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**Title of the dissertation**

**Unmasking Hollywood's Deception : A Critical Examination of the Glamorized  
Portrayal of Same-Gender Relationships in the Coming of Age Movie *Love, Simon***

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and  
Culture**

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### ***Dedication***

*I dedicate this work to my mother, whose boundless love and support was the cornerstone of my journey. Your wisdom, encouragement, and scarifies were the guiding light that illuminated my path. This work is as much as yours as it is mine.*

*To my family, for their endless patience and belief in me.*

*To my dear friends, thank you for the laughter and the encouragement that kept me going.*

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## List of abbreviations

USA	<i>United States of America</i>
LGBTQ+	<i>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and others</i>
DSM	<i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.</i>
HIV	<i>Human Immunodeficiency Virus.</i>
DOMA	<i>Defence of Marriage Act.</i>
IMDb	<i>Internet Movie Database.</i>

**List of Figures**

Figure 01	P34
Figure 02	P35
Figure 03	P37
Figure 04	P39
Figure 05	P40
Figure 06	P47
Figure 07	P48
Figure 08	P51
Figure 09	P54

## Abstract

This research aims to explore the hypocrisy in Hollywood and American cinema regarding the depiction of same-gender relationships, as depicted in the movie *Love, Simon* (2018). Film analysis is used as an optimal approach to analyze cinematography, characters, mise-en-scene, sound, symbols, and storyline. Based on the story of Simon Spier, the movie represents the glamorization and normalization of the image of LGBTQ+ members. The dissertation contends that the movie *Love, Simon* portrays the hypocrisy of Hollywood in depicting same-gender relationships. It is also assumed that positive representations and acceptance of LGBTQ+ relationships can be achieved through such directional techniques.

## Keywords:

Beautifying – Cinematography – Normalization – Outing – Same-Gender –

Taboo

## المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة لاستكشاف النفاق السائد في هوليوود والسينما الأمريكية فيما يتعلق بتصوير العلاقات بين الجنسين، كما تم تصويره في فيلم لوف سايمون (2018). استخدم الباحث تحليل الفيلم كمنهج أمثل لتحليل التصوير السينمائي والشخصيات والمشهد والصوت والرموز والقصة. استنادًا إلى قصة سيمون سبير، يمثل الفيلم تألق وتطبيع صورة تؤكد الأطروحة أن فيلم لوف سايمون يصور نفاق هوليوود في تصوير العلاقات بين نفس LGBTQ+ أعضاء من خلال هذه التقنيات LGBTQ+ الجنس. من المفترض أيضًا أنه يمكن تحقيق التمثيل الإيجابي وقبول علاقات.. التوجيهية

## الكلمات المفتاحية

تجميل ، تصوير سينمائي ، كشف ، نفس الحنس ، محرم.

## Table of content

<b>Introduction</b>	9
1. Background of study	10
2. Aim of the research	11
3. Research problem	11
4. Literature review	12
5. Definition of concepts	13
6. Primary and secondary sources	17
7. Approach and method	17
8. Structure of the study	18
<b>Chapter one: General overview of American LGBTQ+ people and <i>Love, Simon</i></b>	19
1. Same-gender relationships historical review	20
1.1 Ancient civilizations and Pre-colonial America	20
1.2 The Rise of Medicalization and Patholoziation	21
1.3 Activism and 20 <sup>th</sup> century movements	21
2. Same-gender Marriage Legalization in the USA	24
3. Political Correctness	24
4. Summary of <i>Love, Simon</i>	25
<b>Chapter Two: Depicting Humanization and Normalization</b>	28
1. The concept of Humanization 29	30
1.1 Philosophy of Humanization :	30
1.2 Humanization and Media Representation	31
2. Humanization in <i>Love, Simon</i>	32
2.1.Familial Love	33
3.The concept of Normalization	35

3.1 Normalization in <i>Love, Simon</i>	37
<b>Chapter Three: Depicting Victimization and Dramatization</b>	42
1. Understanding Victimization	43
2. Victimization in Media Representation	44
3. Victimization in <i>Love, Simon</i>	45
3.1 Simon and Bullying	45
3.2 Simon and Blackmailing	49
4. Victimize to Dramatize	52
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	58
<b>References</b>	64

# Introduction

## 1. Background of Study

We see today that people all over the world watch films that undoubtedly have a massive influence over global audiences; they serve to depict some aspects of the realities of various nations, including the United States.

The American film industry, also known as Hollywood, is considered one of the largest worldwide industries since it exerts an outsized impact on both domestic and international audiences. This influence is noticeable through the success of American and Hollywood productions that are highly ranked at the box office and are accumulating millions of dollars.

The scope of American cinema extends beyond entertainment; it does not only aim to address societal issues and cultural perceptions, but also to promote them globally through multiple cinematic genres such as action, science, fiction, fantasy, thriller, drama, and comedy.

Many American movies have gone viral and received immense success worldwide addressing important issues like racism, women's issues, and the struggles of marginal minorities, like the LGBTQ+ community. The condition of this latter group is depicted in *Love, Simon*, a 2018 romantic comedy-drama that promotes and normalizes a sensitive topic: same-gender relationships. The movie is based on the young adult novel of Becky Albertalli *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015).

The movie director, Greg Berlanti, employs romantic and comedy elements to promote empathy towards the LGBTQ+ community in the USA. He represents their circumstances through the life of the protagonist, Simon Spier (Nick Robinson), a closeted homosexual high school student who is struggling with his identity.

*Love, Simon* occupies an interesting position within the world of cinema as a cultural reflection of societal attitudes towards identity and sexual orientation. In fact, a lot of commentators and researchers praised the way the movie's portrayal of the marginalized

groups of people by digging deeper into the main character's journey of self-discovery and come out within his environment, highlighting the challenges he has been through by an anonymous blackmailer, which casts him in the role of victim in the movie.

### **Aim of the Research**

This master dissertation aims at exploring the cinematic techniques used by Greg Berlanti to create sympathy and acceptance towards gender minorities, particularly LGBTQ+ communities. Also, the dissertation examines the political correctness and beautification used by Hollywood to glamorize the image of LGBTQ+ teenagers who are victimized and face discrimination and bullying in US schools, leading to a controversial representation of a community that has different dimensions.

The protagonist of the coming of age movie, *Simon Spier*, is a white, conventionally attractive teenager, finds himself in a position of fear following the threat of getting exposed in high school and the distress of familial and social rejection.

It is noticeable how the movie aims to normalize discussions about homosexuality and to massively promote its acceptance by humanizing their experiences.

### **Research Problem**

The task of analyzing a movie dealing with the complex and sensitive issue of same-gender relationships emerged when the researcher thought about the need for critical examination of this very representation in Hollywood and its normalization as embodied in the movie *Love, Simon*.

Therefore, the main issue the research wants to tackle has to do with the way Hollywood praises and romanticizes same-gender relationships among teenagers in the USA. *Love, Simon* is a reference movie and worthy of examination as it shows Hollywood's deception and manipulative techniques, leading to normalizing what is abnormal for millions of non-western film viewers.

We must not forget that the US is a country that has witnessed a significant change in its attitudes, legalization, and constitutional texts when it comes to same-gender relationships, and even American society has accepted and supported the existence of gender minorities.

In this context, the dissertation will answer the following questions:

- What is the movie *Love, Simon* about?
- How do Hollywood in general and *Love, Simon* in particular normalize and beautify same-gender relationships?
- What are the reasons behind the movie's success, both commercially and artistically?
- What criticism can be directed towards the glamorized portrayal of same-gender relationships, as depicted in the film *Love, Simon*?

### **Literature Review**

The dissertation has examined the state of the existing literature and searched for scholarly books, dissertations, and theses that dealt with the topic of same-gender relationships in the USA. A significant number of movies were produced dealing with the mentioned issue such as *Boy Erased* (Joel Ederton, 2018) and *Call Me by Your Name* (Luca Guagnano, 2017) and the Oscar winning movie *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins, 2016), to name but a few.

The analysis revealed an overwhelming positive praise of *Love, Simon* by film critics. Also, a number of dissertations and academic articles highlighted the fact that the movie represents a relevant representation of same-gender relationships. However, the readings of the researcher revealed there is a notable lack of critical perspectives concerning the phenomenon of the normalization of same-gender relationships.

While a number of scholars lauded *Love, Simon*, for its ground-breaking representation of LGBTQ+ characters and its way to foster empathy and acceptance among the audiences, very few researchers have criticized its glamorized portrayal within the border context of

normalization.

There are very few critics who raise concerns about normalizing same-gender love stories and relationships in mainstream media. It is important to discuss and examine the promotion of these issues and their potential impact on societies.

By addressing this gap in the literature, the dissertation provides a balanced analysis, which contributes to a deeper understanding of the implications of cinematic narratives depicting minority identities.

This being said, few critics questioned the depiction of race and gender relating to the black homosexual character. Jessica S. Rauchberg's dissertation at the University of South Florida in 2019 dealt with these critiques, examining the concept of homonationalism and the assimilation of gender minorities into nationalist agendas. Similarly, the researcher focused on the way attention and priority were given to the experiences of white characters while decentering other racial minorities.

Another article to be mentioned is Alexander Ferdorov's "Feature Film *Love, Simon* (2018) as a Gay Manifesto in Cinema on School Theme," published in September 2018, and which presents a critical analysis of the film focusing on the way the western media is portraying a non-traditional sexual orientation, particularly within school environments.

