

**Sex in the Multiplex:  
A Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis  
of Sex in the 250 Most Popular Films on  
Domestic Release, 2011-2015**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

This study consists of a quantitative and qualitative analysis of sex in the 250 most popular films on release in North America between 2011 and 2015. It emerges against a background of discourses on sexualisation and pornification in social scientific and public health research, on the one hand, and a rhetoric of transgression in film studies, on the other. It bridges the gap between these disciplines, between theoretical frameworks, research practices, and methodologies, by employing quantitative and qualitative methods to generate a substantive theory of sex in the films studied.

The method consists of selecting films for analysis based on financial data available for films on domestic release, on home entertainment markets, and Western film markets; identifying sexual content by analysing portrayals and spoken references; and using grounded theory to generate the substantive theory.

This study establishes that the 250 films selected for study account for 7% of films on domestic release but 70% of ticket sales for films from 2011 to 2015. At least one scene featuring sexual content, either depictions or spoken references, occurred in 96% of films studied. Nongraphic sexual content accounted for 69% of sex scenes. It also found that the prevailing discourse on physical intimacy and sex occurred between characters who are not in a close personal relationship.

The substantive theory encompasses the processes of discipline and disclosure that pervade the discourse on sex and physical intimacy as characters feel obliged to reveal their desires and sexual histories, and these revelations are subject to validation, approval or influence from others. These processes reveal the ongoing regulation of film sex. Exclusion emerged as the primary mode of representation of non-heterosexual sexualities. Repudiation constitutes the secondary mode. The analysis also reveals that portrayals of kissing operate as a visual grammar that legitimates and valorises heteronormative values.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study of sexual representation in the 250 most popular films on domestic release in North America between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011, and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015, identifies the most prominent cinematic representational practices with regard to sex, identifying its signification through processes of discipline and disclosure. The identification and elaboration of these processes expose the workings of heteronormativity, the cultural assumption that people fall into complementary genders (masculine/feminine) with corresponding natural sex roles (male/female), an assumption that works to valorise heterosexuality, to suppress gender diversity, and to construct an idealised masculinity and femininity. This study departs from research paradigms that prevail in social science research, on the one hand, and film studies scholarship and historical approaches, on the other. This chapter introduces the study, providing context and background information, before briefly outlining the gap that arises in the literature between social scientific and humanities scholarship. It outlines the project's aims, its methodology, its theoretical framework and the structure the thesis takes.

This study originated in a project that explored the use of non-simulated sexual performances in films that screened at the 2012 Gaze Film Festival in Dublin. Ben Walters (2012), writing for *The Guardian*, a British newspaper, characterised films such as the sexually graphic *I Want Your Love* (Mathews 2012) as exploring “gay experience in all its complexity” and that directors such as Andrew Haigh (*Weekend*, 2011) and Ira Sachs (*Keep the Lights On*, 2012) were “creating films that deal with real life and rounded characters”. *Mates* (da Silva 2011), a short film, blended the appearance of Grindr, a dating app, with casual homosexual encounters, and juxtaposed these images with censored clips from footage of the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton in which the royal couple and members of the public had their faces blacked out. Da Silva's film contrasted furtive casual homosexual encounters with the public endorsement of the royal couple (“this is what's best about Britain, yeah!”).

The contrast in da Silva's film between the public display of heterosexual coupling, tied to reproductive sex through the royal imperative of producing an heir, and the hidden and fleeting nature of sexual encounters between men highlights how representations of sexuality, whether through television broadcasts seen by millions, or for smaller audiences on social media, online pornography or short films screened at film festivals, differ greatly. The increased accessibility of graphic depictions of sex between men in online pornography, on social media and in film festivals represents a positive aspect and necessary complication of the alleged centrality of “the pornography industry” in western culture. Critics of this “pornification” from conservative and feminist perspectives (e.g. Paul 2005; Dines 2010) acknowledge that male pornography differs from that against which they write their polemics, but queer theorists posit these differences as central to understanding western culture (Sedgwick 1990:1). Sedgwick may overstate her claim; nevertheless, this study approaches sexual representation from a queer perspective.

Sedgwick claims that “an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition” (Sedgwick 1990:1). This study remains theoretically sensitive to Sedgwick’s claim, as it does to other descriptions and explanations of sexual representation in popular film, a significant element within contemporary Western culture. The appearance of sexual themes and imagery in films provokes a range of responses, several of them avowedly political, whether conservative, feminist or liberal. A concern especially with sexual graphicness cuts across these perspectives, whether that graphicness is framed as worrisome “porn chic” or celebrated as a transgressive aesthetic. These two frames reflect how scholarly work on sexual representation divides between two paradigms, leading to two mutually exclusive discourses. This study develops an understanding of sexual representation by remaining open to explanations, but ultimately finding the queer perspective most enlightening.

Divergent approaches to sexual content in film result in a significant gap in the literature as mutually exclusive discourses emerge within social science and public health research, on the one hand, and film studies, on the other. Quantitative methods prevail in social science and public health research. Researchers use methods such as content analysis to investigate the extent to which sexually graphic content occurs (Abramson & Mechanic 1983), the effectiveness of age-based classification systems in screening out graphic content (Tickle, Beach & Dalton 2009; Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010), comparing such systems between nations (Thrasher et al 2014), and investigating phenomena such as ratings creep (Leone & Houle 2006). Researchers test the validity of recurring hypotheses rather than seeking to generate new or alternative theories. Repeated “unexpected” or “surprising” findings indicating a dearth of graphic content in popular film fail to alter a persistent assumption of prevalent sexual themes and imagery in mainstream movies within discourse on sexualisation and pornification.

To clarify, public discourses on sexualisation repeatedly assume an increasing occurrence of sexual themes and graphic imagery in popular culture, but studies since 1983 (Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Greenberg et al 1993; Dempsey & Reichert 2000; Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell 2005; Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010) find repeatedly that, with respect to film, this is not so. The understanding that exposure to graphic material potentially damages vulnerable audiences, especially children and adolescents, leads to a repeated emphasis on the sexual graphicness of popular films. Other studies emphasise problematic aspects of sexual practice such as portrayals of rape (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000) or portrayals of married couples’ sex lives (Dempsey & Reichert 2000). Knowledge develops through the incremental build-up of recurring studies, but these have been relatively infrequent. The dearth of studies calls for a comprehensive approach to provide a more accurate description of the sexual content that occurs in popular film. Explanation should only proceed on the basis of accuracy.



The qualitative approach that prevails in film studies generally entails a problematic form of theorising that concentrates on art cinema. Williams (2014:14) argues that this critical “dis(stance)” from Hollywood or commercial cinema in favour of this theorisation assures film studies its respect within the academy. This critical stance entails two broad approaches. The first, a historical approach (McNair 1996, 2002, 2013; Pennington 2007; Forshaw 2015) emphasises changes in the treatment of sexual themes that coincide with the Sexual Revolution, the collapse of the Hollywood studio system, and the replacement of the Production Code with the current (though modified) MPAA age-based classification system. The second approach entails interpreting films, using concepts influenced by Althusserian Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis and post-Saussurean linguistics, prevailing (e.g. Krzywinska 2006; Williams 2008; Coleman 2016) despite well-established criticism (Carroll 1988, 1996; Bordwell 1989, 1996; Knight 1993). Neither approach entails a comprehensive survey of films from any period. Commentators conduct detailed examinations of single films without regard to representativeness.

