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The Frequency of Stereotypical Media Portrayals and Their Effects on the Lesbian Community

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the  
Requirements for Departmental Honors in Psychology

Bridgewater State University

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### **Abstract**

An abundance of research has shown that sexualized and stereotypical portrayals of women in the media have a negative impact on women's body image overall. However, previous research has not primarily focused on lesbian women. There is a gap in the literature regarding the portrayal of lesbian relationships in media, specifically in the eyes of the lesbian population. Limited research has shown that lesbians portrayed in the media are sexualized and stereotyped, falling into one of the six following categories: the hot lesbian, the out lesbian, the closeted lesbian, the butch lesbian, the feminine lesbian, and the bisexual lesbian. The aim of this study was to assess how (and whether) lesbians see themselves and their relationships portrayed in the media and whether cultural messaging which sexualizes lesbians leads to body image issues among lesbians. A sample of 178 lesbian women were recruited via an online survey platform titled 'Prolific Academic' to participate in a mixed-method study with correlational, experimental, and qualitative components. The independent variable was exposure to sexualized media portrayals of lesbians via a video clip from a popular television show. Body image, self-objectification, mood, and self-esteem were then assessed in order to determine whether exposure to sexualized lesbian media affects these variables among lesbians. It was hypothesized that upon exposure to an objectified portrayal of a lesbian in the media, the lesbian participants would report lower body image satisfaction, mood, and self-esteem with higher levels of self-objectification. Additional qualitative and quantitative measures were collected in an attempt to assess how lesbians are portrayed in the media, and to test for an inverse correlation between long-term exposure to sexualized lesbian media and body image: the higher the rate of exposure, the lower the body image. It was hypothesized that the hot lesbian would be the most common media portrayal of lesbianism. This could prove problematic for young

lesbians looking to model their actions after lesbian portrayals seen on television, due to the pervasiveness of media in sexual identity development. Results indicated that the hot lesbian was the most frequently portrayed, and the idea of lesbians moving too quickly was the most frequent portrayal of a lesbian relationships. Participants in the experimental condition reported lower body area satisfaction in comparison to the control, but no effects were found on any of the other dependent variables. Exposure to lesbian media was significantly correlated with positive mood; however, analyses uncovered a nonsignificant trend which correlated exposure with negative mood. These mixed results suggest the need for future research.

*Keywords:* lesbian, stereotype, body image, self-objectification, sexualization, mood, media portrayals

## **The Frequency of Stereotypical Media Portrayals and Their Effects on the Lesbian Community**

The LGBTQ+ community has been increasingly acknowledged to be a part of American culture while gaining more representation in the media in recent years (Geiger et al., 2006). This is notable as in the recent past negative attitudes towards homosexual individuals were socially acceptable and widespread (Kite & Whitley, 1996); however, bias against the LGBTQ+ population is slowly diminishing (Callender, 2015; Meyer, 2003). Often in past research examining same-sex relationships, participant pools consisted of either a mixture of gay men and women (e.g., Kite & Whitley, 1996) or lesbians and bisexual women (e.g., Randazzo et al., 2015). One of the detriments of research not utilizing an all-lesbian sample is that there are issues specific to the lesbian population. For example, the prevalence of mass media as a primary source of information for the public aggrandizes the influence of stereotypical media portrayals on perceptions of minority populations such as lesbians (Raley & Lucas, 2006). Young women who look to popular media to understand their sexuality are seemingly pushed toward heterosexuality, though such ideas are often viewed as a personal choice rather than the systematic heteronormativity of mainstream media (Diamond, 2005). Due to the status of lesbian women as an oppressed minority, young lesbians may experience a lack of positive role models who exemplify the lesbian experience. This combined with the media's widespread reach into the psychological development of young women (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2018) could cause this group to look to the media to inform what a lesbian "looks like," how she acts, and what to expect from romantic relationships. Numerous studies have found that objectifying media portrayals of women have a detrimental effect on women's body image, self-esteem, and mental health (Ward, 2016). However, much of this research focuses on heterosexual women despite

women of other sexual orientations being hypersexualized as well (Worthen, 2012). Objectified and stereotypical media portrayals could be detrimental to lesbian women's overall mental health, including their body image. The status of lesbian women as a double minority in terms of gender and sexuality in the United States creates a need for research specific to this minority group. Further, there has been no prior research linking lesbians' body image, and frequency of lesbian media exposure.

Prior research has suggested a relationship between high levels of self-objectification and negative psychological effects such as poor body image, low mood, and low self-esteem (Moradi & Huang, 2008). Objectification, or internalizing an outsider's perspective of one's own body, has negative effects on a woman's body image through the promotion of body shame (Moradi & Huang, 2008). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) proposed that self-objectification leads to negative mental health repercussions, including (but not limited to) low self-esteem and mood due to diminished opportunities for peak motivational states (i.e., being fully absorbed in a rewarding physical or mental activity). Little research has been done to test objectification theory with an all lesbian sample (for an exception, see Haines et al., 2008). Kozee and Tylka's (2006) study found that the objectification theory framework as postulated by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) was a poor fit for a lesbian sample while being a strong fit for heterosexual women. This could indicate that the relationships between objectification theory variables are more distinct and complex for lesbian women than heterosexual women (Kozee & Tylka, 2006). However, there are also findings that indicate that lesbian and heterosexual women report similar levels of objectification from sources other than mass media in their life experiences (Hill & Fischer, 2008). Contradictory findings in the literature further illuminate the necessity of studies focused on lesbian women specifically

Stereotypical portrayals of women in media are common, but there is a lack of research on the stereotypes of lesbians specifically as they are portrayed in the media. As images of sexuality in the media are often reflective of a given society's warmth toward a certain minority group (Brambilla et al., 2011), the media's objectifying portrayal of lesbians could affect the way they are perceived in the public domain as well as how they perceive themselves. Queer women have reported feeling disempowered and marginalized at the invisibility of certain queer identities (e.g., masculine-presenting women, or butch lesbians) in the media (Randazzo et al., 2015). This finding is representative of a larger issue that seems to affect how minority populations become portrayed in media: invisibility leads to the push for more media portrayals, and those portrayals are often stereotypical, sexualized, and commodified to mirror "cookie-cutter" heterosexual relationships. In this regard, the current study aimed to identify the stereotypical ways lesbians are presented in the media and their effects on the mental health and well-being of the lesbian population.