Ferdorov dealt with the way the western media is trying hard to legalize and accept same-gender relationships and how it is reflected in educational institutions. The author criticized the depiction of an underage LGBTQ+ school student, highlighting the character's level of attractiveness, which would have an influence on representing the LGBTQ+ community.

Additionally, Ferdorov argues that there is significant positive feedback towards the

movie *Love, Simon*, as expressed by the American media critics, and this contends with the idea that in the US there is a target to tolerate and accept same-gender relationships, even among schoolchildren.

Hanna Thrainsdottir notes in her article entitled “Tailoring gayness for the mainstream: The Nuances of Queer Representation in *Love Simon*,” that “*Love, Simon* fits into the romantic comedy genre while depicting a white homosexual character, but the portrayal of queerness is superficial and influenced by mainstream expectations.” (1) The author also criticizes the normalcy of Simon and the discomfort that may result for the film viewers as they feel awkward about the superficial depiction of queerness that is politically correct.

Similarly, Anya Lomsazde dealt with the portrayal of same-gender relationships in *Love, Simon*, and praised the film for its positive representation of the LGBTQ+ community as its members struggle to come out and go through social fear. She also acknowledged the way the movie emphasized the importance of acceptance. However; Lomsazde critiques some points of the film, as it follows clichés and typical romantic comedy and does not fully explore and represent the complexities of queer identity.

Furthermore, John H. Haley Jr, wrote an article about *Love, Simon*, that discusses the way the movie challenges traditional conventions by portraying a same-gender love story and how, regardless of the criticism it got. The movie has been praised for its progressive message, inspiring the audience’s discussions about acceptance and identity.

A dissertation by Emia Glory Sembiring entitled “A critical Queer Discourse Analysis of Sexual Orientation Secrecy Represented in *Love, Simon*” and submitted to the faculty of language and arts Universitas Negeri Medan in 2021 examines the film portrayal of the experiences and challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals who feel the urge to keep their sexual orientation as a secret. The analysis digs deeper into personal struggles and society pressures in relation to self-acceptance.

Moreover, the article “Fiction and Film Analysis: Homonormativity and the queer love story in *Love, Simon* (2018), and *Happiest Season* (2020)” by Isabella Francis explores the themes of homonormativity and queer love stories in the film *Love, Simon*, and another similar one called *Happiest season* and the representation of LGBTQ+ relationships within societal norms and expectations and their contribution to promoting queer individuals in mainstream media.

“The Politics of Queer Emotion: Exploring Identity Politics of the LGBTQ+ Community Coming Out in *Love, Simon*” is another article submitted to the University of Rochester, New York, was produced by Zitao Liu, in which he shed light on the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community and the politics of queer relationships when it comes to coming out delves into the complexities of identity within the film.

Adding to that, Eliana Putri’s analysis of Inner Conflict Due To Homosexuality in Becky Albertalli’s movie script Entitled “*Love, Simon*” submitted to Darma Persada University, Jakarta (2022) explored the inner conflict of Simon Spier and the way he struggles with his identity and the emotional journey of the protagonist, examining themes of self-acceptance, societal expectations, and secrecy.

Tessamonica Chantyan Zie also published an article entitled “In Defense of Sexuality Right Reflected in Greg Berlanti’s *Love, Simon* Movie” which defends and advocates for acceptance and equality and discusses the importance of representation and the ways the movie contributes to the ongoing debate surrounding LGBTQ+ rights.

### **Definition of Concepts**

Some concepts that will be frequently used throughout this dissertation need to be defined. The aim here is to develop a logical and coherent conceptual framework.

One important concept that needs to be defined is “same-gender.” The Online Cambridge Dictionary states that it is “used to describe a relationship in which both or all the

people involved are male, or both or all are female.” In this dissertation, the only concept to be used to refer to the practice where people of the same gender engage in a relationship will be same-gender. It is preferable to avoid using the other terms so as not to harm the feelings of the readers, as in our Muslim conservative society, this very practice mentioned previously is taboo and very sensitive.

“Homonalism” is another concept that, according to Don Kulick, is “an understanding and enactment of homosexual acts, identities, and relationships that incorporates them as not only compatible with but even exemplary of neoliberal democratic ethics and citizenship.” (28).

When it comes to outing, it is defined by the Online Cambridge Dictionary as: “an occasion when it is made public that a famous person is gay when he or she wants to keep this information private.” The term was coined by William A. Henry /// in his article “Forcing Gays Out of the Closet,” published in Time magazine, in which he describes it as an act of disclosing an LGBTQ+ person’s sexual orientation or gender identity without their consent, particularly for social or political reasons.

In his work, Henry also highlights that the act of outing is a subject of debate, especially when it comes to public figures, the changing rules surrounding this practice since 1990s and the moral, ethical, and political dimensions of outing in society.

There is another important concept to be defined, which is political correctness as found in the Collins dictionary political correctness, is a term that originated in the late 20th century and refers to the attitude or policy of being extremely careful not to offend or upset any group of people in society who have a disadvantage or who have been treated differently because of their sex, gender, race, or disability.

Besides, the term Hollywood needs to be defined, which, according to Thomas

Schatz and Alisa Perren refers to “an actual place that emerged as a primary base of operations for the American film industry and it includes its three interrelated aspects: the industrial, the institutional, and the formal-aesthetic.” (495).

Also, the term “glamorize” requires clarification; the verb derives from the noun “Glamour”. It is created by combining the noun “glamour” with the affix “-ize,” the word “glamour” itself has Scottish origins, where it initially meant “magic, enchantment, spell.” Over time, it evolved to convey the idea of “magical beauty and alluring charm.” Specifically associated with Hollywood, high-fashion, and celebrity culture. The term is also linked to enchantment and female fascination, consequently “glamorize” signifies the action of enhancing the attractiveness of something by making it appear more alluring than it truly is. Moreover, it is important to provide a definition of another term, which is “Normalize,” the term is originated from the concept of “normal,” which meant “typical, common” around 1500 and later to “conforming to common standards or regular.” By 1828, the word has roots in late Latin “Normalis,” which meant “in conformity with rule,” and in classic Latin, it referred to something made according to a carpenter’s square. The term normal is derived from “norma” meaning “rule, pattern.” The term has developed over time and has led to different meanings and has been used in different contexts.

### **Primary and Secondary Sources**

Concerning primary sources, they include the film *Love, Simon*. In addition, the dissertation relied on the interview of the film director Greg Bernalti, in which he talked about the significance of his film choice within the context of his personal experiences as a same- gender person and saw the movie as a way to promote same-gender relationships, challenge societal norms, and increases acceptance of gender minorities. Secondary sources include several books and articles that analyze the movie *Love, Simon* (2018).

### **Research Methodology**

The method that will be used in this research is film analysis. The dissertation will engage in a reflection on the normalization of same-gender relationships as depicted in the movie. Film studies will give us room to analyze cinematography, characterization, the narrative structure, cultural context, mise-en-scene, and soundtrack. The work will also pay attention to the reception of the movie by relying on several reports written by film critics.

### **Outline**

The dissertation is organized into a plan divided into three main chapters. Chapter one provides a comprehensive overview of the historical background of the LGBTQ+ community in the USA and its evolution from early activism to present day legalization and civil rights improvements.

Chapters two and three are based on the artistic strategies used by the film director to normalize and humanize the image of same-gender teenagers in the movie.

Chapter two explores the glamorized portrayal of same-gender relationships in the movie and the political correctness used to normalize these very practices. The last chapter deconstructs the procedures used by Berlanti to make the film viewers feel sympathy for the protagonist and identify with his anxiety through his coming out.

By the end of the dissertation, it will be emphasized that Hollywood is a deceptive entertainment industry whose only concern is to make money and to promote same-gender relationships in a normal way, as Greg Berlanti's *Love, Simon* beautifies a sensitive practice.

# Chapter one: General Overview of American LGBTQ+ people and *Love, Simon*

*“The homosexual movement is a direct assault against marriage, family and the well-being of children.” Peter Labarbera*

*“Homosexuality is a sin and abomination, and it’s something that I believe shouldn’t be normalized in our society.” Mike Huckabee*

This chapter seeks to explore the journey of same-gender relationships in general and in the USA in particular, tracing its roots from earlier times to nowadays. It examines the

different movements of LGBTQ+ individuals and the challenges they faced. Also, chapter one provides a short summary of *Love, Simon* and gives technical details of the movie.

## **1. Same-gender Relationships Historical Overview**

The history of same-gender relationships witnessed significant developments as well as legal and societal changes over the past few decades, from ancient civilizations to modern times reflecting the societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, shaped by cultural, religious and legal factors.

### **1.1. Ancient Civilizations and Pre-colonial America**

Same-gender relationships existed in various forms in the ancient world, dating back over 4,000 years in civilizations like ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Rome, and were not considered extraordinary but seen as normal and as part of daily life without any kind of stigma or discrimination. Literature, art, and historical accounts from these civilizations depict same-gender partnerships. (Mark)

However, after the arrival of Abrahamic religions like Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, attitudes towards the act of homosexuality shifted. These religions considered same-gender relationships as sinful and immoral; as a result, LGBTQ+ individuals faced discrimination and restriction and got penalties for engaging in those kinds of relationships.