Three aims emerge from this project in its attempt to address the gap in research that arises from the divergences in theoretical frameworks and methodological considerations between social scientific and humanities scholarship on cinematic sexual representation. The first is to provide a more accurate description of popular cinema and the extent to which sexual content occurs in a representative sample. Carroll (1996:42) notes a reliance on interpreting single films in academic work, which accounts for the absence of comprehensive surveys in film studies. McKee (2014) similarly notes a focus on idiosyncratic works in this research tradition. Sampling strategies in social scientific approaches are purposive rather than representative, identifying films more likely to feature graphic depictions of sex. This results in a skewed picture of the extent to which sexual content occurs, which perhaps explains repeated expressions of surprise (e.g. Bufkin & Eschholz 2000; Pardun 2002) at the relative absence of such content. A more accurate and comprehensive survey is required.

The project’s second aim is to provide a more accurate description of the sexual themes and imagery that occur in popular film. Pardun (2002) notes that sexual practice involves a lead-in and build-up to sexual acts such as intercourse or otherwise taking place. Scholarship in both the social sciences and film studies concentrate on the most graphic depictions of sexual behaviour that takes place. This preoccupation with sexual graphicness arises from a concern from social scientific and public health perspectives that children’s and adolescents’ exposure to such content is potentially harmful, skewing their perceptions of sexual practice and its consequences (e.g. Greenberg et al 1993), and from an inquiry into its potential in liberal perspectives for sexual graphicness to provide evidence of a more tolerant, accepting and sexually diverse culture (e.g. McNair 2002) or into the aesthetic possibilities of incorporating non-simulated sexual portrayals into narrative features (e.g. Coleman 2016). The focus on sexual graphicness neglects other aspects of physical intimacy.

The project's third aim, having provided an accurate description of popular cinema and the sexual content that occurs in a representative sample, is to generate a substantive theory based on the empirical observation of the sexual content identified. It requires an openness or "theoretical sensitivity" (Glaser 1978; Charmaz 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz 2013) to existing theoretical frameworks or accounts. The focus on sexually graphic depictions, and a perception that these are increasing and prevalent, leads proponents of the "pornification thesis" (Cohen 2007:114) to identify "porn chic" as a prevailing mode of representation (McNair 2002, 2013; Paul 2005; Dines 2010; Lynch 2012). For McNair, this "pornographication" constitutes a "democratisation of desire" as a cycle of liberalisation leads to the increased acceptance, tolerance and even celebration of diverse sexual identities and practices. Gill (2012) offers a feminist critique of sexualisation and pornification from a Foucauldian perspective that posits the ongoing regulation of feminine subjectivities and heteronormative identities. This perspective proves important.

The Foucauldian perspective constitutes one theoretical framework to which this study must be sensitive. The theoretical framework for this study is one of "theoretical agnosticism". This involves the investigation of "all kinds of extant theories in different research disciplines to figure out embedded theoretical codes" (Thornberg & Charmaz 2013) and the continual criticism of the application of theories throughout the research process (Henwood & Pidgeon 2003:138). It requires theoretical sensitivity (Glaser 1978; Charmaz 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz 2013), that is, the researcher's familiarisation with possible theoretical frameworks that might inform the generation of a theory during theoretical coding. Theoretical agnosticism requires the researcher to be aware of extant theoretical positions on the subject. The positions in existing scholarship divide between those that fall within the "effects paradigm" (McNair 2013) in social science and public health research, the aesthetic inquiries (e.g. Krzywinska 2006; Williams 2008) and historical accounts (Pennington 2015; Forshaw 2015) in film studies, and Foucauldian feminist scholarship (Gill 2012).

This perspective proves important because it provides an alternative explanation of the processes of discipline and disclosure identified in this study. A "standard narrative" (de Botton 2012) underpins much commentary and research on sexual representation, where writers take as axiomatic that developments such as the demise of the Hollywood studio system, the replacement of the Production Code with the current age-based classification system, and new channels of distribution and exhibition such as film festivals, home entertainment formats (video, DVD, Blu-Ray) and streaming foster a freedom to circulate a range of sexually diverse representations. Whereas conservative objections (Paul 2005; Ingraham 2007; Hatch 2012) to sexualisation arise from a concern that this freedom has gone too far and threatens traditional family values, liberal critics (McNair 1996, 2002, 2013; Pennington 2007; Forshaw 2015) perhaps overstate the extent to which a "cycle of liberalisation" actually facilitate sexual freedom and diversity. The Foucauldian concern with the regulation of sexual identity and practices provides an alternative.

Several theoretical models prevail within social science and public health research studies on sex in film. These include cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross 1976), social learning theory (Bandura 1986) and script theory (Gagnon & Simon 1973). These perspectives constitute explanations of how people respond to messages or “scripts” in popular culture. Academic work within these frameworks involves identifying what messages or scripts exist in the media, and certain studies on film (Pardun 2002; Weitz 2010; Smith 2012) reflect this. This project seeks to identify the representational practices and processes that operate in relation to physical intimacy in recent popular film. What forms of physical intimacy are represented? What attitudes to these forms do characters take? What narrative patterns occur around these representations? It seeks to describe and explain representational practices in film, bearing similarity to descriptive other studies, but it is not a study of viewer engagement nor a theorisation of spectatorship, an aspect that distinguishes it from film studies.

Interpreting the depiction of sexual acts in films according to concepts developed in psychoanalytic theory and theorising “the spectator” characterises approaches in film studies (Krzywinska 2006; Williams 2008; Coleman 2016). Concepts such as objectification, fetishisation and voyeurism remain pertinent in analyses. The literature review summarises critiques of this approach generally (Carroll 1988, 1996; Bordwell 1989, 1996; Knight 1993) and specifically in relation to scholarship on sexual themes and imagery (Frey 2016). Theorising the spectator constitutes one recurring line of inquiry in such scholarship. The other central question is one of aesthetics and concerns the functioning of sexually graphic or non-simulated sex scenes in narrative feature films (e.g. Coleman 2016). This line of inquiry leads to a proliferation of studies on films by provocative auteurs such as Catherine Breillat, Gaspar Noé and Lars von Trier. This question proved to be less significant in this study as it identified the overwhelming prevalence of nongraphic or less graphic sexual content in popular film.

Foucauldian and queer perspectives become more significant as this study, based on its empirical findings, shifts focus to less graphic sexual content. This constitutes a fundamental contribution to the development of our knowledge of sexual representation in popular film. The concept of heteronormativity proves crucial. “Heteronormativity” refers to “the view that that institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and prescriptive sociosexual arrangements” (Ingraham 1994:204). It involves a binary conception of gender, the suppression of gender diversity, the reinforcement of heterosexuality, and the suppression of a critique of heterosexual normalisation (Griffin 2017). The literature review establishes how these issues are bracketed or put aside within discourses on sexualisation and pornification (Paul 2005; Dines 2010). The concentration on sexual graphicness detracts from articulating a fuller appreciation of how heteronormativity suffuses representational practices. The theoretical frameworks that prevail in existing scholarship limited the kinds of questions asked of sexual representation thereby making the topic suitable for investigation using grounded theory

(Milliken 2010).

The method comprises three phases: selecting films for analysis, identifying sexual content in these films and generating data for the next phase, analysing the data using a grounded theory approach to generate a substantive theory. Scholarship in social scientific and public health research is more explicit in its sampling procedures (McKee 2014). Existing studies tend to use a purposive sampling approach, identifying films that are more likely to feature sexually graphic content. This approach thus skews research on the extent to which sexual content occurs. McKee (2014) notes that film studies, in the tradition of humanities scholarship in general, is less concerned with being explicit about sampling, instead focusing inquiries on single texts, often idiosyncratic in nature. Representativeness is not a concern. The sampling process here takes a model (Sampson 1970) that entailed a survey of film distribution. Its purpose is to identify a sample of films that represents popular film understood as those which most people see in cinemas.

