and danger emerges when the women venture outside of the setting. When women step outside the boundary of the all-female living setting, they become the prey of men who are waiting to take advantage of them. Because the film takes place in the all-female living setting, lesbian subtexts are naturally placed within the film despite the fact that there are no particular lesbian characters in the film. Lesbian sensibility is suggested when Stella (played by Clara Bow) jumps onto Helen’s (played by Shirley O’Hara) lap and naturally embraces her, when Stella and the girls dress up as the sexy chorus line showgirls for the all female costume ball, and when Stella sees Helen with George and acts with jealousy.

Mädchen in Uniform is set in a Potsdam boarding school for the daughters of poor Prussian officers. The school contains a very militaristic, authoritative, and very androgynous atmosphere. The headmistress, has an image as a “phallic woman.” As the head of the school, the headmistress becomes the father figure, being in charge of controlling the girls and sustaining the rules. In this oppressive atmosphere, a special but subtle relationship is formed between a teacher, Fraulein von Bernburg (played by Dorothea Wieck) and the students. Being an understanding, loving, and caring teacher, von Bernburg becomes the mother figure for the students. However, this special relationship is disturbed when a student, Manuela (played by Hertha Thiele) in a drunken moment announces her love for the teacher. Even though the headmistress scorns this behavior and has her confined in the infirmary, the sympathetic von Bernbourg and the fellow students understand her repressed
desires. As there are many intimate scenes between the girls in the boarding school, Manuela’s love for von Bernbourg is understood as natural, even though that is not enough to save Manuela.

*Caged* (1950) takes place in a women’s prison, which is controlled by the sadistic, aggressive, and mannish police matron, Evelyn Harper (played by Hope Emerson). Harper finds pleasure in brutalizing the female inmates. A young pregnant woman, Marie Allen (played by Eleanor Parker) is sent to this prison for robbery. She encounters various inmates and guards who try to roughen her up, but her main tormentor is Evelyn. In opposition to Evelyn is Mrs. Benton (played by Agnes Moorehead), the sympathetic, understanding superintendent. Mrs. Benton is also a “butch” type, always in a tailor suit. She tries to protect Marie Allen from the corruption inside the women’s prison. Her nurturing and comforting of Marie Allen seems to be based on her sexual attraction towards Marie Allen.

In order for one to survive in the prison, she must give up her femininity. When an inmate is feminine, in other words, femme, the masculine, butch inmate will prey on her. Knowing this, Evelyn taunts the female inmates by dressing up on her night off and telling them about her date. Evelyn’s conformity to femininity once in a while is not because she likes to be feminine, but because she can use it to taunt the female inmates. When Marie Allen leaves the prison on parole, she is no longer the feminine, innocent young lady. The transformation of Marie Allen is seen when she relinquishes her wedding ring that she was forced to give up when she entered the prison.

**Gestures and Behaviors**

Certain gestures and behaviors of female characters in films give a sense of lesbianism in films. Some gestures and behaviors are explicit and others are implicit and
In this study three different gestures and behaviors of female characters that hint at a sense of lesbianism are found: gaze, touch, and kiss.

Gaze is the most basic expression of longing and desire of the other. When a female character is gazing at another female character for a long time with no particular reason or gazing at the other female character secretly, it becomes clear that there is something more in the gaze. Gaze is a sign of repressed lesbianism, a one way longing for the other, who is mostly a heterosexual woman also desired by men. Gaze is a sign of defeat for the repressed lesbian for she cannot compete against men. She cannot do anything more than to look at her desired one. Films such as *Pandora's Box* (1929) and *The Night of the Iguana* (1964) are good examples of how the female character's gaze at another woman is used to represent lesbianism.

In *Pandora’s Box*, Countess Geschwitz (played by Alice Roberts), a designer, has a passionate interest in Lulu (played by Louise Brooks) whom she met through Alwa (played by Franz Lederer), a show producer. Her attraction to Lulu is obvious by the way she glows as Lulu compliments the Countess on her drawing and when Lulu asks to design a costume for her. When the Countess sees Lulu talking with Alwa together in the corner, she becomes jealous, jealous of Alwa, not Lulu. Her jealous feelings can be detected by the way the Countess looks at them. The long passionate and jealous glances that the Countess casts toward Lulu show the Countess’ desire for Lulu. When Countess Geschwitz gazes romantically at Lulu the gaze is almost as that of a male suitor.

Miss Fellowes (played by Grayson Hall) in *The Night of the Iguana* is a repressed woman who has desire for a young girl but is not aware of what the feeling is. Miss Fellowes tries to hide her desire under religion and devotion to her work. As a choir director, Miss
Fellowes takes her women’s church group on a tour to Mexico. Among the group is Charlotte (played by Sue Lyon), the beautiful young blond girl. Through the gaze towards Charlotte, Miss Fellowes seems to have a special feeling towards her. She is also watching out for the girl. Miss Fellowes’ obsession with Charlotte increases at the entrance of Shannon (played by Richard Burton), the tour guide. When the tour bus breaks down, Shannon and Charlotte go swimming. Miss Fellowes, who is always keeping an eye on Charlotte, screams angrily at Shannon and Charlotte to leave the beach when she sees them together. Later that night, Miss Fellowes, thinking Charlotte is sleeping in her bed, comes to Charlotte to apologize for her behavior earlier on the beach. Her gaze towards Charlotte (who is not there) is soft, sweet, and gentle, at the same time repressing her desire towards Charlotte. When Miss Fellowes learns that Charlotte has sneaked out of her room, she becomes furious at her betrayal. Miss Fellowes does not recognize that there was nothing between them for her to feel betrayed by Charlotte. All Miss Fellowes can do is gaze at Charlotte and feel jealous of her heterosexual relationship with a man.

Touch is used as another expression of lesbianism in films. Compared to the gaze, touch is a more active way in expressing one’s desire for the other. Films such as Pandora’s Box, Mädchen in Uniform, and Rebecca are good examples of how touch is used as a sign of lesbianism.

In both Pandora’s Box and Mädchen in Uniform the touch is in the form of dancing between two women. In the former movie, Lulu and Countess Geschwitz dance together at Lulu’s wedding at the Countess’ request. The Countess does not hide her illicit desire for Lulu and dances seductively. When Dr. Schoen (played by Fritz Kortner) tries to cut in between them, the Countess gives him a challenging look, daring him to intervene in their
dance, just to fail. In the latter film, all the girls in the boarding school get into pairs and waltz together. They dance together as if holding and touching each other is a natural behavior. The girls’ dancing scene carries an overtone of lesbianism, indicating the danger that lies in an all-girl environment.

The touch in *Rebecca* is quite different from the other touches. In the film, the touch that becomes a sign of lesbianism is not between two women but between a woman and the other woman’s personal object, her underwear. When the new Mrs. de Winters (played by Joan Fontaine) ask Mrs. Danvers about Rebecca, the former Mrs. de Winters, in Rebecca’s old room, (which has been maintained exactly the same as when Rebecca was alive), Mrs. Danvers nostalgically talks about Rebecca. Suddenly, Mrs. Danvers takes out one of Rebecca’s underwear and fondles it, while reconstructing the memory of Rebecca. This deviant behavior terrifies the new Mrs. de Winters. By touching and fondling Rebecca’s underwear, a piece of the most private and intimate clothing, Mrs. Danvers’ admiration, desire, and love for Rebecca become apparent.

A kiss between two women can also be considered as a lesbian act. Even though a kiss can mean nothing and a kiss may just be a kiss, it is mostly an active gesture of expressing love for one another. Unlike gaze and touch, kiss is a reciprocal act, an act based on mutual feelings between two people. Because a kiss is an act out of passion and intimacy, when two women are seen kissing each other questions regarding their sexuality can be brought up. Films such as *Queen Christina*, *Desert Hearts*, and *The Color Purple* (1985) are all examples of films of how a kiss between two female characters can be debated in regard to their sexuality.
In *Queen Christina*, Queen Christina’s sexuality is in question throughout the film. The debate about her sexuality becomes heated when she is seen kissing Countess Ebba (played by Elizabeth Young), the only female who seems to exist among many male presences in court. Their kiss takes place their first meeting in the film, but their kiss is passionate and charged with sexuality and real affection. It seems as though their kiss has not been the first. The conversation that ensues after the kiss, which is on spending some time together (alone), verifies their relationship as something more than a queen and a wait on maid.

In *Desert Hearts*, Vivian and Cay share an intimate kiss. After attending a wedding ceremony, Vivian and Cay go to Lake Tahoe to watch the sunrise together. As the sun comes up, Cay reveals her sexuality to Vivian and Vivian tells Cay why they cannot be a couple even though she has a hard time putting it into words. Then the scene jumps to Vivian sitting in the car, soaking wet, while Cay is still standing outside. Cay bangs on the car window and Vivian rolls down the window for her. Cay then pushes her head inside the car and then they kiss. At first, Vivian seems to be hesitant about kissing Cay, but later allows herself to share a deep, passionate kiss. After the kiss, Vivian shuts off herself from Cay feeling confused about her behavior. Later, Cay visits Vivian at her hotel room and confronts her. Vivian unconvincingly explains that the kiss had no meaning and it would not happen again. Unconvinced, Cay seduces Vivian and they have sex. As any other heterosexual romance, the female characters’ feelings for each other are verified through their sharing a kiss and the kiss becomes the catalyst for them having sex together.

In *The Color Purple*, a kiss is shared by Celie (played by Whoopie Goldberg) and Shug (played by Margaret Avery). The relationship between Celie and Shug, a female singer
and also the Mister's (played by Danny Glover) mistress, cannot be defined until the scene where Celie and Shug kiss. Celie is fascinated by Shug, who is independent and has sexual autonomy. Shug delivers her special feelings for Celie through a song that is directly addressed to Celie. Shug being a sexual person, leads the kiss and Celie responds with shyness and embarrassment. Then the touching and embracing ensues and the camera pans out to the windchimes and the scene is over. A couple of scenes later, Shug explains to Celie their relationship as “two married ladies.” By the end of the film, Celie and Shug have left the Mister and are together in Memphis.

**Representation Types of Lesbianism**

Lesbian images and lesbianism in films are not always represented in the same way. There are various attributes that influence the way lesbianism is being represented in films. Lesbianism can be embodied in the female characters, in the relationships between the female characters, or both. In this study, three different representation types of lesbian images and lesbianism in films have been found and examined.

**Stereotype**

Stereotype is the most common and ubiquitous representation type that is used when depicting lesbianism and lesbian images in films. Stereotyping lesbianism in films is done by stereotyping the lesbian character, stereotyping the lesbian relationship, or both. How lesbian characters are stereotyped in various films will be examined first.

Butch and femme are the most widely used stereotypes of lesbian characters in films. Because lesbianism is generally associated with masculinity and it is easier to indicate lesbianism through visual imageries, many lesbians are portrayed as butch rather than as

As aforementioned, butches are generally portrayed as aggressive, mannish, asexual, and unfeminine. However, there is a variation in the degree of butchness that it is unfair to cram different type of butches under a single category. According to Halberstam (1998), butch can be “an overdetermined category at this particular historical moment” and “cannot be explained away simply as the most common form of lesbian stereotyping” (p. 187). In order to locate the butch “generically and historically as well as sexually” (p. 186), Halberstam divided the butch types into six different categories: tomboys, predators, fantasy butches, transvestites, barely butches, and postmodern butches. However, in this study, depending on the style and the degree of butchness, butches are divided into five different types: repressed butch, predatory butch, transvestite butch, feminine butch, and queer butch.

Repressed butches are the ones that have strong desire for other women in the film. In order to hide their lesbianism or their desire from others, the butch represses her feelings and desire for the other woman. The other woman who is mostly portrayed as heterosexual, pursues a relationship with a man. The butches try to compete against men through jealousy or jealous acts but are only defeated. In general, as sexually repressed women, repressed butches are portrayed more of as asexual than mannish or masculine. Countess Geschwitz in
Pandora's Box, Mrs. Danvers in Rebecca, and Miss Fellowes in Night of the Iguana are good examples of a repressed butch.

Lulu is the object of the Countess' affection. She proves her love for Lulu by making a spectacle of herself in the courtroom to help Lulu escape and by providing financial support for Lulu. Moreover, the Countess proves her love for Lulu by sexually engaging with Lulu's blackmailer to save her. Regardless of the Countess' efforts, Lulu does not recognize the Countess' love but only uses her. The Countess who was active in pursuing Lulu in the beginning of the film, gradually represses her desire and engages only in selfless act of love for Lulu. She acknowledges that she cannot compete against many men that Lulu is involved with to win Lulu over. Unfortunately, as many other men who have fallen for Lulu, the Countess encounters a cruel destiny because of her love.

Mrs. Danvers loves Rebecca who does not exist any more. Regardless of Rebecca's death, Mrs. Danvers carries Rebecca's spirit with and within her. Being in loved with a dead person, Mrs. Danvers is portrayed as neurotic and repressed. She does not open up to anybody else and seems to be always engaged in her own world. Her hair is always tightly pulled back and she is always wearing her housemaid's uniform. There is no sexual energy around Mrs. Danvers and the only time she becomes sexually aroused is when she fondles Rebecca's underwear. However, this act only reinforces the notion of Mrs. Danvers as neurotic and unpleasantly mysterious. It seems as if Rebecca's death has also killed Mrs. Danvers sexual energy.