Flores states that other cultures in pre-colonial American societies and over 150 different pre-colonial tribes accepted and recognized same-gender relationships and third genders like “berdache” and “passing women,” which shows the acknowledgment of gender diversity. However, the impact of European colonization led to the marginalization of these relationships and condemning them as sinful and criminalizing them.

### **1.2. The Rise of Medicalization and Pathologization**

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, homosexuality was perceived and treated a construct within the medical and psychiatric fields as a psychiatrist’s pathology, resulting in

efforts to actively manage society medically. Equally important, homosexuality was also included as a mental illness in the DSM, or Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders; in the earlier versions, it was described in terms such as "sexual inversion." (Dresher, 25)

The first suggestion of homosexuality as psychopathological was by a German psychiatrist, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, in his book *Psychopathia sexualis* (1886), where he considered all non-procreative sexual behaviors as a form of psychopathology. As Fischer states, "Anthologizing homosexuality was not simply meant to reinforce social mores but was based on a real belief among psychiatrists at this time that homosexuality was symptomatic of psychological illness." (1027). This shows that during that period of time, there was a genuine belief within the psychiatric community that, in fact, homosexuality was seen as a mental illness.

Psychiatric theories at that time sought to cure homosexuality using psychoanalytic approaches and techniques, such as psychoanalysis and conversion therapy, presented by psychiatrists like Sigmund Freud, and to discover its root psychological causes. ( Dresher)

### **1.3. Activism and Twentieth Century Movements**

In the mid-20th century, after facing a lot of struggles and getting into battles fighting for their rights against hate speech and discrimination, LGBTQ+ movements emerged in the USA. The members of those movements had to fight for their civic rights since homosexuality was criminalized by both society and the state.

The Society for Human Rights is the first and oldest known LGBTQ+ rights organization in the United States. It was founded in 1924 by Henry Gerber in Chicago and some other activists like Frank Kameny and Lilli Vincenz, which opened the door for future LGBTQ+ activism in the country. However, the organization had political problems, and shortly after its founding, it was forced to disband.

After that, there came the wave of Stonewall Riots in June 1969 at the Stonewall Inn in New York City, which was the turning point where protests against discrimination began. The Stonewall Riots led to the first Pride celebration, known as the Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade, held in 1970. This event was considered the motivation for the homosexual civil rights movement in America.

The late 1970s witnessed a lot of events. When Harvey Milk became the first openly LGBTQ+ individual to elect a political official in California in 1978, Milk's election as a supervisor in San Francisco was a groundbreaking moment for LGBTQ+ representation in politics and inspired others to contribute to LGBTQ+ activism.

The following year, in 1979, the LGBTQ+ community organized the first National March in Washington, DC, demanding equal rights for its members. The march attracted thousands of participants from across the country and gained support on a national scale.

In the 1980s, the United States was struggling with the epidemic of HIV/AIDS. The disease was first noticed by doctors who treated LGBTQ+ individuals in Southern California, San Francisco and New York City in 1981. At that time, when cases of AIDS emerged in the US, they suspected that it was either homosexual individuals or heroin users. This case has created a kind of stigma for those people.

Furthermore, in 1993, the U.S. government published a policy named "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," which was instituted in the U.S. military, allowing homosexual people to serve in the military but forbidding any kind of homosexual activity.

In addition, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), passed in 1996, defined marriage, federally, as between one man and one woman only, in order to prevent the federal government and other states from acknowledging and recognizing same-gender relationships, which limited the benefits of legally married same-gender couples. These benefits include

insurance benefits, tax benefits, social security benefits, immigration rights, the ability to file for joint tax returns, financial aid, and other laws that heterosexual married couples enjoy.

Back in 2008, California voters passed the proposition 8 ballot, also known as prop 8, with the aim of banning and prohibiting same-gender marriage in the state and to redefine marriage as the unit between one man and one woman only. This proposition came against the judicial ruling that had previously legalized same-gender marriage in California, which caused a debate in the United States.

The passage of prop 8 created a kind of disagreement between supporters and opponents of same-gender marriage. Supporters argued that the definition of marriage as between one man and one woman should be preserved, relying on religious, cultural, and societal reasons. As argued by Arnold Schwarzenegger, former Governor of California: “Marriage has been defined as between one man and one woman for thousands of years, and Proposition 8 simply affirms this traditional definition.” Also, the president of the campaign for Children and Families, Randy Thomasson, a leading conservative group in California, stated, “The people of California have spoken loud and clear with their votes for Proposition 8. Marriage is between a man and a woman, and that’s the way it should stay.”

On the other hand, opponents of the ballot, including LGBTQ+ supporters, strongly opposed the amendment; they stated that forbidding same-gender couples from marriage is a violation of equal rights under the law. Evan Wolfson, founder and president of Freedom to marry, argued that “Proposition 8 represents a betrayal of the principle of equality enshrined in our constitution. We will not rest until all loving and committed couples have the right to marry.”

## **2. Same-gender Marriage Legalization in the USA**

The decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015 legalized same-gender marriage across the United States, causing a shift in social and legal recognition of LGBTQ+ rights. Before

that decision, same-gender couples faced a lot of legal barriers to marriage, as 13 states considered same-gender marriage illegal. However, the Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* changed the perception of marriage equality in the United States. On June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court stated that the right to marry is guaranteed to same-gender couples under the protection clause of the fourteenth amendment of the United States Constitution. As Jurist Anthony Kennedy stated:

“No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. ... It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness which excludes one of civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The constitution grants them that right.”

With the legalization of same-gender marriage, several states that banned marriage began to recognize marriages for LGBTQ+ couples; these states include Alabama, Alaska, California, Florida, and so many others.

During the presidency of Donald Trump, a number of policies were passed in order to protect the LGBTQ+ community. This included weakening nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people seeking health services funded by the US Department of Health Services.

Additionally, the administration supported businesses right to discriminate against LGBTQ+ customers. Trump also eliminated a regulation set by Obama that prohibited discrimination in health care against transgender individuals.

### **3. Political Correctness**

The movie *Love, Simon* uses political correctness to normalize same-gender relationships for teenagers, and therefore one should give a definition of this concept.

Political correctness is a set of guidelines that people follow to avoid offending others. It promotes treating everyone with respect, regardless of their physical abilities, race, religion, nationality, or gender. It aims to prevent discrimination against sexual minorities. (Sviltana, 149)

In recent years, the discourse concerning political correctness in the United States has become a topic of debate, especially when it comes to the context of homosexuality, since political correctness aims to reshape culture, and homosexuality acceptance is a part of it.

Stodulkova notes that the first place that was fully governed by political correctness was universities in the 1980s; it concerned universities curriculum. (29) It also became, at a certain point, a determinant of what was correct and what was incorrect.

Stodulkova also argues that with time, the use of political correctness spread beyond academic campuses and academic fields and tackled different areas and fields of American society.

As mentioned before, the inclusion of homosexuality within the framework of political correctness and the marketing of that phenomenon is considered a strategy to reshape culture and promote LGBTQ+ acceptance, since it involves using some marketing techniques, such as media positive representations, manipulation, and psychological tactics, in order to change societal views on homosexuality.

#### **4. Summary of *Love, Simon***

The story of the film begins with Simon Spier, played by Nick Robinson, a typical high school student who lives a seemingly ordinary life. He has a loving, supportive family and a circle of good friends, and he goes to school like any other teenager, but there is one thing Simon Spier has not shared with anyone yet: he is homosexual.

One day Simon saw an anonymous post on a school gossip site. The post reveals that someone else in his school is homosexual but chooses to remain anonymous. Simon felt that

he could relate and got excited for the idea of connecting with someone who shares his experience. He created an anonymous email account and decided to reach out to this person who's using a fake name, "Blue," and they started exchanging emails.

As Simon and Blue's anonymous conversation kept going, Simon started to catch feelings for Blue, even though he didn't know his true identity yet. At the same time, Simon was dealing with his daily high school life challenges, his life with his friends and family, and the pressure to fit in with society, and his struggles with his own fear of coming out and the potential risks of revealing his own identity.

Throughout the story, Simon tries to uncover Blue's true identity. However, as the story progresses, Simon's journey starts to get complicated, and the risk of getting exposed gets higher when another student, Martin, played by Logan Miller, discovers Simon's secret emails and threatens to expose them unless Simon helps him pursue a romantic interest. Simon found himself in a moment of deceit and must confront his fears.

After that, Simon agreed to Martin's demands while developing his relationship with Blue. The pressure of keeping his secret gets harder for Simon, and he struggles with feelings of guilt and anxiety as he tries to maintain control over the situation.

As Simon got stuck with Martin, the situation became even more complicated, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts with his friends. Simon felt that his life became a mess and decided to stand up for himself, to confront Martin, and to refuse to get blackmailed anymore, so he chose to come out during a school event, where he delivered a speech addressed to his classmates. In his speech, Simon reveals his true identity as being a homosexual. By the end of the story, Simon was able to reconcile with his friends, and Blue's true identity was revealed.

In what follows, some technical details about the crew members engaged in the acting and production of the film will be provided. The researcher relied on the relevant online

database, IMDb (Internet Movie Database), which provides information related to films and television series by focusing on cast, production crew, plot summary, ratings, and fan critical reviews.

Film director: Greg Berlanti

Screenplay: It is written by Isaac Aptaker and Elisabeth Berger, based on the novel *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*.

Production Companies: Fox 2000 Pictures, Temple Hill Productions, TSG Entertainment.