Identifying sexual content in films and television programmes involves two levels of analysis: the scene and the film. The identification of sexual content also involves a distinction between levels of graphicness. Leone (2002) developed a useful scale for distinguishing between levels of graphicness. Nalkur, Jamieson and Romer (2010) later used this scale in their assessment of the effectiveness of the MPAA age-based classification system in screening out sexually graphic content from popular films. This scale distinguishes between levels of graphicness based on the nature of the sexual act depicted and the levels of nudity that accompany these acts. This aspect of the study constitutes its quantitative element. Its purpose is to enable, insofar as possible, a comparison between the findings that emerge and those established in existing studies. The findings that emerge, as signalled previously, indicate the prevalence of sexual themes and images in popular film at lower levels of graphicness. Analysing this content constitutes the substance of this study.

This study is more than a qualitative content analysis. Cho and Lee (2014) distinguish qualitative content analysis from grounded theory by comparing the intended research outcome. They characterise the outcome of a qualitative content analysis as a list of categories or the meaning of qualitative materials, whereas a grounded theory approach results in a substantive theory. Both methods employ phases of coding, the development of categories, and the identification of properties for categories, and qualitative content analysis may entail an inductive approach in these processes as in grounded theory. However, the process of theoretical coding that characterises grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz 2013) constitutes a step beyond qualitative content analysis, while the identification of scenes, categories and levels of graphicness facilitates comparison with previous studies. The substantive theory arises from analysing the processes of discipline and disclosure identified in this study and articulating how these relate to feminist and queer theories on regulating heteronormative sexual identities and

practices.

The thesis follows a social science structure, commencing with this introductory chapter, before moving onto the literature review, methodology, findings, analysis and discussion, and conclusion. This chapter positions the study in relation to existing scholarship, outlines the nature of its original and significant contribution to knowledge, and briefly introduces the theoretical framework and methodology. The literature review summarises and critiques major academic studies and aspects of public discourse on sex in popular film. It commences by outlining the discourses on sexualisation and pornification, engagement with which provided the impetus for this project. It summarises the major findings in major content analyses on sex in popular films as well as outlining the implications of the well-known limitations of this method. The review then critiques the standard narrative, which entails a conception of sex as something that we can liberate, before moving onto the rhetoric of transgression that prevails in film studies. It concludes by outlining the research questions this study addresses.

The methodology chapter comprises three elements, justifying the selection of films for analysis, identifying sexual content, and generating theory. Chapter four reports findings from the quantitative analysis, highlighting the evidential basis for a shift to a concern with less graphic depictions of and references to sexual identity and physical intimacy. Chapter five commences with an analysis and discussion of how these quantitative findings relate to existing scholarship, particularly the major studies identified in reviews of the literature on sexualisation (Ward 2003; Wright 2009). It then moves into the qualitative analysis where it articulates the fundamental insights from this study: the operation of processes of discipline and disclosure in representational practices that represent the privileging and valorisation of heteronormative sexual identities and practices. This constitutes a counternarrative to the standard narrative where representations are not sexually diverse and free; rather, they exclude and repudiate identities and practices outside the heteronormative matrix through complex processes of policing and supervision and representational patterns.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

There is a broad consensus in academia and the media increased sexualisation characterises contemporary culture and society. However, it is often unclear whether this refers merely to cultural visibility in discourse and representation or to significant changes in cultural and societal practices. This literature review commences with an explanation of sexualisation and pornification and how proponents of this cultural and representational processes say that they manifest in popular film. It outlines the two major paradigms in the study of sexual representation, the effects paradigm in social scientific and public health research, and the “aesthetic embrace” that prevails in film studies. It contextualises these within “standard narrative” of increasing sexual freedom from the mid-twentieth century, and the conservative, feminist and liberal political discourses in which they occur, as well as summarising and critiquing major studies and methodological approaches. It outlines a Foucauldian counternarrative that emerges from feminist and queer perspectives before setting out the research questions that this study addresses.

### **Sexualisation**

Sociologists currently speak of “a hypersexual society” (Kammeyer 2008), historians document “a world made sexy” (Rutherford 2007), and media scholars analyse “the sexualisation of Western culture” (Attwood 2009). These writers are responding to “a strong sense that sex has now entered the mainstream of contemporary popular culture” (Garlick 2011:222) and a “perception of a shift towards the sexually explicit in mainstream mass media” (Attwood 2002:99) that incites debates about the definition and status of pornography and the impact that new media have on contemporary sexual identity, practice, and representation. There is “a more widespread fascination with sex and the sexually explicit in print and broadcast media” (Attwood 2006:81-82). This chapter reviews existing scholarship on this “widespread fascination” as it relates to popular film but it first clarifies terminology.

Kammeyer (2008) describes the proliferation of sexual discourse, erotic and pornography in contemporary America as “hypersexual”. He distinguishes between two senses of “hypersexuality”. The first sense draws on Baudrillard (1981), who argued that “hyperreality”, through our relentless exposure to simulations of reality in the mass media, advertising and the entertainment industries, displaces reality, the realm of everyday lived experience. Kammeyer identifies Baudrillard’s concept of the hypersexual “as extension of hyperreality into the realm of human intimacy” (Kammeyer 2008:12) arguing that mediated simulations of sexual experience overwhelm and displace the coupling of human bodies. Hardy (2009) inquires into this blurring between representation and reality in newer pornographic forms. Kammeyer’s “necessarily superficial treatment of hypersexuality” (per Franklin 2009) neglects this Baudrillardian sense of hypersexuality in favour of a Foucauldian sense.

Kammeyer describes an “overwhelming abundance of simulated sexual images, narratives, and representations at all levels of society” (Kammeyer 2008:12). He agrees with Linda Williams, who cites Foucault (1976) when referring to “a contemporary proliferation of discourses on sexuality... a modern compulsion to speak incessantly about sex” (Williams 1989:2). Kammeyer understands “hypersexual” to refer to the increased occurrence of sexual themes in print, academia, film, television, radio and the Internet. Dines (2010:105) calls this phenomenon the “hypersexualisation of mass-produced images”. Other writers (e.g. Evans 1993; McNair 1996, 2002; Attwood 2009) characterize this phenomenon as “cultural sexualisation”. This may manifest in popular film as an increased occurrence of sexual themes and graphic imagery. This chapter summarises and critiques existing scholarship on this manifestation, which constitutes the first aspect of sexualisation.

Duschinsky (2013) addresses a second aspect sexualisation when tracing the origins of the term to Spanier (1975), who coined it as a portmanteau of “sexual socialisation” in a work that studied the factors that influence adolescent premarital sexual behaviour. This sense of “sexualisation” relates to how people, especially children and teenagers, learn about sex. Research establishes that people acquire sexual knowledge from their parents (Hogan & Kitagawa 1985), schools (Manlove 1998), and religious leaders (Werner-Wilson 1998). Students report learning most about sex from their same-sex peers (Spanier 1977; Davis & Harris 1982; Kallen et al 1983; Handelsman et al 1987; Bailey Ballard & Morris 1998), but the media rank among the top three sources of sexual information (Amonker 1980; Thornburg 1981; Andre, Frevert & Schuchmann 1989; Sutton et al 2002).