### **Portrayal of Lesbians in Media**

Studying the psychological effects of stereotypical lesbian media portrayals is essential to help mitigate heterosexism and oppression in sexual minority groups such as lesbians. Amongst the lesbian population, there has yet to be research linking media portrayals of lesbians to mood, self-esteem, self-objectification, and body image. Women are frequently sexualized in all forms of media, with sexualization being defined as a broader framework than sexual objectification (APA, 2007; Ward, 2016). Lesbians specifically are becoming increasingly commodified in the media as their visibility becomes greater over time (Gross, 2001; Raley & Lucas, 2006). Research has suggested that lesbian media portrayals are commodified to sell a multitude of products by reinforcing the current perceived norm in popular culture of an 'appropriate'/'

acceptable representation of lesbianism (Jackson & Gilbertson, 2009). Historically, these portrayals have shifted from villainous presentations to comedic relief, as well as from unattractive and masculine to hot and desirable (Jackson & Gilbertson, 2009). The lesbian community is not monolithic, and lesbian subtypes are publicly perceived as falling into six stereotypes: the out lesbian, the closeted lesbian, the bisexual lesbian, the feminine lesbian, the butch lesbian, and the hot lesbian (Brambilla, Carnaghi, & Ravenna, 2011; Szymanski et al., 2010). Popular shows such as *Desperate Housewives (DH)* or *Orange is the New Black (OITNB)* often employ characters that fall into one or more of these lesbian tropes. For example, Big Boo (*OITNB*) is a classic portrayal of a butch lesbian (i.e., short hair, masculine features and tendencies) even to the point of having “Butch” tattooed on her forearm. Robin (*DH*), however, represents the hot lesbian trope and is overtly sexualized; she is often filmed in full-body shots to emphasize her low-cut clothing while her heterosexual counterparts are most frequently shot from the waist or shoulders up. Robin’s profession as a stripper is frequently mentioned, and the audience may assume a lack of intelligence and competence due to her overt sexuality and objectifying career choice, corroborating previous research (Loughnan & Pacilli, 2014).

The performative quality of lesbianism for a heterosexual audience is widely accepted in music, movies, and television (Diamond, 2005). The “girls kissing girls” phenomenon was exemplified in mainstream music culture with Katy Perry’s (2008) hit song “I Kissed a Girl,” in which the singer openly denotes using women as a form of sexual experimentation. This marked a popular example of lesbianism being simultaneously commodified and devalued as a viable sexual orientation when Perry references kissing a girl “just to try it” rather than due to actual sexual desire (Diamond, 2005). In the case of lesbians portrayed on American television specifically, the message is sent to viewers that lesbianism is, in part, a performance that can be

enacted for the attention of heterosexual men (Randazzo et al., 2015). Lesbianism portrayed on television as an experimentation in deviating from the 'norm' of heterosexual relationships is exemplary of heteroflexibility, which is the idea of depicting primarily heterosexual women as hinting at or experimenting with same-sex sexuality (Diamond, 2005). The media's frequent portrayal of heteroflexibility may foster the relationship stereotype that lesbianism is merely an "experimental phase" rather than a valid relationship. The pervasiveness of heteroflexible characters in the media also informs society's understanding of what lesbianism "looks like."

Prior to Brambilla et al.'s 2011 study identifying lesbian subtypes, research was conducted only on lesbians generally, as they were viewed as a monolithic group. Yet, the social implications of being perceived as a feminine lesbian versus a butch lesbian can differ vastly. For example, in a qualitative study, a group of lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants reported the importance of media role models to their identities; response analyses posit that young sexual minority women can model their behaviors after those shown in the media, considering that to be the standard of behavior and expression (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). The historical precedence and media reinforcement of disguising lesbian relationships as friendships highlights the need for research to focus on how the media's sexualization of lesbianism impacts lesbian women's psychological well-being (Slater, 2012). As early as the eighteenth century, lesbian relationships have been disguised as intimate friendships and judged on their clothing/physical presentation, blurring the lines between lesbianism and female friendship in a way that allows for the simultaneous heteroerotic sexualization of lesbian women and devaluation of lesbianism as a valid sexual orientation (Slater, 2012; Smith & Greig, 2003). Stereotypical portrayals of lesbians can have consequences not only on the mental health of lesbians, but also how this group is perceived by heterosexuals. Heterosexual men encourage lesbianism for their own pleasure due

to a common desire to be with two women at once, while devaluing it at the same time by associating lesbianism with an act of performance (Jackson & Gilbertson, 2009). This act can be seen as exemplary of the fetishization of lesbian relationships for male consumption.

Historically, lesbian sexuality was defined as separate and distinct from gay men's sexuality in part due to the "mysterious" nature of what women do with other women, an idea that intrigues the heterosexual male community through present day (Slater, 2012). Heterosexual women, in turn, are inclined to view romantic relationships with other women as sexual exploration, which is implicitly impermanent (Diamond, 2005). This is referred to as 'lifestyle lesbianism,' which may contribute to the invalidation of true lesbianism while promoting bisexual and lesbian actions for the male gaze (Clark, 2012). It is important to assess the layers of what stereotypes of the lesbian community mean for the interpretation of a given lesbian's independence, status, and competence.

### **Objectification, Sexualization, and Body Image Effects**

Objectification is defined as when a woman is treated as being merely a body who exists for the use and pleasure of others, separate from her person, especially in the experience of women who are sexual minorities (Tebbe et al., 2018). More specifically, objectification theory posits that sexual objectification (SO) can increase women's opportunities for body shame as well as their anxiety about physical appearance and physical safety (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Simultaneously, SO can decrease awareness of internal body sensations (e.g. blood sugar levels) as well as opportunities for motivational states (e.g. rare moments during which one feels creative, joyful, and uncontrolled by others) which in turn can lead to depression, disordered eating, and sexual dysfunction (Calogero, 2012; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Moradi & Huang, 2008; Szymanski et al., 2011). As postulated by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), sexual

objectification, both external and internalized, is likely to be influenced by factors such as sexual orientation, social class, and race/ethnicity. However, such intersectional factors have not been adequately studied, which validates the need for research surrounding how sexual objectification intersects with other aspects of women's sociocultural identities (Szymanski et al., 2011).

The results of heterosexism intersecting with SO are impactful on the lives of lesbians, encouraging the devaluation of homosexuality/homosexual relationships while placing a high value on the heterosexist ideals of womanhood and femininity (Szymanski & Chung, 2001). The idea that heterosexual relationships are superior to homosexual relationships (i.e., the idea that homosexual relationships are less real/valid than heterosexual relationships) along with concealment of sexual orientation, psychological distress, and internalized heterosexism are factors associated with sexual minority women who experience social constraints in discussing their sexual orientation (Mason et al., 2015). The higher social value placed on heterosexual relationships can result in lesbian women following the constructs of womanhood perpetuated by heterosexism at the detriment of her own expression of sexual orientation. For example, a closeted lesbian might dress feminine and kiss other women in a party setting in front of men, morphing her presentation of her sexual orientation to fit within the social confines of heterosexism. Alternatively, lesbians can internalize heterosexism and respond by criticizing other lesbians who do not adhere to such social constructs surrounding female appearance (i.e., butch lesbians; Szymanski & Chung, 2001).