Main cast: Nick Robinson, Jennifer Garner, Josh Duhamel, Talitha Bateman, Katherin Langford, Alexandra Shipp, and Jorge Lendeborg.

Executive producer: Timothy Bourne.

Assistant producer: Adam Fishbash.

Cinematography: John Guleseria

Music: Rob Simonsen

Supervising editor: Harry Jierjan

Production management: Michelle Graham and Michael P. Semanick.

Costume designer: Mary Claire Hannan

Props: Sarah Mae Burton

Decoration: Karen Bruck

Special effects: David Dupuis

Makeup: Donna Bard and Elisabeth Lador.

Box office: Love, Simon gained approximately \$66.7 million.

## Chapter Two: Depicting Humanization and Normalization in *Love, Simon*

*“I believe in the power of storytelling to create empathy and understanding. Including diverse LGBTQ+ characters and narratives in films is essential to reflecting the richness and complexity of the human experience.” Gus Van Sant*

*“As a filmmaker, I strive to tell stories that celebrate love and diversity. By portraying LGBTQ+ characters with authenticity and nuance, we can challenge stereotypes and inspire social change.”  
Dee Rees*

*“ I think homosexuality, which is based on lust, is morally wrong. God did not intend for this world to be a battleground for rights between homosexuals and heterosexuals. ” Anita Bryant*

In recent decades, society's opinion of same-gender partnerships has shifted from what was once considered taboo, even criminalized in certain areas of the world, to being

welcomed and cherished, which represents a change in culture and advancement for LGBTQ+ rights.

The normalization of these practices became part of different aspects of daily life, including popular culture and media representations like films, television shows, and literature, and even in schools and governmental spaces.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable increase in films addressing school themes, especially those featuring nontraditional orientation characters. One significant example is the “*Love, Simon*” movie, which, according to a lot of film viewers, in the US, the release of a melodrama, *Love, Simon*, can be viewed in the context of the victory of political correctness, including in the sexual sphere. (Ferdorov, 6) Also since *Love, Simon* marked achievements in Hollywood by featuring an LGBTQ+ protagonist.

The portrayal of characters in cinema is more than plot and storyline progression; it delves into humanity, empathy, and connection. With this idea comes the concept of humanization, the art of representing characters in depth and relatability with the intention of acknowledging their dignity and worth as human beings. As we notice in the *Love, Simon* movie, the characters, both students and adults, are portrayed as optimistic, easy-going students who go through high school.

Chapter two aims to represent humanization and normalization embodied in the movie *Love, Simon* and their importance in media representation; also, the researcher analyzes how they manifest in the characterization and cinematography of *Love, Simon*. Also, the researcher asserts that such portrayal gives humanization and normalization to LGBTQ+ characters, generating understanding and social change within society that can generate understanding and tolerance vis-à-vis the LGBTQ+ community.

Through an analysis of Simon’s journey, the chapter delves into his supportive nature and vulnerability as portrayed on screen. Furthermore, the chapter detects the techniques

employed in the film, including lighting, framing, and camera angles to show how they contribute to Simon's humanization.

## **1. The Concept of Humanization**

The online Collins Dictionary describes "humanization" as the transformative process of imbuing something with qualities that are more humane, compassionate, and considerate towards human needs and values. This concept involves enhancing the human experience by fostering environments, systems, or interactions that prioritize empathy, dignity, and respect for individuals.

Humanization efforts aim to create spaces and conditions that promote inclusiveness, understanding, and well-being, ultimately seeking to improve the quality of life for people. By emphasizing compassion and empathy in various aspects of society, humanization aims to cultivate a more caring and supportive environment that values the inherent worth and rights of every individual.

### **1.1 Philosophy of Humanization**

According to Paulo Freire, humanization is at the forefront of our collective journey as humans. It is not just a fancy idea; it is about how we can become more authentic humans through our interactions, thoughts, and actions. Humanization is a process of constantly evolving into better versions of ourselves, where we actively engage with the world around us, reflect on our experiences, and work towards positive change. At its core, humanization is about empowering individuals to reclaim their dignity, autonomy, and sense of purpose, especially those who were marginalized or oppressed. (Salazar, 126)

Freire's philosophy is deeply rooted in the belief that every human has inherent worth and potential. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing and honouring the dignity of every individual. This includes challenging oppressive systems and structures that dehumanize people and maintain inequality. Through collective action and solidarity, Freire

imagines a world where all individuals can live with dignity, respect, and freedom, regardless of their background circumstances. (Salazar, 130).

Freire also stated that the idea of humanization cannot be imposed from the outside. It must emerge from within, through the active participation and engagement of the oppressed themselves. This requires cultivating critical consciousness, or the ability to critically analyze and understand the root causes of oppression, as well as the agency to challenge and transform unjust systems by empowering individuals to become agents of their own liberation. (Salazar, 131)

In essence, Freire's philosophy of humanization is a call to action for people to recognize their capacity to shape their destinies and contribute to the collective development of humanity. It also invites people to reflect on the ways that may challenge oppression and generate empathy and compassion.

## **1.2 Humanization and Media Representation**

Humanization in media representation is not just about showing people as characters on a screen or in a story. It is about something deeper; it's about recognizing their humanity. When media portrays individuals or groups as real people with feelings, dreams, and struggles, it helps to see them more than just stereotypes and labels. This kind of representation can break down barriers, build empathy, and bring people closer to each other, even in times of conflict or disagreement. (Maiese)

In conflict, humanization in the media can be important, especially when we see the people involved in a conflict as real human beings; it becomes harder to see them as enemies. Instead of focusing on differences, humanization can help find common ground and see things from other people perspectives. This can open the door to dialogue, understanding, and peace.

Humanization in media representation is also a tool for countering dehumanization, the process of seeing others as less than humans. When the media tells the stories of individuals in a way that highlights their humanity, it challenges stereotypes and prejudices. By promoting acceptance and breaking down barriers.

## **2. Humanization in *Love, Simon***

Simon's portrayal in *Love, Simon* exemplifies the power of humanization in media representation through his relatable character. The film invites audiences to empathize with his experiences as an LGBTQ+ member looking for love and identity. By representing Simon as an individual with hopes and fears, the film challenges stereotypes and helps generate understanding of the LGBTQ+ experience.

In *Love, Simon* the portrayal of Simon Spier, played by actor Nick Robinson, was widely praised for its authenticity; Robinson's performance effectively captures the character of Simon, portraying him as an individual with strengths, weaknesses, and insecurities. Simon's attractiveness as a character lies not only in his physical appearance but also in his emotional depth, which resonates with viewers on a personal level.

Simon is introduced to the film viewers as a typical white teenage boy who seems to fit into society's expectations of normality and acceptance and to have a perfectly perfect life with his loving family and close friends, enjoying his life at his high school. This portrayal of Simon as an average, relatable protagonist serves to humanize his character and make his struggles more accessible to the audience.

As Fedorov notes, "The protagonist is a positive role model, Simon is a relatable "every guy," he's accepted and liked by other students, and his family members (including his younger sister) are kind and supportive. He does well in school, is easy to live with, and doesn't do drugs, and though he makes mistakes, he atones for them and attempts to do better; many parents will likely consider him a positive role model for teens." (3)

Also, a review given about Robinson, states:

“At just 23 years of age, Nick Robinson handles the role of Simon Spier with proper poise. We’re with him on this journey, and we believe that he is a nice kid. When things start falling apart for him, Robinson doesn’t play as malleable. His frustration leaks out, sometimes explosively, but never impatiently. When he finds himself in trouble, he never seems to abandon the kindness of the character, even though he finds the need to stand up for himself, and he is very angry. When he acts selfishly to protect his secret, I forgive Simon for his transgressions long before other characters had. This is a confident and competent performance, and it’s hard to imagine anyone playing the role any better. (Mathew)

These reviews illustrate the acceptance, forgiveness, and tolerance of Simon’s experience and even his sins. It highlights how the movie portrays Simon’s character in an understanding way, emphasizing the growth he faces. The depiction of his character and experience are shown in a positive light. Viewers appreciate the empathetic portrayal, finding Simon’s role important in conveying powerful messages of humanity. The positive reception by the audience shows the film’s success in addressing complex themes with sensitivity.

## **2.1 Familial Love**

In *Love, Simon*, familial love emerges as a powerful tool used by the director to humanize the LGBTQ+ experience. Through a couple of scenes of familial bonding, support, and acceptance, especially that the family had a big influence on developing identity in children’s growth through social interaction (Larossa & Reitzes, 135), the director challenges societal perceptions of love, regardless of sexual orientation.

One of the moments that shows Simon’s bond with his family is when Simon has a deep conversation with his mother Emily days after coming out to them, since the decision, acceptance, attitude, and reaction of a parent when coming out are very important to their mental health, such as their self-esteem, self-recognition, and confidence (D’Augelli, 96). The shot composition in the scene features close-ups of their facial expressions, allowing

viewers to see the emotions reflected in their eyes and gestures. Medium shots may be used to show their body language.



Figure 1 (1:28:00)

Additionally, the lighting in that scene is used to enhance the mood and atmosphere. Soft lighting may be employed to create a comforting ambiance, which symbolizes how Emily supports Simon as he opens up about his inner struggles.