Miss Fellowes represses her lesbianism and lesbian desire through her devotion to religion. Miss Fellowes is portrayed as the typical stereotyped lesbian, a neurotic and a closeted one. Her repressed lesbianism is manifested through her attempt to control
Charlotte, her object of desire. She is always keeping an eye on the girl and tries to separate the girl from Shannon, the male tour guide. She believes that Charlotte has made the trip because of her and thus, she can control Charlotte the way she wants to. When Charlotte is swimming with Shannon and Miss Fellowes sees them together, she yells at the girl to come back. Her voice is full of contempt and jealousy. She yells at the girl, “You only got to come on this trip because of me!...Stay away from that man!...” Later that night she tries to apologize to Charlotte for her behavior at the beach just to find out that Charlotte has slipped out of her room. Her sweet and soft apology turns into expression of anger and betrayal. Her anger is not only towards Charlotte who does not seem to understand her feeling towards her, but also towards herself for not being able to control the girl. However, it seems as if Charlotte is not the only person who does not understand Miss Fellowes’ behavior. Shannon, when visiting his friend, Maxine (played by Ava Gardner) tells her about his tour group and how Charlotte is traveling under the control of a butch vocal teacher. Later in the film, Maxine confronts Miss Fellowes about her unnatural behavior and tells her, “Let’s level for a while, butch ole gal. You know what you’re sore about, what you’re really sore about, is that little quail of yours has a natural preference for men!” When confronted by Maxine, Miss Fellowes is oblivious to what Maxine is talking about. She reacts by asking Shannon, who intervenes in this confrontation, “What is she talking about?” When Maxine confronts Shannon for his intervention, Shannon explains, “Miss Fellowes is a highly moral person. If she ever recognized the truth about herself, it would destroy her.” Miss Fellowes is not only defeated by the heterosexual order of society but also will have to pay her punishment by repressing her lesbian desires and sexuality throughout her life for Miss Fellowes, herself, cannot handle her lesbianism.
The second lesbian stereotype, a predatory butch is the type that finds pleasure in torturing other women by using their power and authority. The power relation between the predator and the prey is usually shown in the S-M (sadism-masochism) power dynamic. Both Sister George and Mercy Croft in *The Killing of Sister George* and Evelyn in *Caged* are good examples of predatory butches.

Sister George, whose real name is June Buckridge but goes along with her TV show character’s name, is a soap opera actress whose character is soon to be killed off. Sister George is a loud-mouthed, mostly drunken, aggressive type of butch who has a relationship with a younger girl, Childie, who is mostly confined in her house by Sister George. The S-M relationship between Sister George and Childie is very explicit in the infamous cigar scene. As a punishment, Sister George makes Childie eat the butt of her cigar. Cigar, being the symbol of phallus, this punishment is based on the act of oral sex. When Childie first bites into the cigar her face looks disgusted and humiliated. However, her face changes from disgust to pleasure and later she begins to enjoy the cigar. Seeing Childie’s pleasure, George yells at her to stop. Childie responds with, “What, stop eating this lovely cigar?” Childie’s enjoyment of the punishment gives no pleasure to Sister George. This cigar scene reveals the S-M power dynamic between the two characters but also shatters it by Childie’s pleasure and Sister George’s defeat.

The bigger predatory butch in the film, however, is Mercy Croft, an executive at BBC. Unlike the loud-mouthed, simple, and aggressive Sister George, Mercy Croft is a sophisticated and opportunistic predatory butch. Mercy Croft does not allow Sister George’s lesbian acts because they are loud and aggressive. She, however, allows herself to engage in lesbianism because her acts are sophisticated and sleek. Mercy Croft is portrayed as a more
dangerous character than Sister George because her acts are performed subtly, but powerfully. She lures Childie away slowly through their various secret meetings. Her status as an executive not only gives her the power to win Childie’s heart but also to destroy Sister Georges’ career and eventually her life.

Evelyn in *Caged* is a sadistic predatory butch matron. Even to get the smallest pleasure, the inmates have to bribe her. Evelyn uses her status as a matron to torture and bully the women inmates, especially the new, feminine inmates, such as Marie Allen. Evelyn throws Marie Allen into the solitary room and even shaves off her head to discipline Marie Allen as well as for her own selfish pleasure. Even when Mrs. Benton intervenes and tries to stop Evelyn’s merciless acts, Evelyn responds with leaking a story about Mrs. Benton to the press that can be scandalous. Nothing can stop Evelyn’s cruel and vicious behavior until she meets her death.

The third stereotype category, transvestite butch, is the type who transforms herself into a man by cross-dressing. By cross-dressing, the transvestite butch cannot be gender-identified for she is no longer a woman but also not yet a man. The gender ambiguity the transvestite butch carries, makes her portrayed as an incomplete human being trapped with identity and inner conflicts. Queen Christina in *Queen Christina* and Sylvia or Sylvester in *Sylvia Scarlett* are good examples of the transvestite butch.

As a monarch, the only way Queen Christina can perform her active duty is by becoming a man. She transforms herself into a man by cross-dressing, however, the cross-dressing only enables her to transform as a man (status) but not as a male (gender). Her cross-dressing is the symbol of her power and her authority as the monarach figure but that does not change her biological status as a woman. When she is not cross-dressed, she
remains a feminine woman. Her cross-dressing is not only an expression of power and authority as a monarch but also an expression of resistance to an arranged political marriage. When she is dressed as a man, there is no need for her to get married. As Queen Christina says, “I shall die a bachelor.” Queen Christina can survive as a monarch only when she transforms herself into a man. When she fails to do so and desires to live as a woman, she cannot be a monarch.

Sylvia Sylvester also transforms herself into a boy through cross-dressing. Her intention is to masquerade as a boy to help her criminal father leave the country. The only difference between Queen Christina’s cross-dressing and Sylvia’s cross-dressing is that while the former functions as a sign of authority and power but keeping the gender of Queen Christina unchanged, the later functions to completely transform Sylvia’s gender. That is, while Queen Christina is still perceived as a woman after her cross-dressing, Sylvia is perceived as a boy, as Sylvester. Sylvester (Sylvia in men’s clothes) is loved by both a woman (who thinks Sylvester is a man) and a man (who has ‘a queer felling when looking at her’). Sylvia’s cross-dressing leaves her in both lesbian and gay sexual situations. Sylvia Scarlett, the combination of Sylvia Snow and Sylvester Scarlett, cannot be identified through the conventional gender definition. She is little bit of this and that.

The fourth category of stereotypes, feminine butch, is the type that is coded as a butch but is softened with femininity. Because there are only few hints of masculinity in the feminine butch, the lesbianism in the feminine butch can easily be erased or become invisible. At the expense of masculinity, feminine butches are portrayed rather in a positive manner compared to other type of butches who are generally portrayed as neurotic,
unnatural, and mannish and therefore, as a threat to the heterosexual order of society. Cay in Desert Hearts is a good example of the feminine butch.

In Desert Hearts it is hard to identify Cay as a lesbian just by her appearance. She does have short hair and wears denim shirts and cowboy boots but that cannot be enough to put her in the lesbian category. Rather than through her appearance, Cay’s butchness is coded through her personality and behaviors. Cay is spontaneous and full of free spirit, which can be detected through her love for horses and fast cars and her working at a casino, a place of uncertainty and fantasy. Her wild unfeminine characteristic is best shown in the scene when she first sees Vivian. When Cay sees Frances (played by Audra Lindley) driving with Vivian in her car and passing her by, Cay suddenly puts her car in reverse and drives at the top speed to catch up with them. She continues to drive in reverse until she meets a truck coming her way. Cay’s butchness can also be read through her relationship with Vivian. Cay is the one who is always leading Vivian into new things, such as gambling and risk taking for their love and relationship. Even in the sex scenes between the two, it is always Cay who is leading and Vivian who follows. The sex scenes place Cay as the active butch and Vivian the passive femme.

The fifth category, the queer butch is the type who does not fit into a single category. Unlike the four other categories of butch type, queer butch does not necessarily fit as a stereotype because of multiplicity that queer butch type contains. Representations of queer butch are fluid, dynamic, and share the least commonality among the queer butch representations. Vasquez in Aliens, Corky in Bound, Cleo in Set it Off, and Brandon Tenna or Teena Brandon in Boys Don’t Cry (1999) all fit as examples of queer butch.
Vasquez in *Aliens* is portrayed as very masculine and mannish. In fact, she is so extremely mannish (her extremely short hair, physical strength, her great ability to control the firearms) that she can pass as a man. She is teased by her colleague whether she has ever been mistaken for a man. Vasquez's masculinity is portrayed as inherent especially within the context of the film. Vasquez's hypermasculinity threatens the gender binary because she is anatomically a woman but she is portrayed as otherwise. Because her hypermasculinity threatens the gender binary and makes other male characters look effeminate, she dies earlier in the film as the first victim of the aliens.

Corky, another masculine butch, is not in question of her sexuality. She is an admitted lesbian who is seen in a lesbian bar, Watering Hole. Her mannish appearance (dark boots, dark drill pants, and tank shirts) and her status as a plumber/handyman and an ex-convict all function as the indicator of her sexuality. However, unlike other butch-femme relationship, it is Violet who attempts to initiate their relationship through seduction after a heated sexual encounter. In addition, unlike other butches, Corky is portrayed as sexy with her pouty lips (a feminine sex symbol) and feminine body shape that is shown after Corky and Violet's sex scene (interestingly, it is the naked body of Corky's that is shown, not the femme, Violet's). Corky's sex appeal makes it hard to define her under a single category of a masculine butch. Along with sexuality, Corky's weak physical strength (contradictory to her masculine appearance) shown when she is recklessly knocked out three times by Caesar (played by Joe Pantoliano). Corky's womanness, weakness, and vulnerability is revealed through her defeat to Caesar. Corky may represent the new type of butches in the 90's who contain femininity under the masculine appearances, replacing the old mannish, masculine butches whose mannish indicators and masculinity appear both inside and out.
Cleo in *Set it Off* follows the convention of the old masculine butches. She is portrayed as masculine, loudmouthed, tough, and bullying butch who enjoys seeing her girlfriend stripping in front of her. Unlike other butches, Cleo is depicted as the angry black butch. Being a black lesbian, she is racially and sexually discriminated at her workplace and is taunted by the black men in her neighborhood. Her anger at the social system is portrayed to be grander than the other three women whom she robs the bank with because of her black working class masculinity. Her blackness not only functions to make her masculinity more invisible, but also to symbolize extreme violence which is generally associated with blackness. Eventually, Cleo is a character that is formed with the stereotyped conception of race, class, and sexuality.

Brandon Teena or Teena Brandon in *Boys Don’t Cry* is a good example of an unidentifiable butch or the postmodern/queer butch. Unlike other butch lesbians, Brandon/Teena’s gender is at question before her sexuality is. Anatomically, Brandon is a girl, however, she cannot be identified more as a girl than as a boy. Her choice of looking like a boy is not for gender disguise but because she truly feels herself to be a man. When she is confronted about her gender, Brandon claims that she is a hermaphrodite who was born with deformed sexual organs. Whether this is the truth or not, she has chosen to become a man, not a woman. S/he stuffs a dildo in her/his pants and tapes her/his breasts to hide every trace of femininity in her/his body. Instead of identifying gender, Brandon performs gender. The act of gender is what Butler (1990) calls gender performativity. Butler’s (1990) claim is that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results” (p. 25). It is not the inherent sex that defines Brandon’s gender, but rather her/his repetitive and
strenuous performance of man that marks her/his gender. Brandon’s gender performance as a man breaks the boundary of normative heterosexuality, which confines everyone as either male or female and nothing between. Because Brandon’s gender is not identifiable it is difficult to categorize him as the butch lesbian even though s/he embodies the typical characteristics of the mannish butch. The impossibility of identifying Brandon/Teena makes her/him queer.

Meanwhile, Lulu in Pandora’s Box, Childie in The Killing of Sister George, Catherine (played by Sharon Stone) in Basic Instinct (1991), and Violet in Bound are all examples of femme characters in films. These characters, unlike butch, are very feminine and sexual, and can easily pass as heterosexuals. Femmes are mostly stereotyped as passive, neurotic, or dangerous because of their deceitful passing ability as heterosexuals. The femininity femmes possess becomes a tool of deception allowing them to pass as straight. Femmes use their sexual power as a weapon to achieve their goals and to get what they want.

Lulu in Pandora’s Box is a good example of femme. Lulu first appears in the film as innocent and childish. Yet she is charged with sexual energy that everybody around her cannot get enough of her. Lulu’s powerful sexuality, however, not only brings tragic death of her first lover, Dr. Schoen, but also brings about the ruin of herself and everybody around her. Lulu uses her sexual charm as a weapon to avoid her ruin. She not only blackmails Dr. Schoen into marriage, but also seduces Dr. Schoen’s son, Alwa, to help her flee from the law after she escapes the courtroom when she is about to be charged with manslaughter.