Dines (2010) alludes to this aspect of “hypersexualisation” or “sexualisation” when she refers to “the Stepford Slut, a hypersexualised... woman” (Dines 2010:102). “Hyper” means “over”, “above” or “excessively” (Soanes & Stevenson 2005:853), and this interpretation refers to an official definition of sexualisation that occurs in a study commissioned by the UK Government, which refers to “the imposition of adult sexuality on to children and young people before they are capable of dealing with it” (Papadopoulos 2010:23). Inquiries and reports by government agencies and professional bodies in Australia (Rush & La Nauze 2006), the UK (Papadopoulos 2010; Bailey 2011) and the USA (APA 2007) reflect anxieties provoked by the perceived excessiveness of sex in contemporary popular culture and media and the potential this has for harming children and adolescents.

According to Kammeyer (2008), “hypersexual” thus comprises three aspects: first, the blurring of representation and “the real”; second, cultural sexualisation, the increased occurrence of sexual themes and graphic imagery in popular culture; and third, sexual socialisation, exposure to excessive or inappropriate sexual content in mass media. This literature review summarises and critiques scholarship and critical commentary on how these phenomena manifest in popular film. As a study that focuses on films rather than viewer engagement, the literature review primarily

addresses studies and writing on cultural sexualisation, i.e. those inquiries into the extent to which sexual content occurs in film and the nature of such content where it occurs. Several political perspectives prevail on the issue of whether sexual content that occurs in popular film is excessive or inappropriate.

Gill (2012:485) identifies three major positions on sexualisation. She describes these as the “public morals” position, the “democratizing sex” position, and feminist approaches, cautioning that these are broad and “definitely not homogenous” (ibid). As will become clear, differences within feminist approaches are especially important. The “public morals” position refers to primarily American conservative critics (e.g. Paul 2005; Ingraham 2007; Hatch 2012) who view sexualisation as fostering the decline of traditional family values and gender roles. McNair (1996, 2002, 2013) most fully articulates the liberal “democratizing sex” position. Feminist approaches split between anti-pornography activists (e.g. Dines 2010; Long 2012; Lynch 2012), more critical, nuanced and open-minded analyses (Paasonen, Nikunen & Saarenmaa 2007; Attwood 2009; Smith 2012), and a specifically Foucauldian perspective (e.g. Gill 2012, 2013; Gill & Orgad 2018).

### **The Pornification Thesis**

Writers from conservative (Paul 2005), liberal (McNair 2002) and feminist (Dines 2010) perspectives identify the centrality of pornography within the process of sexualisation. Smith (2010) suggests that McNair (1996, 2002) was first to introduce the term “pornographication” when addressing sex in postmodern culture. McNair highlighted the increased frequency with which sexual themes and graphic imagery occurred in various cultural products and practices, including British television (BBC and Channel 4), popular music (Madonna), and photography (by Robert Mapplethorpe). Reflecting “the standard narrative”, McNair (2002) developed his positive notion of the “pornographication of the mainstream” in his response to the emergence of the Internet, digital technology and new media, which, together with liberalisation and deregulation, increased access to previously excluded sexual minorities (gays, lesbians, transsexuals), facilitating a “democratisation of desire”.

Long (2012) similarly dates scholarly engagement with “pornification” to 2002 but she criticises McNair’s celebration of liberal capitalism, favouring instead the feminist anti-pornography positions of Levy (2005), Dines (2010) and others who decry the objectification, humiliation, and degradation of women which, they argue, the mainstreaming of pornography entails. Conservative moralists also rail against “the porning of America” (Aucoin 2006), with one critic claiming that “we are living in a pornified culture and we have no idea what this means for ourselves, our relationships or our society” (Paul 2005:11). Smith (2010) believes that “pornification” and “pornographication” have become associated with the criticisms advocated by Levy and Paul and the view that pornographication causes the coarsening and commercialisation of sexual practices has become ascendant (over liberal and more critical



views).

Pornification differs from both “cultural sexualisation” and “sexual socialisation” by displacing a concern with understanding the representation of sex with representations of pornography. The emergence of new media, changes in media regulation and policy, and the popularity of “porn(o) chic” characterise “pornification” (Paasonen, Nikunen & Saarenmaa 2007:2-13), which occurs at the levels of technology and accessibility; the apparent influence of pornography on mainstream mass media; the presence of pornographic practices in public spaces; and the global reach, legitimisation, and success of “the pornography industry” (Long 2012:115-120). Paasonen, Nikunen and Saarenmaa (2007) outline that pornification occurs at two primary levels: industrial-institutional, in which technological, legal and economic changes facilitate the expansion of pornography, and socio-cultural, in which “porn chic” describes the increased presence of the pornographic in popular culture.

The industrial-institutional level (Paasonen, Nikunen & Saarenmaa 2007) involves analysing the technological developments that facilitate increased access to the production, distribution, exhibition and consumption of pornography; political, legal and judicial enactments and decisions that coincide with programmes of media deregulation and liberalisation; and economic circumstances, including increased personal wealth and access to capital, which contribute to the apparent flourishing of pornography businesses. Simpson (2004) estimates that these businesses combined are worth more than all sports franchises combined, all top broadcast television companies combined, or all top technology companies combined. Such figures suggest that pornography, not only influences, but constitutes the mainstream, but they remain problematic and unverified (Ackman 2001). This study does not deal with the industrial-institutional level, concentrating instead on the socio-cultural level, specifically in recent popular film.

Arguments about links between Hollywood and “porn inc” relate to their manifestation in film content (e.g. Dines 2010; Long 2012:117). Critics from both conservative and feminist anti-pornography perspectives agree on how this manifestation occurs. For example, Paul (2005:6-7) argues that *The Girl Next Door* (Greenfield 2004), in which Elisa Cuthbert plays a pornography turned girl-next-door, “celebrates pornography” in its attempt to replicate the “indie cool” of *Boogie Nights* (Anderson 1997). Paul criticizes cameo appearances in several mainstream films by “stars” of the “pornography industry” such as Jenna Jamerson and Ron Jeremy. Dines likewise criticizes both *Sideways* (Payne 2004), where the main male character browses a copy of *Barely Legal*, and *I Am Legend* (Lawrence 2007), where movies featuring Joanna Angel play in the background of a scene (2010:54-56).

Dines (2010) also criticizes *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* (Smith 2008) as being one of the kinds of film where “porn is just folded into part of the story line”. Writing about the same film, Walter (2010:104) asserts that “it’s frequent to see this kind of tolerant reference to pornography in

mainstream art, [but] it has become rare to find any condemnation of it.” Her comments allude to the possibility that the discourse on pornography in contemporary feature film might entail condemnation, emphasising the importance of context. An inquiry into how “porn(o) chic” manifests in popular film might involve a content analysis that identifies when characters use pornography or the appearances of performers associated with “the pornography industry”. This limited approach constitutes the origin of this study.

Lynch (2012) employs a more elaborate approach to “porn chic”. She identifies seven characteristics that constitute “porn chic” and interprets various cultural products and practices according to these criteria, which are a focus on the male heterosexual gaze; sexual objectification of women; sexual subjectification; sexual attention as powerful; upping the ante; misogyny; and the blurring of public and private. The aspects of pop culture she studies include the MTV series *Girls Gone Wild*; Hooters, a restaurant chain, the construction of cyber “raunch” identity through social media profiles; and the performance of pornographic identity through body sculpting (breast implants, genital waxing, vaginoplasty). She describes her analysis as “systematically” reading these cultural practices according to these criteria. It would be possible to perform a similar analysis of recent popular film.