During their emotional dialogue, Emily says to him, “I need you to hear this. You are still you, Simon. You are still the same son that I loved to tease and who your father depends on for just about everything. You get to exhale now, Simon. You get to be you more than you have been in a very long time. You deserve everything you want.” This exchange between Simon and his mother carries a message of acceptance and love. She reassured Simon that he is still the same person she has always loved; she acknowledges the struggles he faced and that he deserves everything he wants.

During that scene, sad, emotional music was played, which helped make their talk even more emotional. It brings out feelings of sadness. The music also shows how Simon and his mother are having an honest moment with each other, making it easier for the audience to connect with them.

In another scene of Simon and his father where they both engaged in a conversation after Simon revealed his sexual identity, the director depicts the depth of that moment

through a combination of medium shots and close-ups, allowing the viewers to see the shift in emotions and expression. The restrained camera movements focused on capturing the characters' emotional performances. The use of background music also helps in evoking emotions and dramatizing the whole moment.



Figure 2 (01:34:25)

Simon's father, in that shot, asked Simon when he knew about his sexuality. Simon answered when he was thirteen years old. Simon's father replied that for the last four years that they spent together, he didn't know about his son. He apologized and expressed how sorry he was for all the mean jokes that might hurt Simon's feelings. Then he accepted Simon the way he was. He even wanted to support Simon by joining the LGBTQ+ parent's club.

In one of the opening scenes of the movie, Simon's supportive nature was evident as he supported his sister Nora in her cooking passion, even though her cooking didn't always taste good. Similarly, in the scene where Simon helps his father make a marriage video, he expresses his love for his family by engaging in an activity with his father. So, these scenes contribute to his being a caring, compassionate individual who values love and family.

### **3. The Concept of Normalization**

According to the online Etymology Dictionary, the term normalization has a rich history, tracing its origins back to the mid-19th century. The verb "normalize" first emerged in written English in 1848, derived from the adjective "normal" and the suffix "ize." The

concept of “normal” itself dates back to the 1500s, stemming from the Late Latin word “normalis,” meaning “in conformity with rule.”

The noun “normalization” was then coined in 1842, denoting “the act or process of making normal.” This early usage of the term was primarily restricted to scientific and technical contexts, referring to the process of bringing something back to a standard or typical state. For example, the “normalization of vital powers” in the treatment of a disease or the “normalization of abnormal function” through medication.

Over the following decades, the terms “normalize” and “normalization” began to see other applications beyond their initial scientific usages. By the late 19th century, they were being employed to describe the regularization of human activities and behaviours, such as the “normalization of work” and the “normalization of the human powers.”

A change in the meaning of “normalization” occurred in the early 20th century, when the term was adopted into the political field. Beginning in the 1930s, “normalization” was used to refer to the process of achieving stable diplomatic relations between nations, particularly those in conflict. This political connotation of “normalization” has remained a prominent aspect of the term's usage to the present day.

Alongside its political applications, “normalization” has continued to evolve and expand into diverse technical fields, including metallurgy, computer programming, mathematics, and sound engineering. In these contexts, the term is used to describe the process of conforming to established norms or standards, whether it be the normalization of data, audio signals, or algebraic varieties.

More recently, however, another meaning of “normalization” has emerged. Rather than simply removing variables and regularizing something to fit a pre-existing standard, the new usage of “normalization” seems to involve redefining the standard itself to fit what was previously considered an outlier or extreme. This can be seen in the “normalization of hate,”

where extreme views are no longer marginalized but instead become integrated into the mainstream discourse.

In conclusion, the etymology of “normalization” reveals a rich linguistic development and semantic expansion. From its origins in the scientific and technical areas, the term has evolved to encompass political, social, and even ideological dimensions, reflecting the dynamic nature of language and the changing perceptions of what is considered “normal” in our evolving world.

### **3.1 Normalization in *Love, Simon***

*Love, Simon* challenges stereotypes surrounding same-gender relationships by presenting Simon’s romantic journey with significance. Traditionally, LGBTQ+ characters in film and television are presented in sidekick roles or as the protagonist’s best friend. However, *Love, Simon* fights these traditions by portraying Simon’s relationship with his love interest, Blue, the anonymous person from his school, as a natural and normal relationship that deserves happiness. Also, normalization in the movie is conveyed when the main character comes out, which is considered a courageous step. Coming out is normalized in *Love, Simon*, through the depiction of supportive friends.

In the scene where Simon reveals his true inner self, he comes out to his friend Abby while they are in a car at night. Firstly, the choice of setting, a car at night, creates a sense of intimacy and privacy, allowing Simon to feel comfortable enough to open up about his sexuality to Abby. The darkness outside the car contrasts with the warm interior lighting, emphasizing the personal nature of their conversation.



Figure 3 (00:57:09)

As Simon drives Abby home, the motion of the car adds a kind of dynamism to the scene, reflecting the internal feelings of Simon as he struggles with the decision to come out. The movement of the car also symbolizes Simon's journey towards self-acceptance.

When Simon stops the car and opens up to Abby about his sexuality, there are close-ups on their faces. This tight framing emphasizes the emotional intensity of that moment, allowing viewers to closely see Simon's expression as he reveals his truth. Abby's reaction with a soft smile is captured in warm lighting, highlighting her acceptance and understanding. The use of camera movement, lighting, and framing in the scene all contribute to its emotional impact and significance in normalizing same-gender relationships.

Also, in another scene, Ethan, the black character from *Love, Simon*, comes out to his friends during a picnic where all of them were gathered on the ground, which creates a sense of intimacy between them. As Ethan shares his truth, the camera moves, depicting each individual's reaction. This movement highlights the different responses within the group. Some friends showed surprise, and some others showed acceptance and support.

The power of friendship and acceptance in the *Love, Simon* movie is also depicted in one of the ending scenes. The scene captures Simon waiting at the Ferris wheel in the park; the moment captures the emotional tension of Simon when searching for Blue. As the Ferris wheel turns, the camera follows Simon's gaze, reflecting his anxiety to finally meet Blue. Mid-shots were used in that shot to capture Simon's reactions as he anxiously waited for Blue. These shots frame Simon from the waist up, allowing viewers to see his facial

expressions and body as he navigates the rollercoaster language of emotions. Mid shots focused on Simon's expressions to invite viewers to empathize with his internal struggles.



Figure 4 (01:40:08)

Framing is used to highlight Simon's isolation. As the Ferris wheel turns, the camera often frames Simon in the center of the shot. This framing creates a sense of intimacy with Simon's character.

During Simon's nervous moment, the director portrays the support of his close friends and even colleagues from school. The ambient lighting of the park symbolizes the sense of community and acceptance that surrounds Simon. As the camera turns across the park, viewers witness the array of people who stand by Simon, reinforcing the message of support.

Lighting plays an important role in setting the mood and atmosphere of the scene. Soft lighting illuminates the park, creating a warm ambiance and highlighting the beauty of the setting and the community that surrounds him.

Furthermore, the turning of the Ferris wheel serves as a visual metaphor for Simon's journey of self-discovery and acceptance. With each rotation, Simon deals with the complexity of his own identity and sexuality. The constant motion of the wheel depicts Simon's emotions as he struggles with his feelings for Blue.

Overall, these cinematographic techniques allow the audience to share Simon's experience of love and self discovery. The scene contributes to the normalization of same-gender relationships through its portrayal of supportive friends, ambiance, and visual symbolism, showing the power of acceptance and community in embracing love in all its forms.

In another scene from *Love, Simon*, Simon bravely walks through the corridors of his high school after sharing an emotional speech with the entire school community, admitting the rumours published on the school blog concerning his sexual identity. As Simon walks through the corridors, the camera follows him, framing him in mid-shots, emphasizing his self-assurance and allowing viewers to witness the reactions of his friends. As they express support and acceptance through their smiles and waves.



Figure 5 (01:37:16)

One of the other moments that served to normalize the same-gender relationship in Simon's journey was the email exchange between Simon and Blue. In one of the opening scenes where Simon narrates his internal feelings in a voiceover; Voiceover: A technique used in various audiovisual media where a disembodied voice narrates or comments on the action or events depicted on screen. This technique is commonly employed in film, television, documentaries, and educational videos to provide additional information, context,

or emotional resonance to the visuals. Voiceover can serve as a storytelling device, guiding the audience's understanding and interpretation of the narrative. (Bordwell and Thompson, 55).

The exchange of emails between Blue and Simon and the anonymity of it creates a safe place for them to foster a deep emotional connection based on shared experience and understanding, which highlights the universal experience of love through the visual representation of their connection on Simon's laptop screen in many scenes. This exchange normalizes same-gender relationships by portraying the characters' relationships in an emotional way.

In conclusion, *Love, Simon* employs the techniques of humanization and normalization to foster greater acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community and to humanize and normalize same-gender relationships throughout the movie. The director portrays the journey of Simon through different scenes and cinematography, capturing familial bonds, untraditional relationships, and supportive friends.

Transitioning from the themes of humanization and normalization explored in the second chapter, the third chapter will deal into the darker of the film, specifically, the victimization and dramatization faced by the protagonist and other characters. This shift in focus allows for a deeper analysis of how *Love, Simon* portrays the challenges within the LGBTQ+ community. The researcher will uncover the role of portraying challenges in generating sympathy towards LGBTQ+ characters. By examining key incidents and the director's techniques in depicting these moments

# Chapter Three: Victimization, Dramatization and Sympathy in *Love, Simon*

*“A good movie makes the audience feel like they’ve journeyed with the characters.”*

*Rich Moore*

*“I think cinema, movies, and magic have always been closely associated. The very earliest people who made film were magicians.” Francis Ford Coppola*

*“Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one’s definition of your life, but define yourself.” Harvey Fierstein*

Storytelling in cinema plays an important role in shedding light on the different complexities of human experiences. In the film *Love, Simon*, the story explores the portrayal of victimization and dramatization within the LGBTQ+ community, which shows the film viewers the struggles of its characters. The film captures the emotions and societal challenges

faced by individuals engaged in same-gender relationships, through direction and cinematography, inviting audiences to empathize with their journeys of self-discovery and acceptance.