Lulu’s sexuality and charm seem also to have an effect on women. Countess Geschwitz, also falls for Lulu and develops a passionate lust and desire for her. Lulu’s use of
her sexual charm is not limited to men. She uses it toward the Countess as well. Lulu, who is being blackmailed by Rodrigo (played by Carl Raschig) reaches out to the Countess for help. Lulu tells the Countess that she is the only one who can help her. Then Lulu lies to the Countess that Rodrigo is very interested in the Countess and the only way Rodrigo will stop blackmailing her is if the Countess engages in a sexual act with him. When Lulu pleads for help to the Countess, she strokes the Countess’ arm gently in a romantic and sexual way, engaging in a lesbian sexual situation. The Countess agrees to engage herself in a heterosexual ploy regardless of her disgust with Rodrigo. After seeing the Countess leaving with Rodrigo, Lulu claps her hands together because everything has worked out the way she wanted. For Lulu, the Countess as many men, is just another object she uses to achieve her will. Lulu becomes the typical femme by using her sexuality to manipulate both men and the butch, Count Geschwitz.

Childie in *The Killing of Sister George* is another example of a typical femme. As with Lulu, Childie is portrayed as innocent and childlike (her doll collection symbolizes her infantile characteristics). In her relationship with Sister George, she follows Sister George’s lead and acts passively and helplessly. However, behind her innocent and childish looks, Childie plans a scheme of betraying Sister George. She secretly meets with Mercy Croft, the more powerful butch, various times and fools Sister George by leaving her and running into Mercy’s arms.

Catherine, as many other femme characters, use her sexuality and sexual power to manipulate men and to get what she wants. Catherine is the typical femme character that has been created to serve the fantasies of male conquest. Unlike other lesbian femmes, Catherine is portrayed as bisexual and there are two reasons for this. First, by portraying Catherine as
bisexual, her sexual power can be perceived as more dangerous, for her sexuality is flexible and cannot be identified under one category. Catherine, who is a sexually powerful person, can make both men and women her prey (she is manipulative). Second, by portraying Catherine as bisexual, it is easier for her lesbianism to be cured once she meets the right man. After Catherine’s lesbian lover is killed, Catherine’s lesbian inclination disappears and she is changed into a straight woman through her relationship with Nick (played by Michael Douglas) (to serve the fantasies of male conquest).

Violet in *Bound* is a femme who uses her passing ability as heterosexual to obtain what she wants. Violet has a mobster boyfriend, Caesar, whose job is laundering money for his boss. Violet falls in love with Corky, the ex-con neighbor who is working as the handyman/plumber of the building they live in. After manifesting their love for one another through a sexual act, Violet and Corky plan to steal two million dollars away from Caesar who is in the process of laundering the money. Violet convinces Corky that Caesar will never suspect them for stealing the money together for she has the ability to pass as heterosexual. To prove Violet’s passing ability, Caesar does not suspect Corky and Violet together for stealing the money, but Violet and another mobster Johnnie Marzoni (played by Christopher Meloni). Towards the end of the film, Caesar finds out that Corky and Violet together steal the money. As soon as he realizes the relationship between Corky and Violet, Corky is no longer perceived as a woman to him but a butch, mannish lesbian. He beats Corky up so she becomes unconscious, and the money is left to Violet and himself. Violet, however, has a gun in her hand while Caesar is unarmed. Violet’s ability to pass as a straight woman (or her past as a straight woman) makes Caesar think that Violet cannot shoot him. He is wrong, and Violet eventually pulls the trigger. By killing Caesar, Violet’s sexuality is
no longer ambivalent but is proved as lesbian. Violet’s ability to pass as a straight woman has endangered the lives of many men as well as Corky’s, making her join the femme circle.

Not only are butch and femme the most commonly used stereotypes of lesbian characters in films, but they are also the mostly commonly used stereotypes of lesbian relationships in films. The butch-femme relationship is based on the stereotypical conception of lesbian relationship as a female version of heterosexual relationship. While the butch plays the gender role of man, femme plays the gender role of woman. As men and women each conform to the binary of the gender roles, so, too, butch and femme in the butch-femme relationship conform to the gender binary of masculinity and femininity. This is exemplified by the relationships of Sister George-Childie and Mercy Croft-Childie in *The Killing of Sister George*, Corky and Violet in *Bound*, and Cleo and her girlfriend in *Set it Off*.

In *The Killing of Sister George*, the relationship between Sister George and Childie follows the conventional heterosexual relationship. As the butch, Sister George’s character is the embodiment of the typical characteristics of masculinity. She takes a forceful, militaristic, aggressive, and active role in her relationship with Childie. Meanwhile, as a femme, Childie is portrayed as passive, infantile, weak, and dependent. The independent-dependent relationship can be understood by how Sister George and Childie are posited in the economic structure. In the beginning of the film, Childie is shown as confined within their home, the domestic sphere, while Sister George is seen striding on the streets and in her workplace, the public sphere. The housebound Childie indicates her financial and social dependence on Sister George. Childie’s dependence on Sister George gives Sister George authority and power over Childie, bringing the S-M power dynamics into their relationship. However, as the film progress, Childie is seen to step out of the domestic boundary: she goes
to work and to the theater, to secretly meet Mercy Croft. The power relationship between Sister George and Childie breaks as Childie frequently leaves the house.

Childie’s break off from the domestic confinement also becomes the beginning of her relationship with Mercy Croft, another butch type in the film. Unlike the buffoonery Sister George, Mercy Croft is sophisticated and sleek. As a BBC executive, she also possesses both economic and social power and authority. Mercy uses her status not only to fire Sister George from the show but also to steal Childie away from her. As Childie breaks the butch-femme relationship with Sister George, she engages in a new butch-femme relationship with Mercy Croft. Instead of leaving for another man, Childie leaves for another woman who is more powerful (both socially and economically) and an authoritative butch. This indicates Childie’s inclination for a lesbian S-M relationship.

Corky and Violet in Bound also share a butch-femme relationship. However, unlike The Killing of Sister George, their relationship is not based on the S-M power dynamics between the butch and the femme. In fact, it is the femme that initiates and is active in the sexual relationship. In addition, it is the femme who saves the relationship from endangerment, not the butch.

Corky and Violet’s butch-femme relationship is not based on power dynamics but rather on visual imageries. From the beginning of the film, Corky’s butchness can be decoded through her wardrobe (dark boots, muscle t-shirt) and the masculine tattoo on her arm. Violet, meanwhile, is encoded with hyper-femininity through her clothes and her whining voice. While Corky’s sexuality is apparent, Violet’s is not. In addition, she has a long-term boyfriend, indicating her heterosexuality. Therefore, Corky cannot initiate their relationship for she does not understand Violet’s true sexuality. However, Violet can easily
sense Corky’s sexuality, through the masculine visual codes that are posited on her. Therefore, she can be the initiator and the active one of their relationship. To prove that, it is Violet who seduces Corky not the other way around. Their sexual engagement is always lead by Violet and Corky is the one who follows. In addition, regardless of Corky’s butch appearance, unlike previous butches, Corky contains feminine sexuality in herself. Therefore, their relationship cannot follow the conventional S-M power dynamics but rather is portrayed with a balanced power dynamic. By stripping off the masculinity of the butch in the bedroom, Corky and Violet’s relationship is created not only for the film plot but also to please the heterosexual male’s fantasy of two women making out.

Cleo and her girlfriend in Set it Off is another clear example of the butch-femme relationship. Their relationship in the film is used to highlight Cleo’s butchness. The relationship between Cleo and her girlfriend is more sexual than emotional. Like many men in a heterosexual relationship, Cleo is very active and is the initiator of the sexual engagement with her girlfriend. Her girlfriend, meanwhile, like many other femmes, is passive and follows Cleo’s lead. In the film, there is a scene where Cleo is enjoying watching her girlfriend doing a strip show for her. This shows how Cleo is consuming her girlfriend’s feminine body for her own sexual pleasure just as many men do in the patriarchal society. While Cleo robs the bank and bring in lots of cash into the house, Cleo’s girlfriend provides Cleo a sexual service and receives a little portion of that money. Cleo is a replacement of a man and the relationship with her girlfriend is a replacement of a heterosexual relationship.

Lesbians in films are most commonly stereotyped as butch or femme. Depending on the characteristic and the degree of masculinity of the lesbian character, the lesbian character
can either be portrayed as any of the five different butch types or a femme. Butches are portrayed as predators of (straight) women and eventually threats to the heterosexual order of society. Their in-between status of the gender role (not women but not men) influences their sexuality to be represented as deviant. The deviant sexuality of the butch threatens the social order of patriarchy and heterosexuality, therefore, many of the butch characters are killed off (Evelyn, Vasquez, Cleo, and Brandon Teena) or punished by the society in other ways through humiliation, denial, and defeat (Queen Christina, Miss Fellowes, Sister George).

Meanwhile, femmes are not portrayed as deviant as the butches, for they take the gender role of femininity. The embodiment of femininity within the femme allows her to be considered less of a threat to the heterosexual social order. However, femmes are portrayed as dangerous embodiment of sexuality because femmes use their sexuality and sexual power as weapons to gain what they want. With the femme, the danger does not lie in her lesbianism (as it does for the butch) but lies in her use of sexuality. Whichever way lesbian characters may be portrayed, the representations of the lesbian characters are hardly positive when stereotyped.

The butch-femme relationship is also the most commonly used stereotype of representing lesbian relationships. The butch-femme relationship is based on the notion of gender binary. Therefore, in the butch-femme relationship, the masculine butch takes the man’s gender role, while the feminine femme takes the woman’s gender role. The power distribution within the butch-femme relationship is hardly balanced. The butch usually dominates the femme body, involving the S-M power dynamics. Because the butch-femme relationship is based on the notion of masculinity and femininity, this relationship can be easily replaced with the heterosexual relationship.
Invisibility

Another representation type of lesbianism and lesbian images in films is invisibility through annihilation. If lesbian images in films are not (negatively) stereotyped, they are erased and denied through the process of invisibility. In this study, two different ways of eradicating lesbianism and lesbian images in films have been found.

The first way of annihilating lesbianism and lesbian images is by killing off the (potential) lesbian character in the film. *Rebecca* (1940) and *The Children’s Hour* (1962) are good examples of how this occurs.

In *Rebecca*, Rebecca is the lesbian character that is made invisible. In fact, Rebecca’s character is killed off in the film even before the story begins. The audience is posited in the same situation as the new Mrs. de Winter, who has just married Maxim de Winter and moved into his mansion. As the new Mrs. de Winter, the audience encounters Rebecca only through other people’s memory and their recollection of her. The new Mrs. de Winter is told that Rebecca has committed suicide and Maxim is very saddened at Rebecca’s sudden death.

At the end of the film, it is revealed that Rebecca has not committed suicide by drowning herself in the sea but has been murdered by Maxim. Through Maxim’s revelation to the new Mrs. de Winter, Rebecca’s deviant sexuality is hinted. Maxim tells the new Mrs. de Winter that Rebecca was “incapable of love, or tenderness, or decency.” He explains how many men were attracted to Rebecca. So when Rebecca chose him as her marriage partner, many people were telling him that he was the luckiest man on earth. Then he goes on to explain what had happened on their honeymoon. On their honeymoon, Rebecca told Maxim that their marriage was a sham and that Maxim had fallen as her victim. Maxim tells the new
Mrs. de Winter, "...She told me all about herself. Everything. Things I’ll never tell a living soul. I wanted to kill her."

With the surfacing of Rebecca’s body, the question of whether Rebecca committed suicide or was murdered goes on trial. Rebecca’s cousin, Favell (played by George Sanders) believes that Maxim has killed Rebecca because of her promiscuity and that she was carrying his (Favell’s) baby. However, the doctor whom Rebecca privately went to see reveals that Rebecca had cancer that was incurable. Rebecca dying of cancer justifies as her motivation to commit suicide and Maxim is off the hook.

Rebecca’s deviant sexuality as a lesbian is rendered invisible through Favell’s belief that Rebecca was carrying his baby. The context of what Maxim has told the new Mrs. de Winter about Rebecca, changes from lesbianism to Rebecca’s promiscuity through Favell’s belief of Rebecca carrying his baby. Maxim may have killed Rebecca because of her promiscuous acts, not her lesbianism. Favell’s false belief renders Rebecca’s lesbianism narratively invisible with Rebecca’s physical invisibility. Whether it was Rebecca’s promiscuity or lesbianism that caused Maxim to kill her, Maxim’s true motivation cannot be revealed because of Rebecca’s on-screen non-presence. Even though Rebecca’s lesbianism can be hinted at through Mrs. Danvers character and Maxim’s ambivalent revelation of Rebecca’s secret, lesbianism is annihilated through the physical non-existence of Rebecca in the film.

The death of Martha Dobie (played by Shirley MacLaine) in The Children’s Hour is another good example of how lesbianism is annihilated through the death of a (potential) lesbian character. The story begins when a child tells her grandmother a lie that two teachers in her boarding school, Martha and Karen (played by Audrey Hepburn) are having an
“unnatural affair.” The false accusation circles as a rumor and eventually devastates both Martha’s and Karen’s lives. The boarding school, which was starting to make profits, meets a crisis as all the students withdraw from the school one day. Wondering what is going on, Martha and Karen find out that they have been falsely accused of lesbianism. The problem is that Martha has discovered the truth of her own lesbianism through the false accusation. She confesses her feelings for Karen, and then guilt stricken Martha commits suicide by hanging herself for she cannot handle the nature of her true sexuality.

The lesbian relationship between Martha and Karen could have developed throughout the film. However, by killing off Martha, lesbianism is naturally annihilated in the film. Towards the end of the film, there is a scene where Martha and Karen are in the same room and Martha reveals her true feelings towards Karen. Full of self-hatred and fear, Martha tells Karen, “I’m guilty! I’ve ruined your life, and I’ve ruined my own. I feel so damn sick and dirty I just can’t stand it anymore.” Karen’s response, in return, is a warm smile and a suggestion that they go away together and start over a new life. She sends the tormented Martha back to her room, and guilt-stricken Martha eventually kills herself.