Exposure to objectification and sexualization via media have had measurable effects on the lived experiences of women in the general population (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008), but more research is needed to determine if this is true of lesbian samples. Tebbe et al.'s (2018) research postulated that the objectification of lesbians can differ based on gender expression; for

example, masculine-presenting women experience objectification via being labeled as hypersexual aggressors, while feminine-presenting women are treated as sexual objects. Some studies posit that lesbian women have reported higher levels of body surveillance than their heterosexual counterparts, potentially due to the experience of operating within the heterosexist framework which dominates our culture (Kozee & Tylka, 2006). Higher levels of body surveillance could signify that lesbians monitor their appearance more than heterosexual women, in part to ensure visibility or to avoid derision within such a pervasive framework (Kozee & Tylka, 2006). However, there have also been indications that lesbians and heterosexual women are equally bound by Western societal beauty expectations, as some studies (Hill & Fischer, 2008) have found lower levels of body surveillance in lesbian women than in heterosexual women, potentially due to lesbians focusing on the functional qualities of physical attractiveness rather than the conventional aspects of being perceived as such (Heffernan, 1999). This could be due to protective factors associated with being a part of the lesbian community (e.g., not trying to attract a man; Hill & Fischer, 2008). Sexual objectification affects all women, as the cultural sexualization of women has numerous negative impacts on women's mental health and wellbeing. The sources of sexualization and objectification of lesbian women can be both personal, from interactions with the public, and impersonal, from social standards, media portrayals, and common stereotypes (Hill & Fischer, 2008). Objectification, both of others and of the self, is a frequent and largely unconscious occurrence within the community of sexual minority women (Moradi et al., 2019). Contributing to the body of literature surrounding objectification effects in an all-lesbian sample is the impetus for the current study, as it is important to assess exposure to lesbian media specifically and its implications on the lesbian community.

The media commonly objectifies women, and objectification has been linked to poorer mental health and body image issues. Women are heavily sexualized in media, and lesbian women experience this equally, and sometimes at greater rates, than heterosexual women (Tebbe et al., 2018). This could be because lesbians experience a more diverse set of objectification tactics than heterosexual women (Kozee & Tylka, 2016). Lesbian relationships have become increasingly commodified, exploited, and hypersexualized by popular media, most often targeting male consumers' ideals of being sexually involved with two (or more) women at one time (Szymanski et al., 2011). Studies have found that sexual minority women are primarily sexualized by men (Tebbe et al., 2018), and prior research indicates that 85% of sexually objectifying comments directed toward women on prime-time comedies were made by men, lending credence to the idea that lesbian women are highly susceptible to dehumanization (Lampman et al., 2002). It is important to note that lesbian objectification from women is present when queer women are viewed as 'experimental' in their relationships (Tebbe et al., 2018). As lesbian women are faced with the internalization of overt sexualization both from themselves and their potential partners, the effects of stereotyped media portrayals are potentially increased in this population (Randazzo et al., 2015).

Popular media provides the message to women that their value and worth is directly correlated to their physical attractiveness (Brooker et al., 2018). The overt sexualization of women in mainstream media has measurable negative effects which results in women's gender attitudes being affected, both physically and psychologically (Schooler, 2015). This constant appearance pressure and anxiety can affect how a woman evaluates her physical presentation (Moradi & Huang, 2008). For example, butch lesbians who are masculine presenting might evaluate themselves against standard media portrayals of women differently than a feminine

lesbian would. This may result in body shame regarding queer women's orientation to their appearance. However, research has revealed that women who have higher enjoyment of sexualization are predominantly heterosexual, as they view sexualized attention as a way to gain potential emotional intimacy from their male partners (Barnett et al., 2018). Interestingly, this finding mirrors eighteenth and nineteenth century relationships between women, which were higher in emotional intimacy than any of their heterosexual relationships (Slater, 2012). This could suggest that lesbians do not feel the need to sexualize their partner in order to gain emotional intimacy like their heterosexual counterparts.

Body shame is defined as the emotion that results from measuring oneself against a cultural standard and coming up short (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The media's unrealistic, narrow, and unattainable standard of beauty influences the interpretation of a woman's worth and sexiness (APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2007). Greater exposure to media images that reflect this standard is linked to an emphasis on appearance and beauty when defining one's own self-worth, self-objectification, body shame, appearance anxiety, and body dissatisfaction (Szymanski et al., 2011). The constant sexual objectification of women results in feeling a lack of control over experiences related to their own bodies, which provokes anxiety about their appearance and physical safety (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). These standards and effects are most predominant in the lives of white women, specifically when compared to African American women (Botta, 2000) and Cuban American women (Jane, Hunter, & Lozzi, 1999). Queer women experience heightened responses to sexual objectification, as their body image problems employ double the mental energy; unlike heterosexual women, they focus on how body image relates to their potential partners as well as how it relates to themselves (Randazzo et al., 2015).

## **Present Study**

Overall, previous research in the past 20 years has shown that women are sexualized in popular media characterizations, and that this sexualization has a negative impact on their body image and self-esteem (Ward, 2016). However, the vast majority of this research focuses on heterosexual women, and so the present study aims to address the gap in the literature by utilizing an all-lesbian sample in a mixed-method study with experimental, correlational, and qualitative components.

The current study aimed to analyze the frequency of stereotypical portrayals of lesbians in media as well as the immediate body image effects of such portrayals on the lesbian population. The experimental component of the study involved randomly assigning some participants to be exposed to a video of a sexualized portrayal of a lesbian character and then testing self-objectification, mood, self-esteem, and body image.

**H1:** Compared to the control group, participants exposed to the video of a sexualized portrayal of a lesbian character will report increased self-objectification, negative mood, lower self-esteem, and negative body image.

Participants were also asked to report how often they experience exposure to such images, in an attempt to assess if exposure over time would slowly deteriorate a young lesbian's body image positivity, self-esteem, and body relations through an increase in self-objectification. The correlational component involved survey questions regarding the participants' frequency of exposure to specific stereotypical media portrayals.

**H2:** The hot lesbian is the most commonly reported stereotype.

**H3:** If a participant reports higher exposure to lesbian stereotypes in the media, then they will report increased self-objectification, negative mood, lower self-esteem, and negative body image.