This chapter aims to explore the themes of victimization and dramatization as depicted in *Love, Simon*. Focusing on the narrative elements and cinematography and how they helped to generate profound sympathy for the viewers, as we navigate through scenes of bullying, blackmailing, public outings, and internal struggles, we will discover the portrayal of same-gender relationships experiences depicted on screen and the power of cinematography and storytelling in fostering sympathy and understanding in people's consciousness.

In short, it will be suggested in this third chapter that the film director Greg Berlanti uses victimization as a relevant cinematic strategy in order to dramatize his characters, and as a consequence, the film viewers will feel sympathy for them.

### **1. Understanding Victimization**

Victimization is a term with roots tracing back to the Latin word "victim." It evolved over time to encompass a wide range of unfair treatment, often involving physical or emotional abuse. The Online Oxford English Dictionary provides a comprehensive definition of victimization, describing it as the unjust action of causing suffering to someone due to dislike towards them, their opinions, or their actions.

This term, with its earliest known use in the English language dating back to the 1840s, means identifying individuals for cruel or unfair treatment, typically through physical or emotional abuse.

The etymology of "victimization" reveals its formation within the English language, derived from the verb "victimize," which means to make someone a victim or subject them to

deception or fraud. This verb, in turn, stems from the noun “victim,” which has its origins in the Latin word “victima,” referring to a sacrificial animal. The evolution of this term highlights the complex nature of victimization, as it has come to represent a wide range of experiences where individuals or groups are subjected to harm, exploitation, or injustice.

Victimization can manifest in various forms, including personal victimization, which involves offences committed against a person causing psychological, physical, or financial harm, and property victimization, which includes offences against one's possessions. Examples of victimization may include theft, stalking, child abuse, domestic violence, physical assault, rape, and murder.

Understanding the historical context and implications of victimization is crucial for addressing its effects on individuals and society. Victimology, a subdiscipline in criminology, focuses on understanding victim experiences and impacts, leading to the development of victim surveys like the National Crime Victimization Surveys (NCVS). These efforts aim to shed light on the prevalence and consequences of victimization, ultimately working towards prevention and support for those affected by these harmful experiences.

## **2. Victimization in Media**

The victimization of LGBTQ+ individuals in media and movies is a complex issue that has been extensively studied. Research has shown that LGBTQ+ people are often portrayed negatively or stereotypically in the media, which can reinforce harmful perceptions and lead to real-world victimization. (Cook, 38)

These portrayals can include depictions of LGBTQ+ individuals as comic relief, villains, criminals, mentally or physically ill, or victims of violence. (Marrero, 7) Online media became a double-edged sword for LGBTQ+ communities, providing a platform for connection and self-expression while also facilitating victimization through social media. (Marrero, 7)

The importance of accurate and adequate media representations of LGBTQ+ individuals is emphasized, as is the power that LGBTQ+ people have in influencing popular media and the decisions that are made in this space. However, media can also be a powerful tool for positive representation and change, with groundbreaking characters like Aaron Baker on the series *The Fosters* portrayed as a happy, accepted transgender person, showing the potential for media to challenge stereotypes and provide affirming role models. (Thomson, 3)

### **3. Victimization in *Love, Simon***

In *Love, Simon*, victimization can be considered as a central theme that depicts the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ people in their journey. Throughout the protagonist, Simon, experiences various forms of victimization. One example of victimization is depicted through instances of bullying, where Simon is subjected to harassment by his peers due to his sexual orientation. Similarly, blackmailing initiated by Simon's classmate Martin forces him into a state of fear.

#### **3.1 Simon and Bullying**

Before delving into the analysis of bullying as depicted in *Love, Simon*, it is important to establish a comprehensive understanding of this concept. Bullying is the systematic abuse of power, characterized by aggressive behavior or intentional-doing by peers that is carried out repeatedly and involves an imbalance of power, either actual or perceived, between the victim and the bully. This definition shows the nature of bullying, which can take various forms. Direct bullying, which includes physical violence and verbal acts of aggression such as hitting, stealing, or name calling, or indirect bullying, which is characterized by social exclusion, rumor spreading, or manipulation.

Additionally, with the development of technology, a new dimension of bullying was introduced with the rise of cyberbullying, which can be broadly defined as any bullying which is performed via electronic means, such as mobile, phones, or the internet. (Suzet, 879)

It must be recognized that individuals who are victims of bullying are at a heightened risk of experiencing a range of somatic problems, including but not limited to colds, headaches, or sleeping problems. The psychological consequences of bullying extend beyond physical symptoms, with victims frequently reporting internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression disorders. Furthermore, victims of bullying are at significantly increased risk of self-harm or thinking about suicide. (Suzet, 880)

Additionally, the impact of being bullied in school influences various aspects of an individual's mental and physical well-being. Research indicated that individuals who experienced bullying are more likely to exhibit symptoms of borderline personality disorder and psychotic experiences, such as hallucinations or delusions. Findings from research show the complex interchange between bullying experiences and subsequent mental and physical health outcomes, highlighting the importance of comprehensive interventions to address the impacts of bullying. (Suzet, 880)

Bullying in *Love, Simon* is notable in different scenes; one is when Simon experiences bullying in the high school cafeteria after his emails with Blue are exposed by Martin. The cinematography captures the emotional intensity of the protagonist.

The scene begins with Simon sitting alone at a lunch table, surrounded by his classmates, who stare at him with a mixture of curiosity and amusement. The use of medium close-up shots highlights Simon's isolation and discomfort as he becomes the point of attention in the cafeteria. The camera angles and framing depict a sense of unease.

As the scene progresses, the cinematography employs shifts in lighting and color palette to convey the tension and the emotional mess. The cafeteria is typically depicted as a vibrant and lively space. The camera movement and composition convey the dynamics of power and control within the scene. Quick cuts and dynamic camera movements capture the chaotic energy of the cafeteria, mirroring Simon's inner feelings and the tension surrounding

him. As some of his classmates begin to engage in offensive gestures and movements, drawing attention to themselves and Simon, with medium close-up shots, viewers witness Simon's growing discomfort and frustration as he becomes the target of their actions. The camera focuses on Simon's face, highlighting his anger. As Simon gets up from his table to confront his bullies, the camera follows his movements with a focused shot, emphasizing his willingness to address the situation. Suddenly, the scene shifts as Simon's teacher enters the frame, and her presence reduces the tension in the room. As the teacher intervenes, the camera focuses on her, capturing the end of the bullying incident and restoring a sense of order to the chaotic cafeteria environment.



Figure 1 (01:21:08)

Through shot compositions, lighting, and camera movement, the scene effectively conveys the emotional impact of bullying on the protagonist, inviting viewers to his experience of humiliation. The director contributes to the narrative of acceptance in *Love, Simon*, fostering greater understanding and compassion for LGBTQ+ individuals and their struggles by depicting Simon as the victim of injustice and his journey towards resilience.

Bullying was also addressed for Ethan, the black character in the movie, whose portrayal generated controversy among viewers and movie analysts, raising questions about racial dynamics and homonationalism within the film.

As highlighted by Rauchburg, the film presents a difference between Simon, a white protagonist portrayed as deserving of acceptance, and Ethan, who faces public ridicule and shame. This reflects societal attitudes towards race and sexuality, with Simon framed as entitled to his true self while Ethan is subjected to discrimination and rejection. (Rauchburg, 7) This shows that Ethan's portrayal raises questions about representation, power dynamics in mainstream cinema and in the *Love, Simon* movie.



Figure 2 (06:65)

Ethan in that shot was having a conversation with his friends; the camera captures their interaction with medium shots. Meanwhile, in the background, a group of classmates walks by, making offensive comments about Ethan and making mean remarks about his appearance.

As Ethan attempts to defend himself against the bullies, the director shifts focus to his face, capturing the frustration he experiences in the face of harassment. Close-up shots highlight Ethan's face, allowing viewers to empathize with his situation. Meanwhile, Simon and his friends pass by, their worried expressions reflecting the realization that anyone could become a target of bullying.

Simon comments as he exits the scene, "*I wish he wouldn't make it so easy,*" which highlights the internal conflict and guilt he feels about the potential consequences of being openly LGBTQ+ in a school environment. Through his gestures and expressions, the scene conveys Simon's internal feelings.

The scenes depicting both Simon and Ethan serve to emphasize the challenges and complexities of struggling with one's sexual identity. Simon faces bullying and harassment after his emails with Blue, his anonymous friend, are exposed. Similarly, Ethan is subjected to ridicule and shame by his classmates. These instances of bullying victimize Simon and Ethan as LGBTQ+ members.

Furthermore, the film director challenges viewers to confront the harmful consequences of discrimination by portraying bullying as an illegal and socially unacceptable act. The scenes of bullying in *Love, Simon* serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of empathy and understanding in creating a more accepting society. Through the characters of Simon and Ethan, audiences are encouraged to advocate for those who face similar challenges in advocating for the tolerance and acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals.