The film never explicitly mentions lesbianism. It can only be hinted through Martha’s tormented monologue and Karen’s response. Karen’s desire for Martha is indicated by her encouraging response to Martha’s confession. Thus, the feeling that Martha and Karen have for each other is the same and mutual. Through the confession scene, it is understood that Martha and Karen’s lesbian relationship could have been developed. However, by killing off Martha, lesbianism is automatically rendered invisible. Karen’s farewell to the dead Martha in her coffin (“Good-bye Martha. I’ll love you until I die.”) is
very suggestive of lesbianism and makes one wonder what would have been if Martha was alive.

Another way of annihilating lesbianism is converting the lesbian characters into heterosexuals in films. The conversion of the lesbian character's sexuality is justified by the myth that all women are lesbians until they meet the right men. *Personal Best* (1982) and *Chasing Amy* (1997) are good examples of how lesbianism is rendered invisible through the process of the lesbian character's conversion of sexuality.

In *Personal Best*, Tory (played by Patrice Donnelly) and Chris (played by Mariel Hemingway) are a lesbian couple who are both sexually attractive, strong, and androgynous (they are both athletes and their names suggest androgyny). Tory and Chris are both training to participate in the Moscow Olympics. As an older and more experienced woman, Tory is more active and in control of their relationship as well as her athletic performance than Chris. In the beginning of the film, the two women are seen running a race. While Tory's performance is good, Chris gives a bad performance. Tory's encouragement and support for Chris leads them to their physical engagement. Tory, as the caregiver and supporter of Chris, is also the seducer. Tory is always the one who initiates physical contact (her suggestion of arm wrestling with Chris, her persuading the coach to accept Chris on the team so they can sleep and train together) and sexual engagement.

Tory and Chris' relationship is sustained sexually until Chris's athletic performance exceeds Tory's. Chris is able to prove herself as an athlete without Tory's support and help. Tory's athletic advice, which has once benefited Chris, is no longer in use as Chris improves. In fact, Tory's advice works as adversary, only to make Chris hurt herself. The coach
accuses Tory of giving the wrong advice deliberately, but Chris is not fully convinced. However, through this incident the three-year relationship between Chris and Tory is over.

The reversal in the athletic ability between Tory and Chris functions to hint Chris's sexuality. Once the relationship with Tory is over, Chris meets a handsome, young Olympic gold medalist and immediately falls in love with him. Chris and her new boyfriend go to a bar and they see Tory sitting in the bar upstairs. The new man, seeming to know the two's relationship, asks Chris about Tory and why they have separated (as a team). Chris replies that Tory used to be her roommate and she is not sure what had happened between them to cause separation. Later, Chris's boyfriend asks Chris about her relationship with Tory (for their relationship was no secret), and Chris replies that there is nothing to tell about their relationship and she does not see Tory anymore, anyway. Chris's conversion to a heterosexual woman has not only erased the possibility of Chris's lesbian desire and lesbianism of the future but also of the past. To Chris, a lesbian experience with Tory was just what she needed while she was training, but as she has met the right man, she no longer needs a lesbian relationship. In addition, Chris's conversion to a heterosexual is justified as she and Tory sustain their “friendship.”

*Chasing Amy* is another good example of a film that uses lesbian character's conversion of sexuality to erase and deny lesbianism and lesbian experience in the film. The film is about Holden (played by Ben Affleck), who draws comic books. Holden has a friend named Banky (played by Jason Lee) who has been his best friend and a co-worker for years. Holden and Banky go to a comic book convention, one day and meet a fellow artist, Alyssa (played by Joey Lauren Adams). Holden immediately falls in love with her thinking that he and Alyssa had “shared a moment.” Holden assumes that his love for Alyssa is mutual.
What Holden does not know about Alyssa is that she is a lesbian. Holden discovers this fact in a lesbian bar and becomes disappointed. Alyssa shows up at Holden and Banky’s place later on and explains how she wants to continue her friendship with Holden. Even though Holden and Alyssa remain friends, Holden finds himself to be in love with Alyssa anyway. Besides loving Alyssa, his friendship with Banky starts to cause trouble. Banky, believing that Holden’s relationship with Alyssa has been affecting their friendship, tries to convince Holden not to see Alyssa. He ends up asking Holden to choose between him and Alyssa, which hints that he may be secretly in love with Holden. Holden eventually reveals his love to Alyssa. Alyssa becomes frustrated at first, but it turns out that Alyssa loves Holden enough to allow the relationship to grow beyond friendship. Everything goes well until Holden learns of Alyssa’s sexual history with men. Disgusted, Holden calls the relationship off. After a conversation with his friends at a diner, Holden comes up with a solution to solve the problems he has had with both Banky and Alyssa. However, Holden’s idea turns out not to be the best solution and everybody ends up going their own way.

The heterosexual male point of view that the film possesses (through the myth of ‘all women are lesbians until they meet the right men’) enables Alyssa’s lesbianism to be annihilated in the film. Alyssa’s lesbianism is used only for Holden’s (and the male spectator’s) fascination and fantasy he has for lesbianism. However, when lesbianism becomes the obstacle of Holden’s pursuit of a relationship with Alyssa, Alyssa’s lesbianism is readily erased. The heterosexual male point of view in the film is proved by the way Holden’s attitude/feelings towards Alyssa change. The reason Holden becomes obsessed with Alyssa is because of his belief that Alyssa has never slept with another guy before because she is a lesbian. When he learns about Alyssa’s past with men, he decides to leave
her. While Holden is able to tolerate Alyssa’s promiscuity as a lesbian he cannot accept the idea of Alyssa’s promiscuity with men.

In this study, two different ways of how lesbianism and lesbian desire is eradicated has been examined. One way is by killing off the lesbian character to prevent the lesbian context in the film and the other way is by converting the lesbian character’s sexuality into heterosexuality. Whichever way lesbianism is rendered invisible, annihilation of lesbianism in films is done to sustain the heterosexual order of society and is also justified.

Sensibility

Sensibility of lesbianism and lesbian images is another representation type of lesbianism in films. Lesbian sensibility means that there has been no explicit indication of lesbian identity or relationship in the film, but through various signs and codes the film provides a sense of lesbianism in the film. Lesbian sensibility can be carried through the female character or through the relationship between the female characters.

Ripley in the Alien films, Clarice in The Silence of the Lambs, and Jordan in G. I. Jane are all examples of characters that embody lesbian sensibility. These characters are never explicitly mentioned or indicated as lesbians but they are not indicated as clear heterosexuals either. Their androgynous looks and their masculine occupations render them as unconventional feminine protagonists and they hint of perversion. By taking the unconventional, unfeminine gender role, these characters have the potential to be read as lesbians.

The mystery behind the sexuality of Ripley, Clarice, and Jordan is controlled by the confinement of these female characters in their workplace. Ripley, Clarice, and Jordan’s relationships with other people are rarely shown, and if shown, the relationships remain in
their working circle. Jordan, among the three characters, is the only one with a boyfriend, however, her boyfriend, also being a navy officer, remains in her working circle. The relationship between Jordan and her boyfriend is in question because they never exchange their expression of love for one another and Jordan seems to be uncertain about her future with the boyfriend. In addition, Jordan seems to have more chemistry with Kathy Blondell, the real lesbian character in the film, than with her boyfriend.

Lesbian sensibility can also be carried through the relationship between/among female characters in the film. To carry a lesbian sensibility, the female characters do not necessarily have to have a lesbian identity. In fact, the ambiguity of the female characters’ sexual identity is what creates lesbian sensibility in films. Strong female-bonding or friendship and female living together as a family are two ways of how lesbian sensibility is carried through the relationship between/among female characters.

The nature of the relationship between two female characters, which consists strong female bonding or friendship is most frequently opened up for debate. Films such as, *The Color Purple*, *Thelma and Louise*, and *Boys on the Side* are examples of how strong relationship/friendship between two female characters can be read as a hint of lesbian relationship.

To see the relationship between Celie and Shug in *The Color Purple* as a mere friendship is questionable. Regardless of their rivalry position, (Celite being Mister’s wife and Shug being Mister’s mistress), the two women share a close relationship. They are able to share a close relationship because of Mister’s brutality. Mister is the embodiment of patriarchy. Mister has thrown out Nettie, Celie’s sister who has been temporarily living under his roof, for not succumbing to his sexual demands. He treats Celie as one of his
slaves. Mister's exploitation of women's sexuality is evident as he brings his mistress, Shug, into the house. As a philandering man, Mister can never be sexually satisfied. Celie is able to accept Shug's existence because of her submission to the patriarchal system.

In fact, as opposites attract, the shy Celie is fascinated with Shug for her confidence and her sexual autonomy, and provides her the service of cooking, bathing, and caring. Shug, recognizing Celie's attention, returns her love to Celie. The love Shug gives to Celie validates Celie's existence. However, whether the love between Celie and Shug is an expression of lesbianism or mere friendship is not clear in the film. Even the kiss scene between Shug and Celie is hardly erotically or sexually charged. After Shug and Celie kiss, they embrace and are about to proceed with their sexual engagement, but the camera pans away to the windchimes and the scene ends.

Another reason for the difficulty of understanding the relationship between Shug and Celie is because of Shug's desire to reconcile with her father. Her desire to reconcile with her father indicates that Shug is not up to fighting against the patriarchal system but rather to accept her position in it. To prove Shug's complicity with the patriarchal system, when Celie tries to kill Mister with his razor, it is Shug who holds her back. By not participating in the battle against patriarchy, the relationship between Celie and Shug remains ambivalent regardless of the various codes in the film that hint lesbianism. While Shug's desire is fulfilled through the reunion and reconciliation with her minister father, Celie's life becomes complete when she is united with Nettie and her children. By not being able to fulfill in each other's desire, Celie and Shug's relationship becomes incomplete as lovers despite Celie's departure of Mister to live with Shug in Memphis. The relationship between Celie and Shug
lies between the boundary of friendship and love, stepping into each territory depending on the interpretation of the film.

In *Thelma and Louise*, Thelma and Louise each have a husband and a boyfriend. However, regardless of their various connections with men, it is hard to resist seeing their strong female bonding with a lesbian subtext. Thelma and Louise escape for a weekend trip and the trouble begins when Louise shoots a guy whom they have briefly encountered at a nightclub for he was trying to rape Thelma. Thelma, who is defenseless, is only able to escape from the male supremacist attack with Louise’s intervention. Thelma wants to go to the police, Louise doesn’t. As a rape victim herself, (which is revealed little by little), Louise knows that the police, being a phallic system, will not work in their favor. Thelma and Louise become the outlaws and are soon chased by the police.

It becomes possible to read Thelma and Louise’s friendship within a lesbian context as Thelma and Louise are posited as outlaws. As outlaws, Thelma and Louise are escaping from the patriarchal system. To make matters worse, Thelma engages herself with a young con-artist (played by Brad Pitt) and loses the money that she and Louise need to get to Mexico. As the film progress, both women realize through their experience that any system that has to do with men oppresses and ruins their life. Mistrust of men and the patriarchal system makes them seek an alternative relationship, female bonding and companionship. Therefore, at the last scene of the film, as the police close in, Thelma and Louise decide to drive off the cliff and die together rather than to succumb to the patriarchal system that has been oppressing them throughout their lives. They kiss each other on the lips, hold hands, and drive off the edge of the Grand Canyon.
Thelma and Louise’s decision to escape from the police, to go to Mexico and start a new life, and to jump off the cliff rather than to surrender to the police indicate their desire to be free from the patriarchal system. They are able to make these decisions, because they are not alone. They have each other. As Thelma and Louise drive off the cliff, their strong female friendship transforms into something new. The new dimension of the relationship between Thelma and Louise becomes a possibility as the film ends with the freeze-frame of Thelma and Louise in the air and off the canyon instead of Thelma and Louise’s death.

Even in the title, Boys on the Side, indicates marginalization and the resistance to patriarchy through female bonding. Jane, Robin, and Holly all unintentionally end up living together at the desert house in Arizona. Friendship, love, and mutual understanding grow as the three women live together as a family. Among the three women, only Jane is established as a lesbian and it is Jane and Robin’s relationship that is in question of a lesbian relationship. Regardless of Jane’s lesbian sexuality, by establishing Robin as a straight woman, the relationship between the two women is never explicitly sexual. In addition, neither Robin nor Jane is depicted as sexually active. Robin is straight but she is not looking for a relationship with a man because of the fact that the man she was with had given her AIDS and Jane is never seen with another woman in the film.

The relationship between Jane and Robin stands on the borderline of love and friendship. Jane’s lesbian sexuality does not automatically make Jane and Robin’s relationship a lesbian relationship. In fact, Jane’s sexuality is an obstacle for Jane and Robin’s relationship to develop further (Jane keeps her sexuality a secret and when it is revealed she assures Robin that she is not after her). The relationship/friendship between
Jane and Robin grows as they (along with Holly) settle in a house together. As a good friend, Jane provides good care and comfort to the sick Robin.

There are two opportunities for Jane and Robin's relationship to change from friendship to a sexual relationship, but the film shrewdly circumvents them. The first opportunity comes after Jane's birthday. Robin meets a man at Jane's birthday party and with Jane's intervention, Robin goes out on a date with him. The man tries to have sex with Robin but Robin refuses. The man tells Robin that he already knows about her illness through Jane. Robin becomes angry towards Jane and throws her out of the house. By kicking Jane out of the house, the film cleverly avoids elaborating on Jane and Robin's relationship.