This research aims to bridge the gap in the literature between heterosexual women and lesbian women about media impacts on self-objectification and mental health effects. Furthermore, this work aims to document how lesbians perceive their representation in the media, through both quantitative and qualitative data collection.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The online academic platform Prolific Academic was used to recruit lesbian women who were citizens of the United States. The mean age of the 179 participants was 31.54 ( $SD=11.57$ ) with a calculated average participant BMI being 28.10 ( $SD=7.66$ ). The racial makeup of the sample included 72.1% of participants identifying themselves as White, 12.8% Black or African American, 1.7% American Indian or Alaska Native, 3.9% Asian, 0.6% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 6.1% Hispanic or Latino/a, and 2.8% identifying as ‘other’. Participants reported a wide range of education levels: 0.6% with less than a high school degree, 13.4% were high school graduates, 33% with some college education, 7.3% with a 2-year college degree, 32.4% with a 4-year college degree, 12.9% with a professional or doctoral degree, and 0.6% responding as ‘other’. The employment status of participants was that those employed full- and part-time made up 67.6% of the sample, 10.7% unemployed looking or not looking for work, 3.4% retired or disabled, 15.1% students and 3.4% identifying as ‘other’. On average, participants reported that they were moderately familiar with the show *Desperate Housewives* ( $M=3.85$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ), from which clips were used as the experimental stimulus. Participants were paid through Prolific Academic \$1.95 each; availability of funding determined the sample size. Participants were treated in accordance with APA ethical guidelines.

### **Materials**

### ***Experimental Manipulation***

The video clips utilized in the main study were from the show *Desperate Housewives*. Character/actor consistency eliminates confounding variables such as different actors producing different reactions from participants. Both the experimental and the control videos portrayed the same four characters: Robin, Katherine, and two men at a bar. The experimental video, taken from Season 6, Episode 15, was 45 seconds long and portrayed the stereotypes of lesbianism being performative for the male gaze, and heteroflexibility via using lesbianism as an experimental departure from heterosexism. In this experimental clip, two men at a bar unsuccessfully attempt to flirt with Robin, an out lesbian, who responds by kissing her heterosexual friend Katherine on the lips. The women walk away and leave the men gawking in their absence, and the scene cuts to Katherine and Robin discussing the men's reaction to the event. The control video, also taken from Season 6, Episode 15, was 50 seconds long and did not portray a lesbian stereotype. This clip showed Katherine and Robin sitting with the same two men at the bar and having a conversation about Robin's occupation, during which the sexual orientation of the characters was not revealed. The two clips used in this study were chosen based on a pretest of four possible videos.

A pretest survey was conducted to measure participant responses to four videos the researchers chose as representative of the independent variable of stereotypical and hypersexualized lesbian media portrayals. To test the effectiveness of the media clips, a total of four were reviewed: two experimental and two control video clips were chosen from a popular show, *Desperate Housewives*. Clips were chosen by the researchers to be similar on several characteristics, including the actors featured, general tone of the clip, and length of the scene. The aim of the pretest was to test that the experimental clip significantly portrayed more

stereotypes than the corresponding control clip, yet the clips were similar in terms of how engaging they were. Pretest participants were instructed to watch the four video clips (two neutral interactions and two interactions displaying one or more lesbian stereotypes) and respond to two sets of questions after each video. The online pretest included a separate sample of 35 female participants who rated each video on a scale of 1 “Not at all” to 5 “Very much” and measured the effectiveness of each experimental or control video to portray (or lack) a certain lesbian stereotype and elicit an equal level of emotion from the participant

The first set of four questions was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale from ‘Not at all’ to ‘Very much’ and examined the extent to which each video represented a lesbian stereotype (e.g., “To what extent did this video portray a lesbian who is hypersexualized?”). The second set of four of questions used the same scale and measured the engagement level of the video (e.g., “How entertaining was this video?”). Upon completion of the videos and question sets, participants were asked demographic information about their age, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and level of education.

A series of t-tests were used to evaluate the video scores and identify those that would be the most similar on all levels other than portrayal of a lesbian stereotype. For the main study, one experimental and one control video were chosen out of the original four, as the experimental ( $M_E = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 0.906$ ) and control video ( $M_C = 2.03$ ,  $SD = 1.141$ ) were most significantly different in portraying performative lesbian actions for men,  $t(33) = 7.409$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , as well as the idea that lesbian relationships are primarily sexual experimentation ( $M_E = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.234$ ;  $M_C = 1.44$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ),  $t(33) = 6.955$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The chosen experimental and control videos were also rated as significantly different in portraying a lesbian who is hypersexualized ( $M_E = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 1.106$ ;  $M_C = 2.62$ ,  $SD = 1.538$ )  $t(33) = 3.484$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , and/or unsure of her sexual orientation ( $M_E = 1.97$ ,

$SD=1.243$ ;  $M_C=1.38$ ,  $SD=0.604$ ),  $t(33) = 3.187$ ,  $p = 0.003$ . In terms of emotion, the pair of videos did not significantly differ in the emotionality ( $M_E = 1.44$ ,  $SD=0.66$ ;  $M_C=1.5$ ,  $SD=0.749$ )  $t(33)= -0.442$ ),  $p = 0.661$ , and experimental and control videos were rated as equally entertaining ( $M_E= 2.74$ ,  $SD= 1.214$ ;  $M_C=2.56$ ,  $SD=1.16$ )  $t(33) = 1.234$ ,  $p = 0.226$ , and easy to pay attention to ( $M_E=3.62$ ,  $SD=1.256$ ;  $M_C=3.44$ ,  $SD=1.353$ ),  $t(33) = 1.529$ ,  $p = 0.136$ . The only exception found was in the rating of funniness, in which the control video was rated as funnier ( $M_C=2.71$ ,  $SD= 1.219$ ) than the experimental video ( $M_E=2.12$ ,  $SD=1.094$ ),  $t(33) = 2.837$ ,  $p = 0.008$ .

### ***Dependent Measures***

**Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS).** The surveillance subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS) assesses the extent to which a participant monitors their body (McKinley & Hyde 1996) and is commonly used as a measure of self-objectification. Questions are answered on a 1-7 scale (1=*Strongly agree*, 7=*Strongly disagree*). The measure consists of eight questions to assess how attentive one is to how their body looks to others (e.g., “While watching the video, I thought about how I look many times,” “Right now I am thinking about how I look compared to how other people look”). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.81.

**Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-SF).** The PANAS-SF is a more concise version of the original PANAS used to assess mood (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988). The aim of the questionnaire is to determine how a person feels at that moment (i.e., “Indicate the extent to which you have felt this way in the past week”). The item list is split up into two mood scales. One scale measures a person’s positive emotion (i.e., enthusiastic, proud, attentive) and the other scale measures the negative emotions (i.e., jittery, hostile, upset). Each segment has ten terms, which can be rated on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating the extent to which the respondent

agrees that this applies to them. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.9 for the positive scale and 0.898 for the negative scale.

**Multi-dimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ).** The multi-dimensional body self-relations questionnaire (MBSRQ) aims to assess attitudes toward one's body and appearance (Cash, 2000). Questions are answered based on a 1-5 Likert scale, 1 indicating definitely disagreeing with a given statement and 5 indicating definitely agreeing. Three of the revised ten subscales of this measure were used in the current study, namely the appearance evaluation (AE), appearance orientation (AO), and body area satisfaction (BAS) subscales (Brown et al., 1990; Cash, 2000). AE, comprised of seven items, measures how happy/unhappy and attractive/unattractive a person feels about their physical appearance (i.e., "My body is sexually appealing", "I like my looks just the way they are"). The Cronbach's alpha for this subscale was 0.914. AO assesses how much time and energy a person spends trying to "look good," and has twelve items (i.e., "I am careful to buy clothes that will make me look my best", "I check my appearance in the mirror whenever I can"). The Cronbach's alpha for this subscale was 0.883. BAS, with nine items, measures how satisfied/dissatisfied a person is with specific areas of their body, such as "lower torso (buttocks, hips, thighs, legs)". The Cronbach's alpha for this subscale was 0.866.

**Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES).** The RSES is a ten-item questionnaire intended to assess self-esteem (global and general self-worth) via positive and negative feelings about oneself (Rosenberg, 1965). Items are rated on a four-point Likert scale, from 1 "Strongly agree" to 4 "Strongly disagree". Some items include "I feel I do not have much to be proud of" and "On the whole I am satisfied with myself". The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.937.

### ***Long-Term Exposure to Media Portrayals of Lesbians***

There are no existing validated scales that measure self-reported exposure to media portraying stereotypes of lesbian individuals and their relationships. Therefore, to pinpoint the frequency of stereotypes of lesbians in the media specifically, an original measure was created using a 5-point Likert scale (1=*Not very often*, 5=*Very often*) consistent with measures of frequency of other subjects (e.g., violence) in the media (Krahé et al., 2011). The original measure is composed of thirteen items: six questions about validated lesbian stereotypes (Brambilla, Carnaghi, & Ravenna, 2011; Szymanski et al., 2011), four questions about colloquial lesbian relationship stereotypes, and three questions about the overall perception of lesbians and their relationships in media. Some items include “How often do you come across a portrayal of a “butch” lesbian (a lesbian whose gender expression is stereotypically masculine or ‘boyish’) in popular media?” and “Would you say that portrayals of lesbians/lesbian relationships in popular media are generally positive, somewhat positive, generally negative, somewhat negative, or hard to say?”. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.70. See appendix for full list of items.

### ***Qualitative Data***

Participants were asked an open-response question at the end of the study: “In your experience, how would you describe the ways in which the media portrays lesbians and their relationships?” Each qualitative response was coded by two researchers independently from one another. A small subset of codes was discussed prior to independent coding. Three rounds of coding revealed new categories that were mutually agreed upon by researchers. After combining all codes, there were matching codes 97% of the time. The qualitative responses with differences in coding were not included in analyses. See Table 1 for full list of codes and definitions.

### ***Procedure***

The study was completed online via Qualtrics survey software and the website Prolific Academic. Researchers obtained informed consent from participants prior to the beginning of the study. Participants were told that the study was a measure of the effects of media and were instructed to watch the video and complete the measures that followed. Participants typically completed the questionnaire in under fifteen minutes. First, participants were randomly assigned (via Qualtrics) to a control group or an experimental group and shown the corresponding video clip. Both groups then completed the measures regarding mood, body image (i.e., appearance orientation, appearance evaluation, body area satisfaction), self-esteem, and self-objectification. Finally, participants answered questions which assessed frequency of self-reported exposure to lesbian stereotypes, including the open-ended question regarding how they believed lesbians are typically portrayed in the media. No deception was used, and participants were assured of the confidentiality of their answers in the debrief. Researcher contact information and an electronic copy of debriefing information were provided.

## Results

### Effects of Sexualized Media Exposure: Experimental versus Control Groups

H1 stated that lesbians in the experimental group who were exposed to sexualized lesbian media portrayals would report higher rates of self-objectification and appearance evaluation, lower mood, and lower rates of self-esteem and body area satisfaction than the control group. An independent samples t-test produced no significant difference in self-objectification levels between the control ( $M_C=5.29$ ,  $SD_C=1.16$ ) and experimental groups ( $M_E=5.32$ ,  $SD_E=1.04$ ),  $t(177)=0.20$ ,  $p=0.85$ .

T-tests conducted on differences in mood, both positive: ( $M_C=2.35$ ,  $SD_C=0.94$ ;  $M_E=2.24$ ,  $SD_E=0.77$ )  $t(177)=-0.85$ ,  $p=0.40$ , and negative: ( $M_C=1.46$ ,  $SD_C=0.64$ ;  $M_E=1.36$ ,  $SD_E=0.58$ )

$t(177)=-1.07, p=0.29$ , yielded no significant differences between experimental and control groups as measured by the PANAS-SF. There was no significant difference in self-esteem between the experimental ( $M_E=2.73, SD_E=0.72$ ) and control groups ( $M_C=2.74, SD_C=0.73$ ),  $t(177)=-0.14, p=0.89$ . There was no significant difference found between the appearance evaluation of the experimental ( $M_E=2.87, SD_E=1.00$ ) and control groups ( $M_C=3.04, SD_C=0.99$ ),  $t(177)=-1.14, p=0.26$ . However, a t-test yielded a significant difference between the body area satisfaction of the experimental ( $M_E=2.91, SD_E=0.83$ ) and control groups ( $M_C=3.17, SD_C=0.84$ ),  $t(177)=-2.06, p=0.04$ . The control group was more satisfied with their specific body areas than the experimental group as measured by the MBSRQ-BAS.

### **Frequency of Lesbian Stereotypes**

A repeated measures ANOVA and pairwise comparison indicated significant differences in the frequency of reported lesbian stereotypes. As predicted in H2, the portrayal of the hot lesbian ( $M=3.61, SD=1.16$ ) was reported significantly more often than the other (5) stereotypes,  $F(5, 177)=35.97, p<0.001$ . Additionally, it was reported that there was a significantly more frequent portrayal of feminine lesbians ( $M=3.34, SD=1.03$ ) than out lesbians ( $M=3.12, SD=0.96$ ), while out lesbians were shown more often than closeted lesbians ( $M=2.88, SD=0.92$ ). A repeated measures ANOVA found a significant difference in frequency amongst the lesbian relationship stereotypes: the moving too quickly (or ‘U-Haul’) stereotype ( $M=3.23, SD=1.11$ ) was witnessed significantly more frequently than the other three relationship stereotypes,  $F(3, 531) = 23.45, p<0.001$ . No other relationship stereotypes were significantly different from each other.