### **3.2 Simon and Blackmailing**

Blackmailing refers to the act of demanding money or other valuable consideration from someone in exchange for not revealing embarrassing or damaging information about them. (Online Etymology Dictionary)

The "black" in "blackmail" likely refers to the association between the color black and evil deeds, or serves as a contrast to "white mail," which was rent paid in cash rather than goods or services. Over time, the term evolved to describe the criminal act of coercing someone through the threat of exposure, distinct from extortion, which involves conditional threats.

The core essence of blackmailing is the exploitation of someone's vulnerability or secrets in order to extract payment or compliance, reflecting an abuse of power dynamics and the human desire for privacy. It remains a serious criminal offence for many authorities.

Blackmailing in *Love, Simon* serves as one of the main events that impacts Simon's character and the storyline. Simon struggles with the fear of revealing his true identity to his

friends, family, and classmates, and the film director highlights depicting Simon as a victim of blackmailing so as to make the audiences feel sympathy for the same-gender relationship.

When Simon's secret and his relationship with the anonymous person, Blue, are discovered by a classmate, Martin, it puts the protagonist into a state of victimization and vulnerability. The act of blackmailing threatens to expose Simon's personal truth. Simon is forced to find a balance between protecting himself and embracing his sense of self-worth. Thus, the blackmailing serves as a main point in Simon's journey of self-discovery, marking a turning point in the film's exploration of love.

In the scene where Simon is using the computer in the school library, there is a mix of close-up shots to capture Simon's excitement while texting Blue and wider angles to capture the environment. As the school director approaches, the camera angle captures his sudden appearance behind the computer, surprising Simon mid-conversation. Simon, previously smiling while in his exchange, is visibly faded by the interruption; his discomfort is evident as he minimizes the screen upon the director's arrival. The tension appears with quick cuts between Simon's expression and the director's presence, reflecting the fear of exposure.

When Martin used the computer right after Simon left, he discovered the emails and the camera shifts focus to his facial expressions, emphasizing his realization as he scrolls through the messages on the computer screen.

In another scene capturing Martin and Simon's confrontation in the corridor, tracking shots follow Martin as he follows Simon, emphasizing the urgency of the situation. Close-ups of their faces capture the intensity of the conversation, with Simon's stress evident through his body language, facial expressions, and furrowed brow.

In the library scene, the use of framing can be crucial in depicting the power dynamics between Simon and Martin. They are visually separated and positioned on opposite sides of bookshelves, symbolizing their conflict and the secrets they hold.



Figure 3 (27:26)

Simon realizes that he is being blackmailed and this is depicted through a series of close-ups, focusing on his expressions as he processes the situation. The camera focuses on his face as he struggles to comprehend Martin's intentions. The discussion below shows Simon's stress.

*Martin: I used the computer in the library right after you.*

*Simon: Okay?*

*Martin: When I went to Gmail, it pulled up your account. And I read some of e-mails. I*

*shouldn't have done it, but they were all like, right there.*

*Simon tenses up.*

*Martin: Simon, calm down. I'm not going to show anyone.*

*Simon: show anyone what. Did you print my e-mails or something?*

*Martin: No. I... took screenshots.*

*Simon: why would you take screenshots of my e-mails?*

*Martin: You and Abby Suso are like, best friends, right?*

*Simon: what does that have to do with anything?*

*Martin: I need you to talk to her.*

*Simon: What? Why would I help you to do that?*

*Simon: Oh my god. Are you blackmailing me?*

This conversation they had shows the tension of the situation, especially that Martin's intentions to blackmail Simon are revealed, putting Simon in a position of weakness and generating sympathy from viewers. With each word, Martin exerts control over Simon, expressing his willingness to manipulate him. Simon's desperate voice emphasizes the seriousness of the situation, while Martin's smirk and request highlight his vicious intent. As Simon struggles with the realization of his own weakness, viewers are meant to empathize with his feelings of fear of his secret being revealed to the entire school community, and the truth that he's held hostage by Martin's manipulation.

In conclusion, the incidents of bullying and blackmailing in *Love, Simon* are both plot devices and directional techniques used to represent LGBTQ+ members as victims of their choices. In short, the film director emphasizes the struggles of the characters, like Simon and Ethan, by portraying them as victims deserving sympathy and support.

#### **4. Victimize to Dramatize**

The term "dramatizing" refers to the act of converting or adapting a subject matter into a dramatic form or representation. This process involves imbuing the original content with theatrical elements, heightened emotions, dialogue, and narrative structure to create a more engaging and impactful presentation.

The practice of dramatizing can be applied to a wide range of source material, from real-life events and personal experiences to fictional stories and historical accounts. By transforming the subject into a dramatic work, the dramatizer seeks to captivate the audience, evoke strong emotions, and convey a particular message or perspective more effectively.

Dramatizing is a creative and interpretive act that requires skill in areas such as storytelling, character development, staging, and the use of dramatic devices. It allows the

dramatizer to shape and reframe the original content to suit the conventions and expectations of a dramatic medium, whether it be theater, film, television, or another performative format.

The origins of the term "dramatizing" can be traced back to the late 18th century, reflecting the growing importance and influence of drama as an art form and a mean of expression. By dramatizing, the dramatizer aims to breathe new life into a subject, making it more accessible, compelling, and impactful for the audience.

In one of the scenes that captures Simon's emotional disturbance and the nature of his experience as an LGBTQ+ member, he sits at the dinner table with his family. The night he got blackmailed by Martin, the discomfort across his face is evident through the tension in his posture and the way he scrolls through his phone.

When Simon received an email from Blue, the glow of his phone's screen illuminated his face in the darkness. The reflection of the phone's light adds depth to Simon's expressions, highlighting his sadness. As he steps outside of his house's front yard, texting Blue while simultaneously observing his family, the contrast between the warm, inviting light of the house and the cool darkness of the night expresses Simon's sense of isolation.

The shot composition features a combination of wide shots establishing the setting and medium close-ups focusing on Simon's face. Through framing and composition, the director also captures Simon's internal struggles. As he gazes through the windows of his home, watching his family enjoy their time together shows a sense of displacement. The visual separation between Simon and his family emphasizes the gap between his identity and social reality. Visual symbolism in that scene, such as framing devices like windows and reflections, may symbolize Simon's desire for transparency in his relationships.



Figure 4 (28:50)

The scene serves as a powerful dramatization of the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ members, particularly the fear of rejection and the loss of familial support. Simon's internal emotions are portrayed with sensitivity, inviting the audience to empathize with his journey.

In the coming out scene of Simon, the director uses various cinematic techniques to effectively convey Simon's coming out speech and the reactions of those around him, ultimately dramatizing themes of acceptance and fostering sympathy towards Simon's experience as an LGBTQ+ member.

The voiceover narration of Simon's speech adds depth and emotional effect, allowing viewers to connect with his courage as he shares his truth. Through carefully chosen words, Simon's narration highlights the significance of the moment, as shown below:

*Dear students of creekwood high school*

*As anyone with a half-decent data plan already knows, a recent post on this very website declared that I was homosexual. The delivery left something to be desired, but the message is true.*

*For a long time, I was killing myself to hide that fact. I had all these reasons - it was unfair that only LGBTQ+ people had to come out, I was sick of change, but the truth is, I was just scared. At first I thought it was just a strange thing, but then I realized that no matter what, announcing who you are to the world is pretty terrifying, because what if the world doesn't like you?*

*So, I did whatever I could to keep my secret. I hurt the best, most important people, and I want them to know that I'm sorry.*

*I am done being scared. I'm done living in a world where I don't get to be who I am. I deserve a great love story.*

The reactions of the characters enhance the scene's impact, as the smiles and expressions of acceptance from Simon's friends, family, classmates, and even individuals like the school director and teachers emphasize the theme of acceptance within the school community. The director, through close-up shots capturing each character's reaction, emphasizes the impact of Simon's words, further humanizing the individuals involved and reinforcing the message of acceptance.

The choice of music in the background complements the scene's emotional tone, adding a sense of celebration to Simon's moment. The cool, upbeat music highlights the positive message of unity, enhancing the overall quality of Simon's speech.

Overall, the scene effectively dramatizes the themes of acceptance and compassion, promoting LGBTQ+ acceptance within the school community. The scene fosters empathy through storytelling, performances, and uplifting music, leaving an impact on both the characters and the audience.

Similarly, the monologue in the opening scene of the movie serves as a tool in the dramatization of LGBTQ+ themes, while the cinematography completes this narrative by visually introducing viewers to Simon's seemingly perfect life. As Simon narrates his life and the struggle he has with hiding his true identity, various shots of his life were depicted, including scenes at his house with his family members and interactions with his friends at high school.

The cinematography uses a combination of shots, including wide shots of Simon's surroundings and medium close-ups of his interactions with his family and friends. These shots establish the setting and the context of Simon's life, portraying the perfect picture of his life that belies his internal emotions.

The lighting in these scenes is often bright and cheerful, enhancing the sense of normality that Simons presents to the world. As Simon's monologue progresses, the cinematography captures his external appearance of having a normal life and the internal conflict he has as a closeted homosexual teenager.

Overall, the opening scene of *Love, Simon* combines the emotional depth of Simon's internal monologue with visual cinematography to set the stage for the dramatic exploration of same-gender relationships.