A major problem with both these approaches is an assumption that “the pornographic” explains or provides the singular account for the representation of sex in film. This is especially problematic for Lynch’s approach. Though reading various cultural practices by reference to the same criteria each time appears systematic, Lynch obscures how she identified the seven characteristics that, according to her, define “porn chic” and, more significantly, why they might relate specifically to “the pornographic” as “porn chic” rather than other ongoing cultural or socio-political processes. Lynch’s work on pornification typifies the description and explanation of apparent cultural shifts and alarming experiences that obscures the specificities and politics of cultural artefacts, as criticised by Smith (2010:104). Attending to the particularities of popular film calls for a different analytical approach.

The discourse on pornification suggests that “porn(o) chic” constitutes the big story of sex in contemporary Western culture, but it is a problematic concept. Smith (2010) argues that “pornographication” and “pornification” have “no very precise meaning” (Smith 2010:105). She claims that the usefulness of the term “pornification” may well have been exceeded. “Pornification” represents one way that conservative and feminist anti-pornography critics have responded to a perceived increased frequency and graphicness in the sexual content in contemporary culture, where writers such as Dines, Long and Walter choose examples of films that appear to bear out their claims, or others such as Long interpret cultural practices and products according to preconceived criteria, obscuring the possibility that other processes may operate. An analytical approach open to other possibilities is required.

The discourse on “pornification” is also significant because its advocates argue that we should be concerned about the “pornographic” seeping into cultural practices such as mainstream movies. Their concern arises from believing that pornography and our increasingly pornified culture has the potential to cause harm. Conservatives and feminist anti-pornography activists agree on its damaging potential, but they differ on what this might be. Conservatives (Paul 2005; Ingraham; Hatch 2012) object to the decline of the nuclear family and traditional gender roles. Feminist anti-pornography writers (Dines 2010; Long 2012; Lynch 2012) critique the reinforcement of patriarchy and the objectification, degradation and humiliation of women. McNair (2013:4) argues that the contradiction between a fear for male heterosexual hegemony and opposition to patriarchy means that neither of these positions are correct.

### **Paradigms in the Study of Cinematic Sexual Representation**

Commentary on pornification, and the concern with the manifestation of “porn chic” in mainstream movies, reflects a preoccupation with a core issue: whether the production, distribution and consumption of pornography causes harm or not (McNair 2014). This preoccupation results in a programme of research into sexual content in popular film that questions the extent to which sexually graphic depictions occur and the framing of such depictions as leading to risky behaviour. The “effects paradigm” (McNair 2014) entails two core focal points, an emphasis on the sexual graphicness of film content and the harm that this may cause. This “effects paradigm” dominates social science and public health research in terms of sexual content in film. It continues conservative and feminist anti-pornography opposition to sexually graphic content from the 1970s.

A “paradigm shift” in researching the pornographic occurred from the 1980s (Kirkham & Skeggs 1996; Attwood 2002; McNair 2014). Attwood (2002) characterises this shift as occurring primarily within the humanities where scholars have moved away from the framework established by the “tired binary” (Juffer 1998:2) of the pornography debates that prevailed from the 1970s. Conservative moralists always opposed pornography because it offends against sacred and traditional ideas about sex. The sexually graphic became a defining issue within the women’s movement as feminist critics explored its possible connections to violence against women and perpetuating gender inequality. Works by Susan Brownmiller, Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon and Robin Morgan continue to inspire contemporary feminist anti-pornography scholars (Dines 2010; Long 2012; Lynch 2012). This scholarship focused more on pornography than Hollywood productions.

From the 1960s, social scientists and public health researchers investigated possible effects of exposure to sexually graphic material. Debates concerning the methodologies employed and the validity and reliability of findings in such work formed the bulk of academic work on pornography. Marcus (1964) and Sontag (1967) contributed early works in the scholarly appreciation of pornographic literature, followed much later by Kendrick’s (1987) treatment of

pornography in terms of its access limited to elite males in the nineteenth century. Williams (1989) contributed a ground-breaking work that drew on psychoanalytic, Marxist, narrative, and genre theories in her examination of hard-core pornography, putting aside “the tired debates between pro-censorship, anti-pornography and anti-censorship, ‘sex-positive’ feminism” (Williams 2014:25). However, Williams’ continuing work on sex in film maintains a focus on the sexually graphic.

Attwood (2002) suggests that the paradigm shift in pornography research entails both a description of the generic attributes of pornography across a range of media and a close examination of pornographic texts. Film studies scholars make important contributions in this regard (Williams 1989, 2004, 2008; Gibson & Church Gibson 1993; Lehman 2006; Schaefer 2014). Their work adds to that which Attwood (2002) characterizes as examining how pornography signifies through the broader cultural framework as a transgressive category, an “outlaw discourse” (Wicke 1993:79), or a debased low-culture genre. Scholarship in film studies follows Williams in her focus on the sexually graphic and its transgressive potential (Krzywinska 2006; Coleman 2016). A critique of this scholarship follows later in this chapter, identifying a need for attending to less graphic sexual content.

Attwood (2002) emphasises the need for the perceived “pornographication of the mainstream” to be contextualised within “a much broader historical examination of sexual representation”. Directions this broader examination can take, in addition to examining less graphic forms of representation, include looking at the consumption of sexual content and its production. Attwood identifies ongoing research into “the ways in which pornography is consumed and integrated into everyday life” (2002:93) as an aspect of the contextualisation of pornography. This study’s textual focus means that it makes no contribution in this regard. However, the “effects paradigm”, as outlined above, reflects a particular emphasis in existing scholarship that views consumption as “exposure” and potentially harmful. This study remains open to positive possibilities and pleasure that may be available in cinematic sexual representation.

Academic attention is also currently directed towards the production of audio-visual content featuring representations of sexual acts, whether simulated or not. This includes work that considers performing in pornographic films as a form of exploitative labour (Jensen 2007). Sarikakis and Shaukat (2008:111), for example point out that such labour “involves no protection from either trade unions or the state” and that the wages female performers earn are incomparable to the revenues and profits that commercial pornographic productions achieve. Scholarship on gender inequality in Hollywood and film industries throughout the world also reflects the direction of academic work to addressing such issues in film production, particularly the annual reports on employment statistics by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University.

This study emerges in the context of the #MeToo movement, in which the film industry, especially Hollywood, features prominently, most clearly through the case of Harvey Weinstein, the executive producer who ran Miramax and the Weinstein Company before being convicted in February 2020 for rape in the third degree and sentenced to 23 years' imprisonment. Gill and Orgad (2018:1319-1320) outline four limitations to the scholarship and critical commentary on the #MeToo Movement, which are its exclusionary politics and aesthetics; a focus on sexual violence and specific workplaces; popularity due to a call for justice or salacious content; and its separation from "critical discussion of the huge role played by films in naturalizing and normalizing violence against women". This study specifically addresses sexual themes and imagery in Hollywood's output.

Attwood (2002:101) argued that there remains much work to be done to establish whether the perceived increased occurrence of sexual themes and graphic imagery is "as dramatic as has been suggested" or that current sexual representations mark "such a decisive break from what has gone before". She questions the utility of focusing on pornography and points to the need for developing adequate theoretical frameworks capable of accounting for reconfigurations of pornography in the mainstream and to increase knowledge about specific sexual representations, the significance of these for a variety of audiences, and their role in everyday life. This review now focuses on summarising and critiquing the scholarship that addresses questions regarding the extent to which sexual content occurs in popular film and what it establishes about its nature.