The second opportunity comes when Robin and Jane share their last moment together in the hospital. Robin confesses that she once loved a girl when she was ten years old. The girl she loved had red strawberry blonde hair. Jane tells her that she was once red strawberry blonde. Then Robin asks, "It was me you loved, wasn't it?" Jane replies, "Yeah, still do." Robin answers with, "Well, I loved you too...." By the time Jane and Robin confess their love for each other, Robin is dying and the relationship between Jane and Robin cannot progress any longer. In fact, the confession of love between the two women was possible only because Robin is dying. Love between Jane and Robin culminates only to immediately disappear with Robin's death. By letting go two good opportunities for Jane and Robin's relationship to grow further, the film sustains the stability of friendship between the two women. Eventually, the platonic friendship between Jane and Robin becomes the disguise for their love and lesbian relationship.
The Color Purple, Thelma and Louise, and Boys on the Side all hide or hint lesbian sensibility through strong female bonding and friendship. The extension of female bonding and friendship is the women living together as family. By living together as a family, women reject the familial ideologies of blood and marriage, and create an alternative family through partnership and friendship. The rejection and the non-existence of the patriarchal figure in this alternative family carry the sensibility of lesbianism and lesbian relationship. Bagdad Café and Fried Green Tomatoes are good examples of how lesbian sensibility is carried through the form of female living together as family.

In Bagdad Café, the alternative family is formed with Jasmine’s arrival at Brenda’s café/motel. Before Jasmine’s arrival, a very unsatisfied and unhappy Brenda struggles to manage her family relationships, her café/motel, and her life. She has two children, a grandson, and people living in her motel that she needs to take care of, her husband has just left her (or she has kicked her husband out), and there are hardly any customers at her café/motel but only several truckers who pass by. Even though tensions arise between Jasmine and Brenda because of their extremely opposite positions, as time goes by Jasmine and Brenda’s relationship grows into somewhat strong and intimate. As their friendship/relationship grows stronger, Brenda finds happiness and passion in her life. Jasmine is not only able to make the café/motel prosperous (through her magic tricks she brings in a huge crowd of customers to the café), which Brenda’s husband was not able to, but also make the family come together as one through understanding and love. Jasmine, who has never had her own child, is able to perform her maternal love and care for Brenda’s children (and grandson), while Brenda, who has been too weary of her situation, is able to receive financial and emotional support from Jasmine. What Brenda and Jasmine have
lacked is fulfilled through the familial bond between the two women. However, their alternative familial bond is disrupted by the patriarchal system of law. Jasmine’s visa expires and she needs to go back to Germany. With Jasmine’s departure, Brenda’s café/motel is back in the situation where it used to be. After a long wait, Jasmine comes back to Bagdad café/motel and the two women share a long and emotional embrace.

The irony in the film is that the alternative familial form between Jasmine and Brenda substitutes and rejects the patriarchal family system; however, it is also the patriarchal system of marriage that is able to sustain their relationship. Jasmine, being a German, cannot live with Brenda permanently unless she has U.S. citizenship. One way to obtain the U.S. citizenship is by marrying an American man. An American man who resides in the motel proposes to Jasmine suggesting that Jasmine will be able to get a U.S. citizenship if he marries her. Jasmine replies with, “I'll talk it over with Brenda.” Despite the fact that Jasmine and Brenda’s alternative familial bond is only sustained with help from a patriarchal figure, the man’s suggestion of marriage for a U.S. citizenship implies his understanding of Jasmine and Brenda’s relationship. Jasmine’s response to discuss this with Brenda also hints that the relationship the two women share surpasses that of friendship. Therefore, despite no explicit sexual desire between the two women, the familial bond between Jasmine and Brenda carries a lesbian sentiment and sensibility.

In *Fried Green Tomatoes*, the nature of relationship between Idgie and Ruth becomes debatable. Idgie and Ruth’s story is displayed through flashbacks as the elderly Mrs. Threadgoode (played by Jessica Tandy) tells their story to Evelyn (played by Kathy Bates) whom she befriends at the nursing home. Idgie and Ruth’s friendship goes back to Georgia in the 1930s. Idgie and Ruth are bonded by their love for Idgie’s late big brother Buddy, who
also happens to be Ruth's fiance. After the tragic death of Idgie's brother, Ruth and Idgie spend one summer together and they become best friends. Idgie becomes devastated when Ruth leaves her to get married. However, the man Ruth has married is a brutal woman-beating man. One day Idgie visits Ruth and finds out that her abusive husband has been beating her. Idgie rescues the pregnant Ruth from her abusive husband and brings her home. Soon Ruth has a baby boy and Idgie and Ruth raise him together. They also set up The Whistle Stop Café together with the help of Big George (played by Stan Shaw). Ruth and Idgie do not mind serving Big George at the café, (Big George, being a black servant) and then, Ruth and Idgie ignite the local Ku Klux Klan's anger. In the middle of the chaos, Ruth's husband comes to take the baby away but is killed. It is not certain who has killed Ruth's husband but Idgie takes responsibility and she goes on trial. Both Ruth and Big George are acquitted of murder and the café prospers. However, Ruth becomes ill of cancer and after leaving her son to Idgie, she dies.

To hide the lesbian overtone, the film emphasizes the importance of friendship. Even the film ends with Mrs. Threadgoode, who later is revealed as Idgie, telling Evelyn, who has decided to shelter the homeless Mrs. Thereadgoode, that (best) friends are the most important thing in life. However, to read the love between Ruth and Idgie merely as friendship seems incongruent for three reasons. First, as Idgie's brother, Buddy (played by Chris O'Donnell), dies Idgie becomes the replacement of Buddy for Ruth. To carry Buddy's spirit, Idgie is portrayed as a tomboy who enjoys hunting, fishing, gambling and fighting like any other boys. The scene where Idgie risks her life to get some fresh honey from the dangerous bee hive apparently makes Idgie's love for Ruth more than mere friendship. Second, Idgie rescues Ruth from the patriarchal family system. Ruth, who is defenseless against her
husband’s violence, is rescued by Idgie. Then, Idgie and Ruth, along with Ruth’s new baby form an alternative family. In court, the prosecutor asks Ruth why she has left her husband for Idgie and violated the sacred bonds of family. Idgie replies, “Because she’s the best friend I ever had and I love her.” Ruth’s decision to leave the social norm of family to recreate an “unnatural” family form with Idgie indicates that Ruth and Idgie’s relationship is more than a friendship. Third, when Ruth dies, she leaves her son in Idgie’s care. By placing Buddy into Idgie’s hand, the familial bond between Idgie and Ruth remains as Buddy becomes the constant reminder of Ruth. Even though Ruth is dead, the familial bond between the two women remains unshattered and Idgie is able to continue her love for Ruth through Buddy.

**Representations in Different Time Periods**

Representations of lesbianism and lesbian images in films change over time. The reasons for the changes of lesbian representation can be historical, cultural, or social. According to the influential historical, cultural, or social events, this study divides the period of film history into five different time periods: first time period (from 1895-1930s), second time period (1940s-1960s), third time period (1970s-early 1980s), fourth time period (1980s-early 1990s), and fifth time period (late 1990s-to date).

**First Time Period (1895-1930s)**

The first period was the beginning stage of the history of cinema. This was the period when the support for homosexual rights was invisible in the United States. In this study, six films that were produced in this time period have been examined: *Pandora’s Box* (1929), *The Wild Party* (1929), *Morocco* (1930), *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931), *Queen Christina* (1933),...
and *Sylvia Scarlett* (1935). In this period, lesbianism and lesbian sensibility were mainly represented through iconography. Iconography, according to Dyer (1984), is “a certain set of visual and aural signs which immediately bespeak homosexuality and connote the qualities associated, stereotypically, with it” (p. 31). Iconography was done mainly through cross-dressing and other distinctive visual codes.

In *Pandora’s Box* Countess Geschwitz’s lesbianism is conveyed through her mannish attire (gender reversal), long gazes (lesbian desire), and the tango dance (lesbian performance). Meanwhile, in *The Wild Party*, despite the fact that there are no explicit lesbian characters, lesbian sensibility is naturally conveyed through the film’s all-female setting (lesbian location), Stella’s mannish clothes when sitting on Helen’s lap (gender reversal), and Stella and Helen’s passionate embraces (lesbian performance).

*Morocco, Mädchen in Uniform, Queen Christina*, and *Sylvia Scarlett* all use cross-dressing to signify gender inversion as lesbianism. In *Morocco*, Amy Jolly (played by Marlene Dietrich) dresses up in top hat and tails and performs a cabaret. She then kisses a woman in the audience on the lips. The kiss between Amy and the woman is not portrayed in a deviant manner. In fact, all the cabaret audience (including the woman Amy kissed) laughs and enjoys Amy’s performance and her kiss. They are able to laugh because the kiss, in their understanding, does not threaten the social order of heterosexuality, but rather is an act of heterosexual performance. Amy’s gender transforms from female to male as Amy is dressed in a tuxedo. Transforming into a man through cross-dressing gives Amy the power to become an initiator of the kiss.

In *Mädchen in Uniform*, cross-dressing of the female character is used at the epitome of lesbianism in the film. Manuela, like many other students in the boarding school, loves
her teacher Fräulein von Bernburg. After the school play, Manuela, in a drunken moment declares her love for the teacher in public. When the announcement is made, Manuela is coincidentally dressed up as a man from the school play. The declaration of love, therefore, is made from the gender transformed Manuela.

Cross-dressing in *Queen Christina* is a very important element in the film. Queen Christina is able to execute her power and authority as a monarch when she is dressed as a man. Unless her femininity is erased, her power and authority as a monarch cannot be exercised. For Queen Christina, cross-dressing does not change her into a man but functions as a rejection to the dominant codes of femininity.

In *Sylvia Scarlett*, cross-dressing enables Sylvia Snow to transform into Sylvester Scarlett. While the cross-dressing in *Morocco*, *Mädchen in Uniform*, and *Queen Christina* transforms the female character’s gender symbolically, leaving the female gender intact, cross-dressing in *Sylvia Scarlett* completely transforms Sylvia’s gender from a girl to a boy. Therefore, a lesbian sexual situation occurs as a woman falls in love with Sylvester, the cross-dressed Sylvia, thinking she is a man. Cross-dressing in this film is used to create gender confusion, and therefore, becomes a good comedy ingredient.

In addition to cross-dressing, the female actress’s sexuality played a huge role in representing lesbianism in this period. The androgynous and sexually ambiguous star image of Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Katherine Hepburn, Joan Crawford, Louise Brooks, and others, played an important role in creating and reading a lesbian subtext in their characters. The gender in-between status these sexually ambiguous star personas carried created the possibility of encoding and decoding lesbianism and lesbian subtext in the film.
In the first time period, lesbianism and lesbian sensibility were carried through cross-dressing and visual codes rather than the lesbian relationships between women. Therefore, not many lesbian desires or lesbian characters were created in this time period. In fact, Countess Geschwitz in *Pandora's Box* may be the only explicit and alleged lesbian character in films created in this time period. Because lesbianism was signified through the images of gender reversal, rather than lesbian performance, representation of lesbianism was done in a light manner and was even used for a comedy subject. In addition, the sexually ambiguous star persona played a role in the representation of lesbianism in this time period.

**Second Time Period (1940s-1960s)**

The second period was the moment of cultural, political, and social oppression due to McCarthyism. In this period, the censorship authorized by Hollywood's Motion Picture Production Code was in effect and many lesbian images were limited to no representations or portrayed in a stereotypical way. To examine the lesbian representation in films in the second time period, five different films have been chosen: *Rebecca* (1940), *Caged* (1950), *The Children's Hour* (1962), *Night of the Iguana* (1964), and *The Killing of Sister George* (1968). Because censorship was in effect in this period, lesbianism and lesbian images were subtly represented and in the process lesbianism was represented as vicious, morally condemned, repressed, and ridiculed. This is also the period when lesbian relationships were stereotyped in the butch-femme relationship.

In *Rebecca*, lesbianism is condemned and punished by killing off the lesbian characters. Rebecca is killed even before the beginning of the film and Mrs. Danvers kills herself in the fire. In *Rebecca*, because lesbianism and lesbian desire are considered as sin,
lesbian characters should be punished and their punishments are justified in the form of murder and suicide.

Lesbianism is used for the horror effects in Caged. Situated in a all women’s prison, lesbianism is used as the code for social punishment the women receive when they transgress the patriarchal system of the law. Evelyn Harper is the character that is the embodiment of lesbian horror. She is a vicious, cunning, sadistic, and evil lesbian butch. Her characteristics imply the negative conception of lesbianism in the film. Eventually, Evelyn is stabbed by a prisoner, but because she is the vicious lesbian butch, her murder is justified.