In *Love, Simon*, a lot of scenes contributed to depicting dramatization of Simon's character. Among these moments are the conflicts Simon faces with his friends, particularly Martin, following the unauthorized publication of his e-mails with Blue. In the scene of their confrontation after the exposure, the cinematography enhances the emotional intensity and dramatic tension of the moment. The scene begins with Simon leaving the school and heading towards his car. The use of tracking shots as Martin runs after Simon adds urgency and suspense to the moment. The camera focuses on Simon's expressions as he apologizes, capturing the anger between his desire for forgiveness and his anger.

The lighting in the scenes is subdued, with shadows across their faces. This lighting choice emphasizes the seriousness of the confrontation and adds depth to their emotions. Meanwhile, close-up shots of Simon's red face and fists convey his anger, highlighting the emotional impact of the scene.

Sound design also plays a significant role in dramatizing the scene, with Simon's raised voice and Martin's apologies adding tension to the moment. The absence of background music allows the viewers to focus on the emotion and conflict between the characters. Overall, this moment effectively dramatizes the situation for Simon, highlighting the impact of Martin's betrayal.

Moving to the scene where Simon confronts his friends outside, the composition of the shot positions Abby and Nick side by side, symbolizing their unity against Simon, while Simon stands in front of them, visually representing his isolation. Leah, positioned behind Abby and Nick in the background, adds depth to the scene, as her expressions reflecting a mix of empathy and concern for Simon.

The lighting may be natural and soft, enhancing the realism of the outdoor setting while allowing the characters' emotion to be the point. Close-ups shots of Simon's frustrated expression and Abby and Nick's serious glares highlight the intensity of their conversation, while wider shots capture the space dynamic between the characters, emphasizing their distance. The scene dramatizes the breakdown of Simon's relationships with his friends, highlighting the profound impact of his secrets.

In conclusion, the themes of victimization, dramatization and sympathy are clear throughout the narrative, offering an exploration of the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in navigating their identities. Through scenes of blackmail and bullying, the film vividly depicts the ways in which Simon is victimized. In addition to moments of dramatization, such as the opening monologue, confrontations with Martin and his friends, and Simon's speech of coming out, serves to generate sympathy for the viewers by portraying Simon's experiences with empathy and invite them to empathize with his struggles and celebrate his moments of courage.

By picturing Simon's internal and external conflicts, the film fosters understanding of the LGBTQ+ experience and promoting for sympathy and acceptance towards same-gender relationships.

# Conclusion

To conclude this dissertation, the researcher thinks that *Love, Simon* is one of the movies that helped promote and beautify the image of LGBTQ+ members through its use of directional and cinematic techniques. By featuring the struggles of blackmailing and discrimination, in addition to humanizing and dramatizing LGBTQ+ characters, the film director could generate understanding and sympathy in the film's viewers.

Chapter one provided a comprehensive exploration of the historical background and evolution of same-gender relationships in the US, tracing their origins from ancient civilizations to pre-colonial America. It delved into the path of same-gender relationships, documenting societal banning and discrimination to the medicalization and pathologization of LGBTQ+ individuals. Moreover, the chapter navigated through legal and social events that refused same-gender relationships until the groundbreaking acceptance and legalization of same-gender marriage.

Chapter one also delved into the LGBTQ+ movements in the US throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, shedding light on the moments that shaped the fight for equality. From the Stonewall Riots to the AIDS crisis and beyond, the LGBTQ+ community challenged discrimination and demanded recognition of their rights. Additionally, the chapter analyzed the use of political correctness as a strategy to normalize same-gender relationships within American society.

Through an exploration of historical contexts and societal shifts, chapter one opened the door for a deeper examination of LGBTQ+ representation and acceptance in media, as depicted in *Love, Simon*.

Chapter two embarked on an extensive exploration of the directional techniques employed in *Love, Simon* to portray same-gender relationships by using humanization and normalization. Through an analysis of the film's cinematography, dialogues, and character development, the chapter aimed to reveal the meaning behind each scene, thereby shedding light on the struggles of LGBTQ+ individuals.

The chapter also analyzed the cinematographic choices made by the director, Greg Berlanti, such as framing, lighting, and camera angles employed to capture the emotional depth of same-gender relationships. The movie captured the facial expressions and gestures needed to invite the audience into the inner world of its characters by employing specific shots. Furthermore, the use of lighting and colors created an atmosphere of warmth, which humanized and normalized the LGBTQ+ members.

Additionally, the chapter explored the importance of familial bonds and supportive environments in facilitating the acceptance and normalization of same-gender relationships. Through a critical analysis, chapter two sought to show the ways in which the film challenges societal norms and fosters understanding for LGBTQ+ individuals.

In chapter three, a detailed examination was provided to investigate how *Love, Simon* serves to both victimize and dramatize LGBTQ+ relationships. Through analysis of cinematography and dialogue, the chapter aimed to unveil the underlying themes of discrimination, and societal stigma faced by LGBTQ+ individuals.

The scenes depicting victimization were analyzed, particularly those focusing on bullying and emotional manipulation in school settings. Moreover, the chapter delved into the techniques used to emphasize dramatization, leading the film viewers to identify with Simon and feel sympathy for him and his struggle.

This dissertation aimed to unveil the hypocrisy and vicious intentions behind Hollywood's promotion of the LGBTQ+ experience. The industry's approach is tricky, as it promotes same-gender relationships primarily to appeal to progressive audiences. *Love, Simon* is a good example of how Hollywood handles LGBTQ+ themes. While the film aims to normalize and humanize LGBTQ+ experiences, it also reveals a deeper hypocrisy in Hollywood's portrayal of these narratives. Hollywood often presents LGBTQ+ in a way that makes them seem perfect and appealing, fitting with mainstream tastes. We see an idealized

portrayal of same-gender relationships. This romanticized view suggests that being queer is glamorous. Hollywood also promotes LGBTQ+ narratives through marketing, making them seem trendy and fashionable.

*Love, Simon* serves a purpose far beyond just entertainment; it actively promotes, beautifies, and glamorizes same-gender relationships. Through the personal journey of the young protagonist as he navigates his identity, the film emphasizes the beauty and normality of same-gender love.

Western media, through films like *Love, Simon*, plays a role in promoting and humanizing LGBTQ+ members, employing specific directional techniques and cinematography to capture a narrative that resonated on an emotional level.

The film's relatable characters help viewers sympathize with the struggles of LGBTQ+ individuals. This humanization is critical to shifting public perception, as it allows audiences to see LGBTQ+ as relatable individuals, rather than stereotypes. *Love, Simon* encourages viewers to embrace the diversity of human experiences.

Furthermore, the film's positive portrayal of a same-gender romance, with the typical highs and lows of teenage love, serves to normalize such relationships in the eyes of the audience. This normalization is a powerful tool for fostering a more accepting society.

By using film as a medium, *Love, Simon* reaches a wide and varied audience, including those who might not have engaged with LGBTQ+ narratives. The film's popularity helps to spread the message of acceptance and different forms of love to different cultures and communities around the world. In doing so, it helps to create a more understanding and compassionate global society.

This cultural impact is what makes movies such as *Love, Simon* particularly interesting to watch and analyze. The film's ability to generate sympathy, challenge stereotypes, and promote acceptance provides a chance to examine how media can influence societal attitudes

and norms. Its success in humanizing LGBTQ+ experiences and normalizing same-gender relationships highlights the power of cinema to drive social change.

Therefore, *Love, Simon* was chosen for analysis not only for its cinematic qualities but also for its significant cultural and social implications. By studying this film, we can better understand the role of the media in shaping public perceptions.

It should be noted that *Love, Simon* was based on the *Homo Sapiens Agenda* by Becky Albertalli, it perceived positively by viewers, and achieved significant success at the box office in 2018. Furthermore, *Love, Simon* was notable for being the first major Hollywood studio film to focus on an LGBTQ+ character romance. The film's positive reception from audiences and critics is reflected in its box office performance, which generated over \$66 million worldwide against a production of \$10-17 million.

Critics praised the film for its heartfelt portrayal of an LGBTQ+ teenager's experience, as well as its humour and charm. The performance, particularly by Nick Robinson as Simon, was widely praised for bringing depth and readability to the character.

In conclusion, the impact of *Love, Simon* extends beyond the USA and Hollywood, influencing global audiences. The film contributes to a cultural shift towards greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals worldwide.

The researcher believes scholars and students should prioritize studies on how western and American media are spreading their social attitudes worldwide and how this phenomenon impacts people from diverse societies, including Arab and Muslim societies. Particularly, there should be a focus on understanding the influence of movies on shaping societal perceptions, especially regarding same-gender relationships.

Western and American media hold significant power on shaping global cultural norms and values through the wide spread of their content. Researchers, by studying the strategies

and tactics employed by these media outlets, can gain an understanding of how specific social attitudes are promoted on a global scale.

In the context of our Algerian society, where traditional values and norms often oppose Western ideals promoted by the media, it is important to examine how these external influences impact local attitudes and behaviors. By investigating the reception and interpretation of Western media messages within our cultural context, researchers can shed light on the complexities of cultural globalization.

Furthermore, there is a need to explore how the portrayal of same-gender relationships in Western media, particularly in movies, influences attitudes and perceptions within our society. As these representations become more visible and normalized in global media, it is important to understand how they are received and interpreted by Algerian audiences. This research can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of social attitudes towards LGBTQ+ issues.

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