### **Studies on Film Sex Within the Effects Paradigm**

Ward (2003) and Wright (2009), while reviewing empirical scholarship on sexualisation and the media, identified six studies on sexual content in popular film (Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Greenberg et al 1993; Dempsey & Reichert 2000; Bufkin & Eschholz 2000; Pardun 2002; Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell 2005). Nalkur, Jamieson and Romer (2010) published a study after these reviews. These seven studies constitute the quantitative scholarship that establishes the patterns and trends against which the findings from this study can be assessed. This section summarises and critiques these seven studies. It outlines the principal findings from each, draws important themes that emerge from comparison, and the implications these have for this study. It also deals with criticism of the quantitative approach and the significance of these critiques for this study.

Researchers frequently mention the relative dearth of studies on sexual content in film in comparison to academic work on sexual content in other media, especially television programmes, music video, printed magazines, and advertising (Ward 2003; Wright 2009). Greenberg et al (1993:58) write that "systematic content analyses of films have been rare". Gunasekera, Chapman and Campbell (2005:465) refer to the "paucity of data specifically addressing popular movies and their impact on population sexual... behaviour". Bufkin and Eschholz (2000:1327) describe "the paucity of research that empirically explores portrayal

patterns within and across several different types of media outlets”. These comments describe the comparative absence of studies that investigate the extent to which sexual content occurs in popular films, especially research using content analysis. How has this line of inquiry developed?

A focus on how “exposure” to sexual content in films founds this line of inquiry, which has a long, if erratic, history. Black (1996) refers to Forman’s (1933) one-volume summary of studies commissioned by the Payne Fund in the USA. Forman included the effect of seeing sexual content in films on adolescents’ attitudes, but, as Black (1996:152) notes, Forman ignored findings that effects were “specific for a given child and given movie”. Later, in the UK, Wall and Simpson (1951) found adolescent boys responding to “crude, erotic fantasy”, and girls reporting both shock and enjoyment of the “vulgarity and coarseness”. This study also shows teenagers responding to sexual content in films even at the height of Hollywood’s Production Code and conservative regulation of film content in the UK.

Researchers assess the extent to which sexual content occurs in films given constraints such as the operation of the Production Code during Hollywood’s “golden age” and the current MPAA age-based classification system, which replaced the code in 1968. A concern regarding the potential harm of any sexually graphic material guides these studies, which assess the effectiveness of regulatory systems in screening out sexual content, especially from films rated as suitable for viewing by younger audiences. This limits the range of questions addressed by studies on the extent to which sexual content occurs, which are more concerned with the frequency with which graphic depictions occur than the nature of these depictions or the extent to which less graphic portrayals or references occur. Studies look at films or ratings descriptions.

Scholarship on content regulation addresses the issue of “ratings creep”, where objectionable content appears to merit a less restrictive rating today than it would have merited in years gone by. This aspect relates to Lynch’s characterisation of “porn chic” as entailing a tendency towards more extreme content or, as she puts it, “upping the ante”. The existence of ratings creep may indicate a tolerance for more extreme, more graphic, or more violent content. Another related proposition is that audiences become more accustomed to more extreme or graphic sexual content, and the industry produces even more extreme content to gain an edge on their competitors. Scholarship in this area provides useful tools for examining sexual content films, but it is first necessary to summarise and critique the major studies.

Abramson and Mechanic (1983) studied best-selling novels and films in the USA to assess the nature of sexual content in both. They characterised the importance of their work in terms of identifying in these media, as a primary source of sexual information, sexual myths and fallacies that might occur. They studied fifteen films, the top five films by rental receipts from three years, decades apart. They identified twelve scenes featuring sexual content. Only two occurred in films from 1959, with six in 1969 and four in 1979. There was no mention of contraceptives or birth

control in any film. Sexual behaviour rarely occurred between characters who were married or in a long-term relationship. No scenes featured masturbation, incest, the use of lubricants, sex during menstruation nor non-heterosexual sex.

Greenberg et al (1993) studied sixteen films originally released in US cinemas between 1982 and 1984 that were rated R for sexual content and popular with adolescents. They identified 280 scenes featuring sexual content. Their coding distinguished between eight categories of sexual behaviour (prostitution, rape, homosexual, intercourse/married, intercourse, unmarried, petting, long kiss, or other). They found similar trends to that of Abramson and Mechanic (1983) in that the ratio of depictions of unmarried to married sexual references was 32:1. "Long kisses" occurred at an average of 2.4 per film. Depictions of, or reference to, homosexual practices occurred in six films, never more than twice per film. They found no rape scenes. The majority of scenes involved only a verbal reference to sex, though 36% had a visual component.

Dempsey and Reichert (2000) followed Greenberg et al (1993) in coding for portrayals of marital and non-marital sex in the top twenty-five video rentals of 1998 in the US, a sample they say is representative because it accounts for 9 million of 4 billion rentals of that year (0.23%). They identified 105 scenes in twenty-three films, finding that sexual behaviour among married characters is "rare and rather mundane compared to characters having sex outside of marriage" (Dempsey & Reichert 2000:35). They found that 85% of scenes feature portrayals between characters who were not married. They did not examine verbal references to sex, departing from Greenberg et al (1993). They also found that portrayals of sexual behaviour occurred primarily between characters who were young (aged 23-30), middle-class and childless.

Bufkin and Eschholz (2000) identified thirty scenes in twenty of the top fifty theatrical release of 1996 in the USA. They were examining the extent to which rape scenes occurred in popular films. They identified five rape scenes, two of which featured homosexual rapes. These portrayals of sex between men were the only depictions of male homosexual practices in their sample, which depictions, they say, "reify the patriarchal notion that homosexual sex is deviant and only sick child molesters participate in such actions" (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000:1337). Bufkin and Eschholz were surprised to find so few rape scenes. They expressed surprise that 60% of the films studied featured no sex scene, linking their expectation to the presumption of obligatory sex scenes in films (citing Rothman et al 1993).

Pardun (2002:217) similarly expresses surprise on finding that "very few incidents contained any kind of direct reference to sexual intercourse". Pardun studied the sexual or romantic scripts that occurred in fifteen films from 1995-1996 that were popular with adolescents. Pardun identified 309 scenes in her grounded theory approach. However, she makes no reference to theoretical sampling nor saturation. The two concepts that she abstracts from her work are vague (the innocence of romance; the mystery of sex). Nevertheless, her findings provide further evidence

to support the trend identified earlier (Dempsey & Reichert 2000) concerning differences between portrayals of characters who are married and those who are not. Pardun found the non-marital sex to be more “progressive”, that is, involving more than “passionate kissing”, which prevailed between married couples.

The remaining studies are larger in scale in terms of the years covered and number of films studied. They both epitomise the “effects paradigm” by framing sexual content in popular films as a source of concern about the potential it has for harming vulnerable audiences, that is, children and adolescents, and by examining it alongside risky behaviour such as drug use (Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell 2005) and violence (Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010). Gunasekera, Chapman and Campbell identified 53 episodes in 28 of the 87 most popular films on release between 1983 and 2003. The absence of negative consequences of sexual intercourse such as unwanted or teenage pregnancies or the transmission of STIs was concerning, given the prevalence of depictions of encounters between adults who have just met.

Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer (2010) did not code for characters’ marital or relationship status. Their coding employed a scheme devised by Leone (2002) to identify the extent to which scenes at various levels of graphicness occur. A breakdown of Leone’s scheme appears in Appendix A. This study (Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010) examined 855 films from 1950 to 2006 to assess the effectiveness of the MPAA rating system in screening out graphic violent or sexual content. They concluded that it was effective in screening out sexually graphic content from films with non-restrictive ratings, but that PG-13 films were becoming increasingly violent. Their findings do not provide evidence to support claims about increasing sexual content or “upping the ante” (Lynch 2012) nor to found a fear of “ratings creep”.