Both The Children’s Hour and Night of the Iguana represent lesbianism as a moral issue. In The Children’s Hour, Martha, who confronts the true nature of her sexuality, torments herself with self-hatred and guilt. To Martha, lesbianism is against her moral values, and the self-conflict between her morality and her sexuality drives her to commit suicide. Meanwhile, Miss Fellowes in Night of the Iguana is a lesbian who represses her lesbianism and her lesbian desire through her religion and devotion to work. Miss Fellowes, being a devout woman, is oblivious to her sexuality. When confronted by Maxine for her sexuality, Miss Fellowes is defeated and retreats with the intervention of Shannon, the tour guide. When Maxine confronts Shannon for his interference, Shannon replies, “Miss Fellowes is a highly moral person. If she ever recognized the truth about herself, it would destroy her.” As Shannon’s response to Maxine indicates, lesbianism is against morality and, therefore, being a lesbian itself can be a punishment.

The Killing of the Sister George works on the stereotype of lesbians (butch or femme) and lesbian relationships (butch-femme). Sister George, as the stereotypical butch, is a loud mouthed, aggressive, sadistic, and mannish butch. Meanwhile, Childie, as the stereotypical
femme, is passive, infantile, but opportunistic, however. Another butch, Mercy Croft, is sophisticated, authoritative, and powerful. According to Sheldon’s (1984) three lesbian stereotypes, Sister George is the butch/mannish lesbian and Mercy Croft is the sophisticated lesbian.

The relationships between Sister George and Childie and Childie and Mercy Croft are based on the heterosexual S-M power dynamics, which is also a stereotypical conception of the lesbian relationship. Sister George and Childie’s relationship is based on the heterosexual gender binary role. While Sister George is the embodiment of masculinity, Childie represents femininity. Sister George’s masculine role controls Childie sexually, socially, and economically. Childie and Mercy Croft’s relationship is similar to Sister George and Childie’s relationship. However, if Sister George and Childie’s relationship is based on the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity, the power dynamics in the relationship between Mercy Croft and Childie is based on social and economic status. Both relationships rely on the stereotypical conception that lesbian relationship is a reflection of heterosexual relationship.

The second time period was the dark period for the representations of lesbianism and lesbian images. Because censorship was in effect, many films represented lesbianism subtly. If lesbianism appeared to be explicit in the film, the representation was mostly done negatively and stereotypically. The representations of lesbianism in films in this period were rooted in the conception of lesbianism as unnatural and deviant.

Third Time Period (1970s-early 1980s)

The third period was when the liberation movements of all kinds occurred, changing the social, cultural, and political perceptions. Representations of lesbianism and lesbian
images have drastically changed in this period due to the gay and women’s liberation movements. In this period, the lesbian images did not rely on deviance. Instead of being condemned or ridiculed, lesbian identities and relationships were portrayed as natural. In addition, the lesbian characters were no longer stereotyped as ugly and old (the stereotype for predatory characteristics). In fact, they were portrayed as young and attractive like any other heterosexual female characters. Three different films are chosen to be examined for this time period: *Alien* (1979), *Manhattan* (1979), and *Personal Best* (1982).

Ripley in *Alien* (1979) is neither indicated as a lesbian or a heterosexual in the film. It is her androgynous looks and various visual signs that open up the possibility of her lesbianism. Her cross-dressing, short hair, and her occupation as a fighter/warrior all indicate the gender inversion, a signification of lesbianism. Regardless of her unconventional female character role, Ripley is not portrayed negatively, but rather admirably in the film.

*Manhattan* is another film that provides positive lesbian representation. In the film, Jill (played by Meryl Streep) has left Isaac (played by Woody Allen) for another woman. Jill, unlike many previous lesbians, is attractive, smart, and confident. Her relationship with her lover, Connie, is still working out successfully. However, the relationship between the two women is never shown in the film. It is only through Isaac’s words to Mary (played by Diane Keaton), his new lover, that Jill and Connie’s relationship is revealed. Lesbianism in this film functions as a device for Isaac to express his obsession with (his lost) masculinity and the heterosexual social order.

*Personal Best* shows two gorgeous lesbians, Tory and Chris, and their relationship. Tory and Chris’s images as lesbians step outside the stereotypical lesbian image of butch and femme and the relationship between the two women is represented as an extension of a
friendship. Unlike many previous lesbian characters, their lesbianism does not depend on various visual codes of gender inversion. Tory and Chris are feminine enough to easily attract men and eventually, Chris engages in a heterosexual relationship by the end of the film. Even though Chris and Tory are not dependent on the stereotypes of lesbian images, lesbianism in this film relies upon the stereotypical myth that all women are lesbians until they meet the right men. In this film, lesbian images are nothing more than a fulfillment of heterosexual men’s fantasy.

In the third time period, a shift has been made from the negative portrayals of lesbian images to the positive and welcoming representations of lesbian images. However, even though the lesbian characters are portrayed positively, the conception of lesbianism itself relies on the heterosexual point of view. Portraying the lesbian characters as gorgeous and attractive while erasing lesbian desire and relationship indicates how lesbianism is undermined in the heterosexual order of society. In other words, lesbian identities are only accepted as long as they do not disrupt the heterosexual social order by forming lesbian relationships, and as long as lesbianism is a passing stage for heterosexuality.

Fourth Time Period (Mid 1980s-Early 1990s)

The fourth period was when the AIDS issue emerged. It also was the period when many women of all colors and classes started to voice out their marginality in society and the media. Unlike the previous time periods, there are a variety of lesbian representations in the fourth time period. However, among the variety of lesbian representations, the main representation of lesbianism in this time period is established through a strong female friendship and alternative familial bond between the female characters. The Color Purple

*The Color Purple*, as the three other films, conveys lesbian subtext through a strong female relationship. The female bonding between Celie and Shug is placed within the context of patriarchy (male domination and brutality). The relationship between Celie and Shug is formed, because of the Celie and Shug's polar opposite positions. While Celie is submissive and dependent on the patriarchal system, Shug is represented as sexually autonomous and independent. Celie's admiration for Shug is based on her desire to be like Shug. Celie's desire to be like Shug is indicated in the scene when Celie is wearing Shug's clothes and the two women share an intimate moment. Eventually, Celie finds self-identity and leaves Mister to live with Shug in Memphis.

The relationship between Celie and Shug is close and intimate, however, the lesbian desire between the two women is undermined. Celie and Shug eventually create an alternative feminine economy by living independently in a household together, sharing and caring for each other. However, Shug's desire and its fulfillment of reconciliation and reunion with her father whom she has been rejected from indicate Shug's dependency on the patriarchal system. In addition, the completion of Celie's life does not come from her familial bond with Shug, but with her reunion with Nettie and her children. This indicates that the alternative feminine economy cannot replace the familial ideology of blood, leaving patriarchy intact in Celie and Shug's relationship.

*Bagdad Café*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, and *Thelma & Louise* all convey lesbianism subtext within the context of female strength and solidarity. *Bagdad Café* carries a strong sensibility of lesbianism through the alternative feminine economy formed by Jasmine and
Brenda in the absence of a patriarchal figure. Brenda and Jasmine complete each other through the familial bond, which brings transformation to the women's lives, from depression and loneliness to vigorousness and prosperity.

In *Fried Green Tomatoes*, the relationship between Idgie and Ruth is in question. The film, in order to undermine lesbian desire and sensibility, over-emphasizes the friendship between the two women. However, the alternative familial bond between the two women (and Ruth's son) hints otherwise. The formation of Idgie and Ruth's alternative feminine economy is a rejection of the patriarchal system of a family bound by marriage and blood. As the film progresses, lesbian sensibility through the relationship of Idgie and Ruth increases. To avoid further context of lesbian desire, the film sets up Ruth to die of cancer. However, even Ruth's death cannot undermine the lesbian sensibility, for Ruth's legacy is carried through her son whom she has placed in Idgie's hands. Ruth's son becomes the agency of love between the two women.

In *Thelma & Louise*, the two female characters are able to find self-identity and autonomy while fighting against the patriarchal system of family and law. The lesbian sensibility culminates as the two women drive off the cliff to die as autonomous and independent women rather than succumb once again to the patriarchal system that has oppressed them throughout their lives. Thelma and Louise's journey of battling against the patriarchal system and the common destiny of death hint something more beyond friendship, but as the film ends with Thelma and Louise driving off the cliff lesbian sensibility is left without being explored furthermore.

*Desert Hearts* (1986) takes an important place in this time period for two reasons. First, unlike the four films that have been discussed above, this film contains a lesbian
character, a lesbian identity. Second, the film goes beyond lesbian sensibility and explores furthermore the lesbian relationship between two female characters, Cay and Vivian. Unlike previous films with lesbian characters and relationships, the lesbian relationship in this film is both sexual and open-ended. Cay is established as a lesbian in the film, but for Vivian, lesbianism and lesbian desire is something she finds in the process of finding her self-identity. Lesbianism functions as a temporary alternative for Vivian, who has just ended her marriage. She engages in the lesbian romance with Cay but refuses to be identified as a lesbian (indicated by her fear of being seen with Cay in public). Even though the film explores the lesbian desires that exist between Cay and Vivian, the future of the two women’s relationship remains uncertain as the film ends with an ambiguous note and open-ended resolution.

The conventional conception of lesbianism (stereotype of butch/femme) continues to remain in the lesbian representation through films, such as Aliens (1986) and The Basic Instinct (1991) in this time period. However, with an exception of Desert Hearts, the main lesbian representation in films for the fourth time period is lesbian sensibility through strong female relationships, either in the form of friendship or familial bond. In this time period, the exploration on lesbianism and lesbian desire is focused on gender issues (battle against male domination and patriarchal system) rather than on (lesbian) sexuality issues.

Fifth Time Period (Mid 1990s-To Date)

The fifth period is the era of the advent of the queer movement and postmodernism. Unlike the fourth time period, lesbian representations in the fifth time period revolve around the issue of sexuality rather than female gender. Women do not form solidarity to fight against patriarchy and there is no strict boundary in the female character’s identity. Boys on
the Side (1995) and Bound (1996) show the unity of women characters, but the solidarity is not formed with the purpose of fighting against the patriarchal system. In addition, the sexuality of Robin in Boys on the Side and Violet in Bound remains unclear throughout the film. Robin and Violet are established as heterosexuals in the beginning of each film. However, as the story evolves, each woman falls in love with another female character. Robin and Violet's love for other women does not necessarily indicate their lesbian characteristics. In fact, their love proves the fluidity of sexuality. Chasing Amy (1997) is another good example that represents sexuality as fluid. In this film, Alyssa’s sexuality changes from heterosexual to homosexual and then from homosexual to heterosexual. Alyssa’s lesbianism (and heterosexism) is portrayed as Alyssia’s choice of will rather than as generic.

In Boy’s Don’t Cry (1999), not only is sexuality in question, but also the gender boundary is problematized and questioned. In this film, the sexuality of Brandon Teena (or Teena Brandon) remains unclear throughout the film. Brandon is not represented as a lesbian because his/her gender is also in question. Unlike previous lesbian characters, who reject heterosexuality while containing the female gender, Brandon associates herself/himself as one of the boys both physically and mentally. She/he stuffs a sock in her/his pants and has her/his breasts taped to hide any indication of femininity in her/his body. Regardless of her/his association with the male gender, society does not allow her/him to be a boy because s/he lacks a male anatomy. His/her ambivalent gender identity makes it hard to perceive his/her love for Lana (played by Chloe Sevigny) as a lesbian romance. Brandon’s ambivalent gender identity does not allow him to be placed in a sole gender/sex category.
S/he is a man and/or a woman, a heterosexual and/or a lesbian all at the same time.

Brandon’s unidentifiable identity transforms her/him from a lesbian to queer.

Lesbian representation in the fifth time period is based on problematizing the gender binary and fixation of sexuality. In addition, as in the case of Cleo in *Set it Off* (1996), lesbian representation brings in the class and race matters. Unlike lesbian representations in the previous time periods, lesbian representations in the fifth time period are based on the questioning the identity politics (gender, sexuality, race, class, and other forms of difference). In other words, lesbian representations in the 5th time period are influenced by queer politics.

**Summary**

How lesbian images and lesbianism are represented in films has been examined in this chapter. In order to thoroughly investigate the topic, three different factors in lesbian representations have been analyzed: signs and symbols that are used to represent lesbianism, representation types of lesbian images and lesbianism, and representation of lesbian images in five different time periods of film history.

Five different signs and symbols that are used to represent lesbianism have been found in this study: attire/clothes, names, occupations, locations, and gestures and behaviors. First, attire and clothes are one element that is used to indicate lesbianism. Masculine clothes, which are used for the female characters’ cross-dressing, signify gender inversion (the basic conception of lesbianism) and are the most commonly used attire types in representing lesbianism. Suits and uniforms are another type of attire used to represent lesbianism. Suits and uniforms signify power and authority, the masculine characteristics that generally belong to men. Because of signification of power and authority, uniforms and
suits were associated with predatory lesbians. Jeans and flannel shirts are another type of attire that is used to signify lesbianism. As androgynous items, jeans and flannel shirts are symbols of sexual ambiguity, therefore, lesbianism. Other masculine outfits, such as leather jackets, leggings, and vests are used to symbolize lesbianism in films. If the aforementioned attire types are used to symbolize masculine women, the butch lesbians, hyperfeminine attire is used to signify femmes, the feminine lesbians. The hyperfeminine attire was used to increase the sexual power of the femme characters.