### **Relationships between Lesbian Popular Media Exposure and Other Variables**

H3 proposed that participants’ reported exposure to lesbian stereotypes in the media would correlate with increased self-objectification, negative mood, lower self-esteem, and

negative body image. The mean of all witnessed stereotypes was used to represent long-term exposure. There was no significant relationship between increased exposure to lesbian media and self-objectification,  $r=-0.90$ ,  $p=0.23$ , self-esteem,  $r=-0.09$ ,  $p=0.24$ , body area satisfaction,  $r=0.10$ ,  $p=0.18$ , or appearance evaluation,  $r=0.05$ ,  $p=0.55$ . Pearson's  $r$  tests of positive mood  $r=0.19$ ,  $p=0.01$ , yielded significant results. In contrast to the hypothesis, the higher the stereotypical media exposure over time, the better the mood. However, in line with the hypothesis there was a non-significant trend between self-reported exposure to stereotyped lesbian media and negative mood  $r=0.14$ ,  $p=0.06$ . The more stereotypical lesbian media exposure, the more participants tended to report a negative mood state at the time of the experiment.

### **Overarching Perceptions of Lesbian Media Portrayals**

A paired samples t-test indicated that participants believed that individual lesbians ( $M=2.99$ ,  $SD=1.10$ ) are portrayed more positively in the media than lesbian relationships are ( $M=2.84$ ,  $SD=1.14$ ),  $t(177)=2.47$ ,  $p=0.01$ . It was found that the more positively one feels about lesbians being portrayed in the media, the more positive the participant's mood,  $r=0.26$ ,  $p<0.001$ , during the study.

### **Qualitative Responses about Lesbian Portrayals in Media**

The most frequent theme apparent in over half of the qualitative responses was that lesbian portrayals are stereotypical (56.8%). Other common themes present in responses were that lesbian portrayals are negative (36.4%), for the male gaze (30.1%), and hypersexualized (20.5%). See Table 1 for full list of codes, definitions, examples from the data, and frequencies.

## **Discussion**

This study addressed gaps in the literature surrounding an all lesbian sample while assessing the frequency of stereotypical portrayals in media and their effects on the mental health

and wellbeing of lesbians. Overall, there were few associations between exposure to lesbian stereotypes in the media and self-esteem, mood, or self-objectification. However, the manipulation seemed to have a negative effect on lesbian's body area satisfaction. In correlation with long-term media exposure, there was a significant effect on positive mood, with a marginally significant effect on negative mood. The more a participant reported exposure to media, the more positive the participant mood. However, results also slightly indicated that the more media exposure experienced, the more negative the participant's mood. The conflicting results surrounding mood were speculated to be related to the tendency for some participants to actively seek out queer media by/for members of the LGBTQ+ community. The most reported lesbian stereotype in the media was the hot lesbian, which aligned with hypotheses. Other frequently reported stereotypical depictions of lesbians were the feminine lesbian, the out lesbian, and the closeted lesbian. Participants reported that the most commonly depicted relationship stereotype was the idea of moving too quickly in a relationship (colloquially known as 'U-haul'ing). Other portrayals of lesbian relationships that were assessed included lesbianism as performative for men, a vacation relationship, and an invalid relationship. Qualitative analyses revealed predominant themes of stereotypical media portrayals of lesbians and, of the stereotypes coded, the trope of lesbian relationships being temporary. Themes of hypersexuality in representations, the performance of lesbianism for the male gaze, and negative portrayals were also present.

In terms of body image, objectification, and mood, most of the data did not support hypotheses. The exceptions were that the control group was more satisfied with their specific body areas than the experimental group after immediate exposure to stereotypical lesbian media portrayals. It's important to note that this finding could be a Type I error, given the number of

statistical tests conducted in this study, so future research should aim to corroborate these findings prior to reaching firm conclusions. Contrary to hypotheses, a positive correlation was found between self-reported long-term exposure to lesbian media and positive mood, indicating that the higher exposure to lesbian media the better the mood. Interestingly and in line with hypotheses, there was a marginally significant relationship between exposure to lesbian media and negative mood, which contradicts the previous finding relating exposure to positive mood. This contradictory finding could be explained by certain moderating variables. For instance, in their open-ended responses, some participants reference purposefully seeking out alternative media in order to be exposed to more realistic representations of lesbians. Thus, these participants could be more likely to feel positive mood after exposure to lesbian media portrayals as the portrayals they are used to seeing may be less contrived and more relatable.

In previous research on exposure to sexualized media content, self-objectification effects were found by some researchers (with race as a mediating factor), while a similar number of researchers found no effect on self-objectification in the female population (Ward, 2016). Substantial evidence suggests greater body dissatisfaction in individuals exposed to sexualized media portrayals than their counterparts experiencing neutral portrayals (Grabe et al., 2008; Ward, 2016). The current study did not find effects on appearance evaluation and self-objectification but did find an effect on body satisfaction. These divergent findings could mean that these types of portrayals do not affect lesbians in the ways previous research suggests. Our data supports an alternate theory that stereotypical media portrayals do not have a large effect on mood and objectification, but rather influence global perceptions of lesbians. For example, one theme in qualitative responses was that participants surveyed did not feel represented by portrayals (11.4%). Many specifically mentioned the invisibility of specific stereotypes such as

butch lesbians (i.e., “not enough butch dykes...”), corroborating findings from Randazzo et al. (2015). This could indicate that the invisibility of certain stereotypes such as butch lesbians in popular media is a contributing factor to the body dissatisfaction of this subgroup. Butch lesbians who do not see relatable representations of this subset of the lesbian community in popular culture can lead to greater body dissatisfaction as the standards they are measuring themselves up against are predominantly hyperfeminized, unrealistic and unattainable. Race has been discussed by previous research as a mediating factor to the effects of sexual objectification, and some participants in the present study reference the idea that lesbian interracial couples are not commonly portrayed, and when they are the portrayals are extremely contrived (i.e. “they don’t make [lesbians] as prominent as an interracial couple,” and “lesbians of color...are often still hyper-sexualized or seen as exotic under the white gaze. Lesbians of color are often only relevant when they are in proximity to a white character whether that be through dating or friendship. In addition, darker-skinned lesbians in media are often portrayed as more masculine or predatory than white lesbians.”). These reported themes in congruence with the racial differences in beauty standards could provide explanation for the lack of findings surrounding self-objectification and appearance evaluation/orientation. For example, a lesbian woman of color might be less likely to internalize harmful media portrayals as such portrayals are not relatable or seen as a source of beauty standards to this population. Another explanation of the lack of significant difference between the objectification levels of the control and experimental groups could be related to the media clips chosen, as the episode may have been perceived as dated and thus not relatable to the current lesbian population. Previous research suggests the importance of factors such as preexisting biases, identities, and beliefs as well as the genre of media consumed on the effects of self-objectification (Ward, 2016).