STUDY	FILMS	YEARS	SCENES	1 OR MORE	MEAN
ABRAMSON & MECHANIC 1983	15	1959, 1969, 1979	12	NA	0.8
GREENBERG ET AL 1993	16	1982-1984	280	16 (100%)	17.5
BUFKIN & ESCHHOLZ 2000	50	1996	36	20 (40%)	0.7
DEMPSEY & REICHERT 2000	25	1998	105	23 (92%)	4.2
PARDUN 2002	15	1995	309	NA	20.6
GUNASEKERA ET AL 2005	87	1983-2003	53	28 (32%)	0.6
NALKUR ET AL 2010	855	1950-2006	NA	NA (85%)	NA

*Table 2.1*

Table 2.1, above, summarises the headline figures from these major studies. Researchers interpret these findings as indicating that sexual content in popular films is “quite substantial” (Ward 2003:359) and that such content “in major motion pictures has risen dramatically” (Stern & Handel 2001:284). Such interpretations appear to bring feature films into line with the general framework of “cultural sexualisation”, that sexual content in film is increasing in frequency and graphicness. However, Ward (2003:359) errs in reporting that Bufkin and Eschholz (2000)



“indicated that 60% of the films contained at least one sex scene”, when they actually express surprise that this proportion of films featured no sex scenes. Stern and Handel (2001) cite Abramson and Mechanic (1983) but disregard the caution required for generalizing from the small sample size.

Despite the small sample size, Abramson and Mechanic (1983) identified several important “manifest themes” that remain significant. The first was the absence of references to contraceptives, positing a circular explanation in which two of the most popular sources of sexual information, best-selling novels and popular films, “are void of references to contraception” (Abramson & Mechanic 1983:201). The second manifest theme was that sexual participants were mostly attractive, single, and physically healthy. The third theme was the prevalence of depictions of sexual relationships between unmarried partners who knew each other for only a short time. They speculate that this reinforces “the notion that sex is merely a way of initiating a relationship, rather than a way of sustaining a relationship”. Subsequent studies show that this representational practice remains consistent.

A crucial line of inquiry arises from this discourse. Dempsey and Reichert (2000:22) argue that popular films, “as a ubiquitous source of entertainment, are important to assess because they provide models for behavior that may impact perceptions about sexuality in marriage”. The underlying concern in such research reflects conservatives fears expressed in discourses on pornification and sexualisation (e.g. Paul 2005; Ingraham 2007; Hatch 2012) that the celebration of “porn chic”, together with an apparent increased occurrence in frequency and graphicness of sexual depictions, undermines and threatens traditional institutions such as heterosexual marriage. A significant aspect of investigation sexual representation in popular film is to examine how this relates to marriage. This study expands our knowledge in this regard by looking beyond the most graphic portrayals of sexual practices.

This approach relies on a distinction between levels of graphicness, which will also facilitate comparison between this study and existing scholarship. As stated, Nalkur, Jamieson and Romer (2010) used a scale developed by Leone (2002) to distinguish between levels of graphicness. This scale grades scenes featuring sexual content by differentiating between the kinds of sexual practice depicted and the levels of nudity involved. Leone developed the scale to assess what kind of content the MPAA classification system regards as “too far for R”. A difficulty with it is its emphasis on the visual and on graphicness. “Graphic” here refers to visual depictions; “explicit” refers to scenes where characters clearly refer to sex when speaking. It is possible for a scene to be sexually explicit without being sexually graphic.

These seven major studies reflect the concern with the increased occurrence and graphicness of sexual content in mainstream media, specifically film in this case, which characterises the discourse on sexualisation. The questions that arise for this study relate to the extent which sexual

content occurs in recent popular films, whether this differs across films of different MPAA classifications in terms of frequency and graphicness, the extent to which certain kinds of sexual acts (such as rape, prostitution, pornography use, etc) occur, and the relationship between characters appearing in sexual acts. Answering these questions provide an overview or snapshot picture of how sexual content appears in popular film and require a research method that can address these quantitative issues. Content analysis appears appropriate, but it has well known limitations.

Six out of the seven major studies on the extent to which sexual content occurs in popular films are content analyses. Berelson (1952:18) set out the classic definition of this research method: "Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication." Scholars criticised objectivity as impossible ideal (Hansen 1998:95), and later definitions require that content analysis be "systematic" (Holsti 1969) or replicable (Krippendorff 1980). Krzywinska (2006:27) writes that "it is possible to identify certain patterns, conventions and trends" apparent in "cinematic representations of sex and sexuality". These patterns, conventions and trends constitute "currently inaccessible phenomena" (Krippendorff 2004:33) that existing content analyses make accessible, providing quantitative evidence that may or may not support hypotheses or propositions concerning sexual representation.

Critiques of content analysis go beyond its positive notion of objectivity, focusing on its quantitative nature, the fragmentation of textual wholes, and its lack of a theory of meaning (Kracauer 1952; Burgelin 1972; Sumner 1979; Hansen 1998). Gill (2012) specifically makes these critiques of content analyses in sexualisation studies, writing that they "rely upon a concept of meaning that is problematic" (488). Sumner (1979) makes this clear, positing that "content analysis has no theory of significance", merely assuming the significance in existence or repetition. Hansen (1998) therefore emphasises the importance and "the need for placing what is counted in content analysis within a theoretical framework which articulates... the social significance and meaning of what is being counted" (96). Choosing a theoretical framework also affects the method's perceived objectivity.

Gill (2012:488) also criticises studies relying on content analysis because they "ignore the difference between levels of meaning (e.g. manifest versus latent meanings) and tell us little about the images they examine, except how frequently they occur". Gunasekera, Campbell and Chapman (2005:468) are upfront in recognising this limitation, acknowledging that they made no attempt "to differentiate fleeting depictions with more influential prolonged depictions of the negative health behaviours... studied". The "little" that emerges from the reviews (Ward 2003; 2009) includes the prevalence of portrayals between non-married characters and the apparent effectiveness of the MPAA classification in screening out such content. Gill's critique of content analyses from this perspective lays bare the need for a researcher to take a more qualitative

approach to more fully understand sexual representation in popular film.

The problem of fragmentation occurs with researchers “seeing ‘sexualisation’ as residing in single, readily identifiable images treated separately from wider features of the texts with which they are embedded (e.g. storyline, genre, characterisation)” (Gill 2012:488). Greenberg et al (1993), for example, did not code in detail for activities occurring when characters appeared nude. They provided some “descriptive information”, which included “running, walking and sitting scenes”, i.e. there was no sexual act occurring. Such comments appear to reflect Gill’s criticism that these are “downplayed and treated as value free” (Gill 2012:488). Hansen (1998:98) posits a counterpoint to such critiques, acknowledging that content analysis initially fragments texts into countable elements, but that the researcher re-assembles these at the analysis and interpretation stage. Contextualisation emerges as vital for studying sexual representation.

Gill’s critique also touches on the problem of defining sex “since coding is an inevitably subjective process”. A deductive approach to developing coding categories (Cho & Lee 2014) prevails in the existing studies. Abramson and Mechanic (1983) invited three “sex researchers”, who identify 29 scoring categories. Greenberg et al (1993) identified eight categories of sexual behaviour, mentioned above, and Dempsey and Reichert (2000) modelled their study on this. Pardun (2002) adopted a grounded theory approach and an inductive process of developing coding categories. This included both verbal references to sexual behaviour and portrayals, leading to an apparently high level (309 episodes) of sexual content in films with non-restrictive ratings. Subjective considerations and differences in definition and emphasis make comparisons between existing studies on sexual content in popular film.