Secondly, names are other signs that are used in films to indicate lesbianism. Androgynous (Tory, Chris) and mannish (Jordan) names are utilized in films to signify lesbian characteristics of the female character. Names that symbolize male anatomy (Corky) or lesbianism (Violet) are also used to signify lesbianism in films. Thirdly, occupations can also be signs of lesbianism in films. Lesbianism can be hinted at films by establishing the female characters’ occupations as those that are considered to belong to men. Plumber/handyman, FBI agent, Navy officer, and alien fighter/warrior are examples of occupations that indicate female characters’ lesbian characteristics. Fourthly, location is another element that many films use to symbolize lesbianism. Desert and all-female institutions, such as an all-female boarding school or an all-female prison are locations that are widely used to create lesbian mood and sensibility. Fifthly, certain gestures and behaviors are used to represent lesbianism in films. The most commonly used gestures are gaze, touch, and kiss.

Lesbian images and lesbianism in films are not always represented in the same way. Three different representation types that are used to represent lesbianism and lesbian images are found in this study: stereotype, annihilation/invisibility, and lesbian sensibility.
Stereotype is the most commonly used representation of lesbian images in films. The most common stereotypes of lesbian characters is butch and femme. Butch can be divided into five different types according to the characteristic of the butch: repressed butch, predatory butch, transvestite butch, feminine butch, and unidentifiable butch. The most common stereotype of lesbian relationship is the butch-femme relationship. The butch-femme relationship, mostly based on the S-M (sado-masochism) power dynamics is modeled after the heterosexual relationship.

Annihilation and invisibility of lesbianism is another type of lesbian representation. There are two ways of annihilating lesbianism in films: killing off the (potential) lesbian character and converting lesbian character’s sexuality to heterosexual. The purpose of annihilating lesbianism is to sustain the heterosexual order of society.

Lesbian sensibility is another lesbian representation type that is found in this study. Lesbian sensibility is carried either through the female characters or strong female relationships in films. Androgyny and ambiguous sexuality is the factor for a female character to carry lesbian sensibility. Meanwhile, lesbian sensibility in female relationships is conveyed through female friendship and familial bond. Strong female relationships are mostly formed in order to fight against the patriarchal system and male domination.

Representations of lesbian images and lesbianism have changed over time. In order to examine how the representations have changed, representations of lesbian images were examined in five different time periods. Lesbian representation in the first time period (1895-1930s) is done mostly through cross-dressing and visual codes rather than on the lesbian relationships between women. In addition, lesbianism in this period was carried through the sexually ambiguous star persona. In the second time period (1940s-1960s),
lesbian representations relied on the stereotypical and negative conceptions of lesbianism. The representations of lesbianism in films were rooted in the conception of lesbianism as unnatural and deviant in this period. In the third period (1970s-early 1980s), representation of lesbian images became more positive. Lesbian characters in this period were as attractive and charming as any heterosexual female characters. They were no longer stigmatized as deviant, evil, predatory, or dangerous. However, representing lesbian relationships on screen was still considered too risky. There were lesbian characters, but no lesbian relationships. Even if there was an indication of lesbian relationship, the relationship was either never shown on screen (*Manhattan*) or annihilated by converting the sexuality of the lesbian character (*Personal Best*). In the fourth time period (1980s-early 1990s), lesbian representations were done mostly through lesbian sensibility. Rather than portraying lesbianism through lesbian characters, lesbianism was represented through strong female bonding, either in the form of friendship or alternative feminine economy. In the fifth time period (1990s-to date), lesbian representations are based on problematizing the gender binary and fixation of sexuality. In addition, lesbian representations in the fifth time period challenged all kinds of identity politics (gender, sexuality, race, class, and other forms of difference) and bringing in the notion of queer politics.
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

In chapter three, representation of lesbianism and lesbian images in films were examined under three different parts: signs/symbols, representation types, and representation time periods. In this chapter, various discussions will be made based on the findings in chapter three. Specifically, this chapter will discuss the notion of masculinity-femininity and its effect on lesbian representations, race and class matters in lesbian representations, and the effects of lesbian feminism and queer studies on lesbian representations.

Depending on the Code of Masculinity

In chapter three, five different signs that signify lesbianism in films have been found. The signs that represent lesbianism, however, are based on the stereotypical conception of lesbianism and lesbian images that only mannish and masculine women are lesbians. In particular, attire/clothes, names, and occupations were the signs that relied on the notion of masculinity to signify lesbianism in films.

According to Dyer (1984), iconography, a certain set of visual and aural signs which signal lesbianism and contain the qualities and meanings associated, stereotypically, with it, is used to “place a character quickly and economically” (p. 32). Iconography is the most commonly used method in stereotyping lesbian (homosexual) characters because without engaging in a further exploration of lesbianism, films are able to inform the audience of the nature of the female character’s sexuality. The problem with stereotyping is that it reduces the opportunity for various lesbian representations more than the stereotypical portrayal of lesbian images itself.
In general, the conception of lesbianism is associated with masculinity. Because the stereotypical conception of lesbianism is associated with masculinity, when representing lesbian images and characters, butch and femme are the most commonly used stereotypes of lesbian characters in films. The binary sexual differences of masculinity and femininity interplay in representing lesbian characters in films. The lesbian characters are labeled as butch or femme according to the degree of masculinity the lesbian characters exhibit. Thus, the masculine lesbian is labeled as butch and the feminine lesbian is labeled as femme. Masculinity and femininity in the white supremacist patriarchal society are deeply connected with the notion of skin colors. Therefore, race becomes an attribute in stereotyping butch and femme.

**Race**

Whiteness in this society is associated with privilege and survival (Davies & Smith, 1997). In the white supremacist society, meanings and significance of superiority can be attached to the color of whiteness. In other words, whiteness can be a signifier of both masculinity and femininity depending on the purpose of its use. When applied to a white male and black male relationship, the color of whiteness is associated to masculinity while blackness is associated to femininity (effeminacy). In that case, black becomes a signifier of inferiority and depravity (feminine characteristics), while white becomes a signifier of male power, supremacy, and domination (masculine characteristics) (Wood, 2001). However, when the color of white and black is applied to white women and black women, whiteness becomes the signifier of femininity. In other words, deep color skin becomes associated with female masculinity. With this stereotypical conception of race and masculinity, many
women of color are portrayed as butch while femmes are reserved for the white bodies. Vasquez in *Aliens*, Jane in *Boys Don’t Cry*, and Cleo in *Set it Off* are all examples of how race and ethnicity become the “attributes” in representing the butch.

Vasquez is a good example of how butch is stereotyped along both the racial and gender lines. Vasquez’s butchness is displayed through the visual imageries of her physical strength and her ability to handle heavy firearms. The extreme butchness makes hypermasculine, and along with her Latin ethnicity she is posited as an alien in the white heterosexual order of society. As a Latin woman, Vasquez’s masculinity is perceived as inherent, marking her hyper masculine sexuality as unorthodox, deviant, and a threat to the sex/gender binary.

The black butch characters are represented through the double stereotype. The stereotypical conception of the black body is associated with masculinity, unfemininity, ugliness, and so on. In addition, the black body in general is associated with “excessive and indeed violent masculinity in the social imaginary” (Halberstam, 1999, p. 29). Cleo in *Set it Off* is the embodiment of stereotypical conceptions of black lesbians. Unlike Corky in *Bound* who is also a butch character, there is no trace of femininity in Cleo. In addition, even though Corky is perceived as masculine, she is not portrayed as violent. The only element that makes Corky dangerous is her status as an ex-convict. However, Corky’s imprisonment was due to her stealing (may be established for the plot), which indicates the difficulty in attaching violent image even to the “white” butch. In fact, the image of Cleo being surrounded by her rapping brothers is depicted more dangerously than the “white” ex-convict.

Cleo is the embodiment of what black feminists, Patricia Hill Collins (1993) and bell hooks (2000), call “the interlocking system of domination.” The interlocking system of
domination refers to the notion that gender, race, class, etc. are all interrelated and the oppressions from these occur simultaneously. The interlocking system of domination has a significant meaning in the feminist, especially the black feminist, circle for several reasons. First, it challenges the conventional white supremacist capitalist patriarchal hegemonic order and allows to shift the entire focus of investigation from one aimed at explicating elements of race, gender, or class oppression to one whose goal is to determine what the links are among those systems. Second, it can also be an alternative humanist vision of societal organization (Collins, 1986). Seeing oppressions through the lens of the interlocking system of domination allows the diversity of oppression to be seen.

Cleo is stigmatized with the social prejudice and expectation that as an angry black working class butch woman she will explode one day and do harm to the white supremacist heterosexual order of society. As Cleo starts robbing the bank with her three other black friends, the mythology of black angry lesbian is once again proved. As with Vasquez, Cleo’s violent masculinity is inherent, which makes her the ticking bomb ready to explode.

Jane in Boys on the Side also relies on the black women mythology. If the violent masculinity is mostly attached to black male bodies, the asexual mammy figure is what many black female bodies are attached to. As Jane becomes the caretaker of Robin, she is transformed as the asexual mammy figure providing service for the white upper-class woman. Either in the form of violent masculinity or asexual mammy figure, Jane and Cleo carry and fulfill the mythologies about black women.

One of the stereotypical images of the butch, masculine woman is ugliness. In the white supremacist society, beauty is associated with white and blonde while ugliness is associated with dark and blackness. According to Allen (1995), "blackness can be read in
the film as undesirable, and this exemplifies how white butch and femme identities can, in certain cultural articulations, serve to devalue black lesbian experiences in popular lesbian representations of lesbian sexuality” (p. 82). Jane and Cleo are played respectively by Whoopie Goldberg and Queen Latifah. Whoopie Goldberg and Queen Latifah’s appearances do not fit into the standard of beauty defined by the white supremacist society. In fact, audiences may not feel uncomfortable watching Whoopie or Queen Latifah as black butches, but they might feel some kind of discomfort when watching beautiful black actresses who have lighter color skin, such as Halle Berry, Jada Pinkett Smith, or Vivica A. Fox play the butch role.

Unlike the butch role, the femme roles are mostly reserved for the white, blond actresses who fit the social standard of beauty. Mainly the role of femme is to use her sexuality and sexual power to deceive and destroy men. In order to manipulate and destroy men, femmes need to contain sexuality that can be pleasurable for the heterosexual men (both on-screen and off-screen). Sharon Stone’s character, Catherine, in Basic Instinct is a good example of how femmes are defined in white femininity. Femmes who use their sexuality as a weapon to get what they want can easily change their sexuality according to their situations and their wishes. When the femme character is alone she can easily pass as a heterosexual and her lesbianism becomes invisible.

Class

Class is another attribute that influences the lesbian representation along with race. However, if the relationship between race and lesbian portrayals has remained intact, relationship between class and lesbian portrayals has changed over time. In the early years of
film history, the butch characters were mostly established as white and upper class. The white upper class butch characters fit into the category of what Sheldon (1984) defined as "the sophisticated lesbian type" whose characters are often older women. Countess Gershitz in *Pandora's Box*, Mrs. Benton in *Caged*, and Mercy Croft in *The Killing of Sister George* are all examples of the sophisticated lesbian type.

Why the early butch characters were portrayed as upper class is interconnected with the social perception of lesbianism at that time. In the earlier time period, women who were successful in the patriarchal society were considered as lesbians because they were perceived as transforming themselves into men to become successful. The sophisticated lesbian types were given the power to either control or assist other women's lives. Other women were mostly young beautiful girls who were passive and infantile. The relationship between the sophisticated (butch) lesbian and her younger and more infantile partner is modeled after a heterosexual relationship. The sources of the power for the sophisticated lesbians are social status and economic wealth. Women with social status and economic power were mostly white upper class.

However, during the women's and gay's liberation movements, lesbianism became a practice of solidarity among working women who wanted to fight against the patriarchal and heterosexual system. However, it was not necessary for most of the white upper class lesbians to join in the battle because they were content with their status in the patriarchal system and considered that the patriarchal system was actually sustaining their status and economic stability. Working class lesbians formed various kinds of solidarity among women to fight against the patriarchal system that oppresses and denies their experiences and existences. Many lesbians believed that butch-femme relationship, that was once prevalent
in the lesbian community (mostly middle-class) “mimicking forms of male and female behavior that feminism rejected” (McIntosh, 1997, p. 244). Many lesbians denied their femininity and feminine gender role in the process, believing that their oppression comes from the gender binary system. By the 1970s, many lesbian feminists were seen to adopt a working class masculine accent and style. According to McIntosh (1997), “lesbian carpenters, and car mechanics were idealized” (p. 244). The notion of lesbianism became interconnected with female androgyny and/or masculinity.

However, the notion of lesbianism changed once again as lesbians joined the forces of younger pro-sex feminists (McIntosh, 1997). Lesbianism no longer became a political choice but a personal choice. Lesbianism no longer was associated with mere women-identified, but also involved sex and sexual actions between women. In the process, the butch-femme relationship that many lesbian feminists tried to eradicate began to come into notice once again (McIntosh, 1997). However, the change to the butch-femme relationship is that while it was a predominant relationship form for the middle class lesbians in the 1950s and 1960s, it has become a dominant relationship form of the working class lesbian culture.