Studies have indicated that the way sexualized images of women are cognitively processed align more with the typical processing of objects rather than the processing of people, leading to dehumanization (Schooler, 2015). Research has found that men are especially likely to dehumanize women when a sex goal of theirs has been activated (Puvia & Vaes, 2013). As previous research has shown that men have an ideal of being sexually involved with two women at one time, the male audience would be especially likely to dehumanize women enacting lesbianism (Szymanski et al., 2011). This creates a vulnerability of dehumanization specific to the lesbian population, whose likeness is performed in an objectifying light for male consumption and titillation. Such susceptibility is significant when used as a framework through which to interpret the qualitative responses: 30.1% of open responses referenced lesbianism for the male gaze, 24.4% referenced the temporary presentation of lesbian relationships with 17% referencing lesbianism as a performative experience. The frequency of themes seems to indicate that lesbianism is perceived by the lesbian population as being portrayed in popular media as a temporary performance for the male gaze. Lifestyle lesbians who have a proclivity for performance would thus be more at risk for being dehumanized, leading to a shift in the perception of lesbians based on their presentation in mainstream media. By primarily presenting lesbians in a hypersexualized light, popular media can influence how this group is perceived and understood by the public and by lesbians themselves, leading to a greater risk of dehumanization and, by extension, mental health effects.

Limitations of this study include the lack of a validated measure to assess long-term exposure to stereotypical lesbian media. Previous research was used to generate content for each item, and items were modeled after prior scales measuring media exposure. However, these scales were not ensured to be gauging true exposure to stereotypical portrayals, and thus the

measure is not validated. Future research should validate a scale of long-term exposure to stereotypical content in media in order to corroborate these findings. Future research could also evaluate actual exposure to stereotypical content, through methods such as tracking participants' media intake, given that the measure in the current study relies on self-report and therefore makes it difficult to tease apart actual exposure from the problems of self-report. For example, the measure used in the current study could instead be measuring sensitivity to exposure, leading participants to retroactively report higher levels of exposure than experienced.

Another limitation to this study concerns the collection of qualitative data at the end of the study, because participant responses could have been primed by previous sections. A further limitation is the online nature of the study; participants were paid upon completion of the questionnaire regardless of the quality or length of response, which could have negatively impacted the quality of data. However, it's worth noting that many respondents wrote lengthy explanations regarding their opinions on how lesbians are portrayed in the media, so perhaps the sample was motivated to provide high-quality data despite the online format.

Corroborating the suggestions raised by Ward (2016), I urge future researchers to redefine how they approach media representations and media exposure. As our media normalcies shift, so must the analysis of media stimuli. Future research might look at the experimental differences between using still photographs, short video clips, and music videos among other sources of sexualized portrayals of women. Previously defined moderating factors of the effects of sexualized media such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status should be addressed through increased diversity in sampling. These findings can be generalized to lesbians but not to other members of the LGBTQ+ community as each subset of such community faces a vastly different set of sociocultural and intersectional hurdles. Findings and data can be used to grant more

visibility to different ‘types’ of lesbians in media so lesbians feel more adequately represented and respected.

The term ‘media’ is ubiquitous and often in flux. This idea of fluctuation highlights the need for continuous re-assessment of definitions, scales, and types of media being studied. Social media has become more influential, and some might argue that television shows and movie portrayals have mirrored the trends set by social media instead of vice versa. Perceptions of lesbianism have shifted over the years from it being viewed as taboo, to being labeled as sexual deviance, to its being acceptable in congruence with men, and over time may continue to integrate lesbianism as an accepted and normal aspect of womanhood. Lesbian participants surveyed indicate that though the portrayals of lesbians in media are progressing, there is still much work to be done for representations to accurately reflect all facets of this diverse minority population. Targeting media representations of lesbians can have great positive effects on the way lesbians’ warmth, competence, and bodily autonomy are perceived by the public. These results could inform more humanizing portrayals of lesbians in popular culture that would integrate the individualism of this community into mass awareness.

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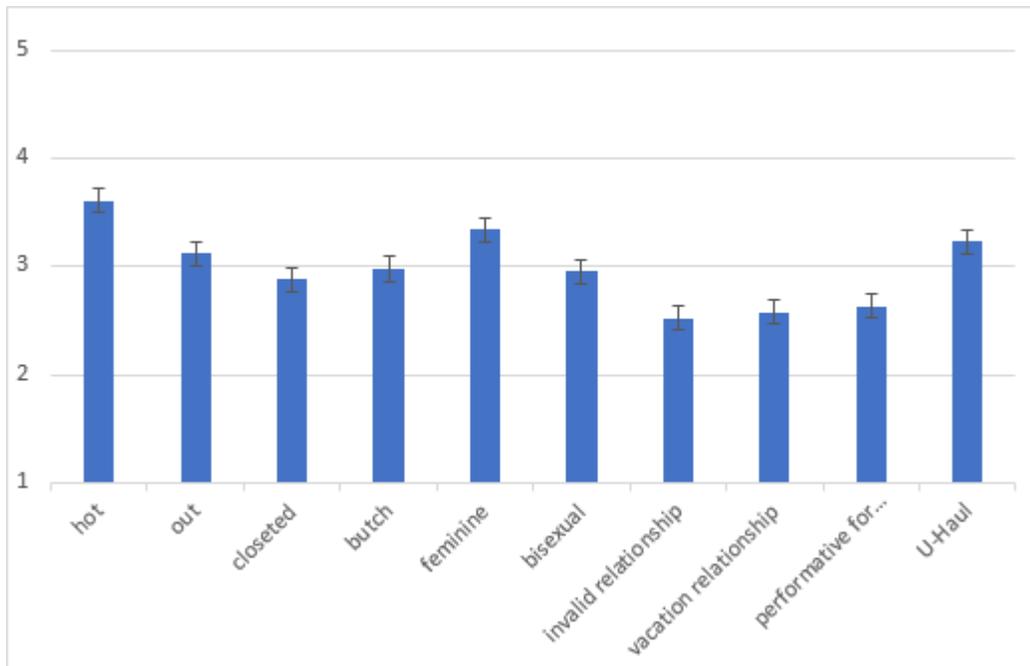
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**Figure 1**

*Frequency of Lesbian Stereotypes [with standard error bars]*



*Note.* Y-Axis represents the mean frequency of a given stereotype; X-axis represents stereotype categories. See appendix (Original Measure Items) for full list of items.