Summary

The indicators and signifiers of lesbianism in films are heavily dependent on the code of masculinity. In the heterosexual order of society, women are assumed to take a feminine role. When women give up the feminine role and take the masculine role, they are considered as the sexual deviant, in other words, lesbians. Because the conception of lesbianism is associated with masculinity, representations of lesbian images and characters become heavily dependent on butch and femme and the butch-femme relationship.
Race is one attribute that influences the representation of lesbians in films. In the white supremacist society, whiteness is the color that becomes the norm of power and beauty. When the subject matter is power, white plays the superior and dominant role while the color of black plays the subordinate and inferior role. When the subject matter becomes beauty, white signifies idealized beauty while black represents ugliness and undesirable. Along with race, class plays an important role in the representation of lesbians in films. Before the gay's and women's movement, lesbian images and relationships were predominantly formed in the butch-femme relationship. In this relationship, the butch was generally the white upper class women who were socially and economically privileged and successful. However, lesbian feminists who emerged from the gay's and women's liberation movement objected to the butch-femme relationship believing that the relationship form is merely a replicate of a heterosexual relationship. Instead, many lesbians adopted to the working class masculinity and denied their femininity and womanness. This notion of lesbianism changed once again as lesbianism became a personal choice rather than a political choice. Lesbianism no longer was confined to a gender issue as the sexuality aspect of lesbianism became emphasized.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Implications

Homosexuality has been one of the issues and themes that films have touched upon from the beginning of the film history. However, under the name of homosexuality, the issues and themes evolved around gay men than lesbians. While the first gay men or gay theme was introduced to the cinema in the year of 1895, the birth year of cinema, the first lesbian character was not introduced until the year of 1929. As the film industry has neglected and ignored the existence of lesbians in society, so has academia in studies of lesbians and lesbianism in films. Not much of critical attention has been given to the lesbian existence and experience in cinema. However, when representations of lesbians and lesbianism in films were under the microscope, the representations have been examined under feminist film studies and gay studies. The problem with examining lesbian representations in films under the feminist film studies and gay studies is that neither study is able to thoroughly focus on lesbian existence and experiences.

The focus of feminist film studies is examining psychoanalytic readings of heterosexual femininity and male spectatorship (Graham, 1994). Many issues on the representation of women in films have been brought up and discussed in the feminist film studies, but lesbianism and lesbian existence were almost always left out in the discussion. In the feminist film studies, heterosexuality has been the unquestionable norm.

Gay studies have not been the answer to examining the lesbian experiences and existence on screen either. In gay studies, male experience becomes the norm and lesbian experience is automatically ignored and neglected when examining sexuality and sexual orientation. Even when lesbian existence and experience in films are examined in gay
studies, the studies on lesbianism are based on the conception of masculinity. In other words, lesbianism is perceived as the experience of masculine women and only masculine women are considered as lesbians. When lesbian experiences are understood only in the terms of masculinity, other aspects of lesbianism becomes marginalized and neglected.

Instead of relying on the traditional studies that have been used when examining lesbian existence and experiences, this study used lesbian feminism and queer studies in understanding lesbian representations in films. Examining lesbian representations in the lesbian feminism perspective allowed this study to bring out various possibilities of lesbianism in films (lesbian sensibility) and not dwell on the stereotypical conception of lesbianism (butch-femme, S-M power dynamics, and so on). Not many female characters in films have been explicitly indicated as lesbians, which is mostly done by representing lesbianism as a sexual phenomenon. However, the perspective of lesbian feminism has opened up the door for female characters, who form female solidarity and bond with mutual love and understanding under the common goal of fighting against male domination and patriarchy, to be perceived as engaging in a lesbian act. In lesbian feminism perspective, lesbianism can be perceived without engaging sexuality.

If lesbian feminism enabled this study to focus on the gender issues that lesbian characters (and potential lesbian characters) face in films, queer studies enabled this study to examine the sexuality issues. In the perspective of queer studies, neither gender nor sexuality is fixated. In fact, queer studies “problematize normative consolidations of sex, gender, and sexuality” (Jagose, 1994). Queer rejects identity politics because identity politics fixate one’s position in society. Therefore, in the perspective of queer studies, one’s sexuality is transformative (rejection of hetero-homo binary) depending on one’s gender performance. In
addition, traditionally, examination of one’s sexuality has been done through the ethnic model. Ethnic model presumes that gay and lesbian subjects are white and, therefore, one’s identity is formed by a single defining feature, sexuality or sexual orientation (Jagose, 1994). Race, class, gender, ethnicity, and other features are relegated to additional or optional category of identification in the ethnic model of sexuality (Jagose, 1994). However, in the perspective of queer studies, one’s identity cannot be formed monolithically but through the intricacy of sexuality with race, ethnicity, gender, class, and so on.

This study engaged in both the lesbian feminism perspective and queer studies perspective to bring out both gender and sexuality issues embedded in lesbianism and lesbian identity in films. In addition, in the process of examining how lesbianism and lesbian images are represented in films, how race and gender inflect lesbian sexuality was found and discussed in this study. Examining lesbian representations through both lesbian feminism and queer studies enabled to bring out the various experiences and meanings of lesbian sexuality in films.

Limitations

Films have more than hundred years of history. Throughout the film history, many films have contained lesbian characters, lesbian themes, lesbian images, and lesbian sensibility. Among thousands of films, choosing the right films for examining lesbian representations was a difficult task. In fact, it still remains uncertain whether the films that have been chosen for this study are the best examples in examining lesbian representations. Some films that contain good lesbian images and representations may have been overlooked in this study. However, this study attempted to include as many films that are well known
for lesbian characters, lesbian overtone, lesbian sensibility, and lesbian relationships as possible.

Another limitation of the study occurred in the process of data collecting. The main texts for this study are films. However, there were some films that were not obtainable for the study. Most of the unobtainable films were eliminated from the study. Several films remained in the study with an assistance of film’s scripts or transcripts and various secondary data on the film.

**Suggestions for Future Studies**

The purpose of this study is to examine how lesbianism and lesbian images are represented in film. In order to examine lesbian representations, textual analysis was conducted in this study. However, the meaning of the text in films can be interpreted and understood differently by different people. Therefore, one’s understanding and interpretation of lesbian representations in films can be different from the other.

Based on this study’s critical textual analysis, a future research can be done with an empirical approach, such as a reception analysis. Through reception analysis, more diverse understanding and meaning of lesbian representations in films can be examined. How new meanings and interpretations of lesbianism and lesbian experiences are created as the audience insert themselves in the text can be examined through a reception analysis. In addition, why the audience respond to the film the way they do can also be examined through a reception analysis as an audience’s response to a film is always based on his/her social location, history, identity, and subject interests (Dobinson & Young, 2000).
As a method of reception analysis, a focus group can be formed and studied in the future study. The participants for the focus group can be formed according to the purpose of the reception analysis. For example, if the purpose of the reception analysis is to examine lesbian readers’ interaction with the text of the film, the participants of the focus group should be consisted of lesbian women. If the purpose of the reception analysis is to examine how lesbian readers read the text of the film differently from heterosexual women readers, two separate focus groups can be formed: a focus group with lesbian readers and a focus group with heterosexual women readers.

Another future research that can be done based on this study is a comparative study of film and other media in lesbian representations. As Russo (1987) points out, gay images in films seem to be more of one dimensional than in other mass media. According to Russo (1987), other mass media, such as “plays, books, magazines, and even television shows presented a steady stream of diverse characters, real and fictional, who challenged gay stereotypes even in the face of a political backlash. But not motion picture” (p. 186). A comparative study of film and other media in lesbian representations enables one to examine whether certain lesbian images and conception of lesbianism are represented only in films or also in other mass media channels. If certain lesbian images and conception of lesbianism are represented only in films while other mass media channels contain different lesbian representations, the comparative study can lead to examining the film (industry) structure’s influence on lesbian representations in films. If the comparative study indicates that all the media channels contain same or similar lesbian representations, the social conception of lesbianism and lesbian identities can be understood.
In this study five different signs have been found that signify lesbianism. Because lesbianism is polysemic, many more signs that indicate lesbianism can be found in future studies. Every signs indicate different meanings of lesbianism. Some signs may signify lesbianism based on the conception of lesbian as a masculine woman and other signs may signify lesbianism based on the idea that lesbianism is a practice of female solidarity. As the meaning of lesbianism has changed over time so have the use of signs. Another suggestion for a future research is to see how the use of signs that signify lesbianism in films has changed over time.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine how representations of lesbian images and lesbianism have been made in films. In order to approach the study by looking into both gender and sexuality issues embedded in lesbianism and lesbian images in films, this study used both lesbian feminism and queer theory as the theoretical background. Examining lesbian representations in films in the perspective of both lesbian feminism and queer theory enabled to bring out various aspects of lesbianism and lesbian experience.

In this study, critical textual analysis and cultural studies were the methodologies used to examine the lesbian representations in films. In textual analysis and cultural studies, the text becomes the focus of the research and when the texts are the focus of the research examining the documents becomes the core task of the study. In this study, films and videotapes were the main documents that were used for the study. Twenty-eight films that are positioned in different time period and well-known for lesbian characters, themes, images, relationships, and sensibilities were chosen for this study. In order to conduct textual
analysis and cultural studies, three methods were used: semiotics, narrative analysis, and historical analysis. Because one of the goal of this study is to examine how lesbian representations in films have changed over time, five different time periods have been categorized according to the historical, social, and cultural events that influenced both the film industry and society.

Examination of lesbian representations has been broken into three parts in this study: signs/symbols of lesbianism, lesbian representation type, and lesbian representation in five different time period. In this study, five different signs/symbols that are used to signify lesbianism in films were found: attires/clothes, names, occupations, locations, and certain gestures and behaviors. Three different lesbian representation types were found in the study: stereotype, annihilation/invisibility, and lesbian sensibility. Meanwhile, this study has found that lesbian representations have constantly changed over the time period. From the first time period to the fifth time period, the changes of lesbian representations in films are as follows: iconography through gender crossing and various visual codes, stereotype with the association of unnaturalness and deviance, attractive and positive lesbian images but no lesbian relationships, lesbian sensibility through strong female relationships, and queer representations.

From the findings of the study, two issues were brought up and discussed: the dependence on the conception of masculinity in lesbian representations and how race and class interplay in representing (or stereotyping) lesbian characters. The signs that are used to symbolize lesbianism are mostly based on the stereotypical conception of lesbianism. The stereotypical conception of lesbianism is that all lesbians are masculine or mannish. Because
lesbian representations are based on the notion of masculinity, race and class play important factors in lesbian representations.

Examining the meaning of lesbianism is a complex task because lesbian sexuality is fluid. Lesbian sexuality cannot be understood without looking into both gender and sex. Understanding the lesbian representations in the perspective of both lesbian feminism and queer theory has enabled to examine the experience of lesbian sexuality in terms of both gender and sexuality. In the process, various aspects of lesbian experiences were given attention while challenging the stereotypical conception of lesbianism created by the patriarchal and heterosexual order of society.
FILMOGRAPHY

Alien, dir. Ridley Scott
Twentieth Century Fox, United States
1979 35mm fiction color

Aliens, dir. James Cameron
Twentieth Century Fox, United States
1986 35mm fiction color

Bagdad Café, dir. Percy Adlon
MGM, United States
1988 35mm fiction color

Basic Instinct, dir. Paul Verhoeven
Artisan Entertainment, United States
1992 35mm fiction color

Bound, dir. Larry and Andy Wachowski
Artisan Entertainment, United States
1996 35mm fiction color

Boys Don’t Cry, dir. Kimberly Peirce
Fox Searchlight Pictures, United States
1999 35mm fiction color

Boys on the Side, dir. Herbert Ross
Warner Brothers, United States
1995 35mm fiction color

Caged, dir. John Cromwell
Warner Brothers, United States
1950 35mm fiction b/w

Chasing Amy, dir. Kevin Smith
Buena Vista Entertainment, United States
1997 35mm fiction b/w

The Children’s Hour, dir. William Wyler
Mirisch, United States
1961 35mm fiction b/w

The Color Purple, dir. Steven Spielberg
Amblin Entertainment, United States
1985 35mm fiction color
Desert Hearts, dir. Donna Deitch
Samuel Goldwyn Company, United States
1986 35mm fiction color

Fried Green Tomatoes, dir. Jon Avnet
Universal Pictures, United States
1991 35mm fiction color

G. I. Jane, dir. Ridley Scott
Buena Vista Entertainment, United States
1997 35mm fiction color

The Killing of Sister George, dir. Robert Aldrich
Palomar, United States
1968 35mm fiction color

Mädchen in Uniform, dir. Leontine Sagan
Deutsche Film-Gemeinschaft, Germany
1931 35mm fiction b/w

Manhattan, dir. Woody Allen
United Artists, United States
1979 35mm fiction b/w

Morocco, dir. Josef von Sternberg
Paramount, United States
1930 35mm fiction b/w

Night of the Iguana, Dir. John Huston
Seven Arts, United States
1964 35mm fiction b/w

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Nero Film, Germany
1928 35mm fiction b/w silent

Personal Best, dir. Robert Towne
Geffen Co./Warner Bros., United States
1983 35mm fiction color

Rebecca, dir. Alfred Hitchcock
Selznic International Pictures, Unites States
1940 35mm fiction b/w
*Queen Christina*, dir. Rouben Mamoulian
MGM, United States
1933 35mm fiction b/w

*Set it Off*, dir. Gary Gray
Warner Brothers, United States
1996 35mm fiction b/w

*Silence of the Lambs*, dir. Jonathan Demme
MGM, United States
1991 35mm fiction color

*Sylvia Scarlett*, dir. George Cukor
RKO, United States
1935 35mm fiction b/w

*Thelma & Louise*, dir. Ridley Scott
MGM, United States
1991 35mm fiction color

*The Wild Party*, dir. Dorothy Arzner
Paramount Pictures, United States
1929 35mm fiction b/w
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