**Table 1**

*Coding of Open Responses: Definitions, Examples and Frequencies*

Name of code	Definition	Example	% of respondents
Hypersexuality	Lesbians portrayed as excessively sexual	“very badly, for the titillation [sic] of it all. Specifically for straight men.”  “fetishized”	20.5%
Invisibility	Lesbians not portrayed enough	“I don’t think that they display us enough”  “I think the media (including gay media) often ignores us in general. We're very underrepresented...”	11.4%
Portrayals are progressing	Lesbians are portrayed in ways that are better than in the past	“It's gotten much better...”  “Better than in the past”	11.4%
Performative	Lesbians portrayed as engaging in relationships/activities primarily for some	“Performative, generally still for male enjoyment”	17%

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	audience, and their		
	relationships are not taken		
	seriously		
Male gaze	Lesbians portrayed as engaging in relationships/activities for men specifically	“Lesbians are usually portrayed... like how the male gaze would idealize being gay.”	30.1%
Positive	Lesbian relationship portrayals are positive	“I think the portrayals are more positive recently...”	13.6%
Negative	Lesbian relationship portrayals are negative	“Not serious, always failing”	30.4%
		“over-sexualized for male audiences and dramatic”	
Seeking alternative media	Participant purposefully seeks out media that is truer to LGBTQ+ experiences	“...I do not find myself represented in media in the slightest, and I have to turn to LGBTQ+ media to feel represented and valid”	8%
		“There is very little lesbian media – I see it because I search for it, but you could easily go a	

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Name of Code	Definition	Example	%
Stereotyped	Lesbians are portrayed in ways which generalize and do not promote the true diversity of the lesbian population	<p>long time without any exposure.”</p> <p>“portrayed as over emotional and moving too quickly.”</p> <p>“They are often portrayed as obsessive in relationships but at the same time their relationships are portrayed as fake, no lesbian is 100% lesbian...”</p>	56.8%
(subcode) Temporary	Lesbians are portrayed as considering their relationships/activities as impermanent	<p>“...It makes lesbian relationships <i>[sic]</i> look illegitimate, temporary, or like they are just for fun.”</p> <p>“As if they are disposable, more of a temporary plot point”</p>	24.4%
(subcode) Butch/Femme	Lesbians are portrayed as one being boyish and the other being girly	<p>“I think they spend a lot of time making one "butch" and the other "fem"”</p>	4.5%

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		“The media portrays lesbians as generally "hot" or "butch"...”	
(subcode)	Lesbians are portrayed but	“The media typically uses the	8.5%
Sad end	their story line often ends in a depressing way	"bury your gays" trope (shows an idealized relationship between two women, then kills one of the characters off when fans fall in love with them).”	
		“...they don't portray lesbians or lesbian relationships unless they can kill off one or both of the girls.”	
(subcode)	Lesbians are portrayed as	“the media always portrays the	7.4%
With a man	being with a man either before, during, or after their relationship with women	woman to fall in love with another woman that leaves her husband and then in the end goes back to the husband”	
		“i see it as a gateway to a man...”	

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Name of code (subcode)	Definition	Example	%
Heteronormative	Lesbians and their relationships are portrayed to fit the standards of straight relationships	"... Often people want to know "who's the guy and who's the girl" as well, thus leading to expectations that lesbians should still conform to a heteronormative society."  "...to fit heteronormative standards. such as "who wears the pants""	5.1%
(subcode) A joke	Lesbians and their relationships are portrayed as comic relief	"as a joke or as a token of diversity"	2.8%
(subcode) Cheating	Lesbians and their relationships are portrayed as having an aspect of infidelity	"I often see lesbian relationships where one of the women is cheating with a man. Then, with lesbians, they act like its a phase"	2.3%
(subcode) Villain	Lesbians are portrayed as a bad influence	"... toxic and abusive..."	2.3%

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		“That they're a bad influence”	
(subcode)	Lesbians and their	“as a token or novelty”	3.4%
Token gay	relationships are portrayed		
	only a diversity ploy and a	“...Sometimes it feels forced as a	
	way to gain LGBTQ+	way to bring in LGBT	
	viewership	support...”	
(subcode)	Lesbians and their	“ ...has characters so shallow as	14.2%
No depth	relationships are portrayed	to be pointless”	
	as shallow characters or		
	storylines	“Lesbians... are shown but not	
		given a lot of depth”	
(subcode)	Lesbians and their	" Mostly it's just two feminine	6.8%
2 femmes	relationships are portrayed	looking women with perfect	
	as 2 hyper-feminine women	bodies together...”	

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## Appendix

### *Original Measure Items*

How often do you come across the following portrayals of lesbian relationships when consuming media (including movies, television, magazines, social media, etc.)? (1=never, 2=very infrequently, 3=occasionally, 4=somewhat frequently, 5= very frequently)

1. The “out” lesbian (a lesbian being open about her sexual orientation)
2. The “closeted” lesbian (a lesbian denying her sexual orientation in the public sphere)
3. The “bisexual” lesbian (a lesbian who fluctuates between being with men and being with women)
4. The “feminine” lesbian (a lesbian whose gender expression is stereotypically feminine or ‘girly’)
5. The “butch” lesbian (a lesbian whose gender expression is stereotypically masculine or ‘boyish’)
6. The “hot” lesbian (a lesbian whose body/body parts are hypersexualized, and viewed primarily as a physical object of [male] desire)
7. Lesbians who view their relationship with women as illegitimate, invalid, or less ‘real’ than a heterosexual relationship
8. Lesbians who view their relationship with women as semi-permanent, or a ‘vacation’ from heterosexuality
9. Lesbians who view their relationship with women as primarily performative and for the approval from others, specifically heterosexual men
10. Lesbians who move too quickly in a relationship, or 'U-Haul'

Would you say that the portrayals of \_\_\_\_\_ in popular media are generally positive, generally negative, or is it hard to say? (1=generally negative, 2=somewhat negative, 3=hard to say, 4=somewhat positive, 5=generally positive)

1. Lesbians
2. Lesbian relationships

In your experience, how would you describe the ways in which the media portrays lesbians and their relationships? (open ended question)