A further complicating factor in comparing findings from existing studies arises from different approaches sampling. Researchers (e.g. Stern & Handel 2001; Ward 2003) draw incorrect conclusions without regard to the sample sizes in these studies. Purposive sampling occurs in certain studies (Greenberg et al 1993; Gunasekara, Chapman & Campbell 2005). Greenberg et al (1993) sought out films that were rated R for sexual content that were popular with teenagers. The films studied then are not representative of films rated R from that period, never mind films on general release or “popular film”. Gunasekara, Chapman and Campbell (2005) similarly formulated criteria for excluding films based on the unlikelihood of sexual content occurring (films rated G or PG, animated films). Commentators ought to have regard to these sampling processes.

Gill’s critique of the “effects paradigm” in sexualisation extends to an aspect that this study does not address directly, suggesting that the paradigm involves a conception of “media audiences of passive dupes who questioningly absorb ‘hypodermically’ injected into them” (Gill 2012:488). Gill suggests that researchers conclude that the content (its sexualised quality) constitutes evidence of the effects upon audiences. Bufkin and Eschholz (2000), however, posit a nuanced

understanding of audiences, positing three perspectives, the dominant ideology position, interpretive reception research, and a third “mixed approach [that] recognizes the difficulties and work associated with decoding texts” (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000:1320, citing Condit 1989; Carragee 1990). This research project focuses on the text, and this review returns to the issue of how it relates to audiences, interpretation and possible “effects”.

These studies constitute the academic work wherein researchers select a representative sample of popular films (Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell 2005; Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010). Reference to such sampling processes is absent from both historical and contemporary approaches to sexual representation in film. Rothman et al (1993:66) warn: “One problem with studies of television and the movies is that, depending on the movies one picks as representative—and without a publicly validated scheme for coding films—one can prove almost anything.” This perhaps accounts for researchers repeatedly expressing surprise at finding few sexually graphic scenes, where commentaries (Paul 2005; Dines 2010; Lynch 2012) are selective rather than comprehensive in choosing examples of cultural sexualisation. An absence of comprehensive engagement with popular film perhaps also explains the standard narrative.

### **The Standard Narrative**

What is the standard narrative? The term refers to a common understanding of the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s as the liberalisation, fostered by the women’s movement and gay liberation, of traditional social and moralistic attitudes to sex. Alain de Botton, a philosopher, characterizes the “standard narrative” as a shift in perception from “a gratuitous sense of confusion and guilt around sex” for thousands of years until “sometime between the First World War and the launch of *Sputnik 1*” when, “finally, people started wearing bikinis, admitted to masturbating, grew able to mention cunnilingus in social contexts, started to watch porn films and became deeply comfortable with a topic that had, almost unaccountably, been the source of needless frustration for most of human history” (de Botton 2012:5). He goes on to suggest that we now perceive sex “as a useful, refreshing and physically reviving pastime”. The mention of pornographic films indicates the importance of sexual representation in this shift of perception.

The standard narrative, as it might apply to popular film, constitutes a kind of corollary to cultural sexualisation. A perceived increase in the frequency and graphicness of sexual themes and imagery in film suggests that there was a relative infrequency and prudishness in previous representations. Histories of sexual representation in the cinema typically follow this logic, drawing parallels between the social and cultural changes associated with the emergence of the women’s movement and gay liberation in the 1960s with the demise of the Hollywood studio system, the replacement of the Production Code with the still-current age-based classification and rating system of the MPAA, and the emergence of the so-called “golden era of pornography” in the 1970s. McNair (1996, 2002, 2013), Pennington (2007) and Forshaw (2015) relate the legal changes, institutional developments, and milestone films that reflect a tolerance, acceptance and

indeed celebration of diverse sexual identities and practices, and the perceived increase in frequency and graphicness of cinematic sexual representation.

The standard narrative is not limited to studies outside the “effects paradigm”. Abramson and Mechanic (1983) couch their explanation of sexual content in films in terms of processes of liberalisation, including the demise of the Hollywood studio system and the “diminished influence of the Production Code”, a series of legal decisions in which the US Supreme Court liberalised the definition of obscenity (citing *Roth v. US*, 1957, *Redrup & US*, 1967), the revision of the Production Code, the appearance of adult language in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Nichols 1966) and MGM’s distribution of *Blow-Up* (Antonioni 1966), which made MGM the first Hollywood’s distributor to release a film featuring nudity. Historical approaches tend to emphasise the emergence of more graphic content, highlighting the films that break the mould, leading to a sense that “the history of moving-image entertainment is one of a gender tendency toward revelation” (Williams 2008:2). Discourse on sexual graphicness in film tends towards a rhetoric of transgression.

Kammeyer (2008) includes the expansion of academic work on sex in his “hypersexual society”, where studies on erotica and pornography in the social sciences and humanities constitute a significant element in sexual discourse. He cites *Kinsey* (Condon 2004), a biopic of Alfred Kinsey, as re-introducing Kinsey’s work to the American public. Kammeyer emphasises the pornographic in his work, developing a narrative that parallels cultural sexualisation where hypersexuality entails an increase in both the frequency with which works dealing with sex and pornography occur and the graphicness of the materials with which they deal. Kammeyer highlights the work of Linda Williams (1989, 2004), “a pioneer in the study of pornography” (Kammeyer 2008:101), Constance Penley (1997) and Laura Kipnis (1996). Scholarly work on film outside the “effects paradigm” tends to follow this path, concentrating on the most sexually graphic films, the “landmark films” or “milestone movies” that appear to “break the mould”, rather than a more comprehensive approach to analysing sexual representation.

The discussion of sexual representation of film outside its framing as a problem of public morality or child protection commences perhaps in the 1960s with works by celebrated film critics such as Alexander Walker (1966), who wrote for the *Evening Standard*, a British newspaper, and Parker Tyler (1972), who wrote for *Film Culture*, an American publication linked to the New York-centred avant-garde experimental film scene. Their critical works emerged contemporaneously with the development of film studies as an academic discipline separate from literature departments from the 1970s, with its own journals, periodicals and conferences. A collection from the mid-1970s (Atkins 1975) perhaps provides a model for more recent publications (Gwynne 2015; Coleman 2016), which feature essays on particular films or topics related to sexual representation. Other recent works (Pennington 2007; Forshaw 2015) take a historical approach, tracing how the “standard narrative” manifests in the development of sexual representation from

the pioneering days of cinema to times closer to our own.

Pennington (2007) provides an historical examination of sexual representation in American cinema, examining its social and historical contexts, and drawing on socio-cultural history rather than psychoanalytic theory to elucidate its appearances. Pennington's work typifies how the historical approach to film sex differs from psychoanalytic readings (e.g. Krzywinska 2006) or those that draw on other theoretical frameworks in film studies such as narrative and genre (e.g. Williams 2008). Pennington focuses on the regulation of sexual content, the film industry's self-censorship and the operation of the Production Code, before turning his attention to sexploitation, pornography, European film, the American underground, and the brief flourishing of "porno chic" in the 1960s and '70s. His exploration of the historical cinematic treatment of themes such as homosexuality, adultery, incest, and paedophilia refers to under 75 films, only nine released after the year 2000. Pennington cites examples of films to illustrate his points, but there is no comprehensive survey or justification for representativeness for any period.

Pennington's work reflects a model that various writers follow in their treatments of sexual representation in cinema which goes back at least to 1966, when Alexander Walker, long-time film critic for the *Evening Standard*, wrote an early volume on the subject in which he examined the sex appeal of primarily female stars. Walker also addressed issues of censorship in the USA and the UK at a time of changing attitudes to sexual permissiveness, and social and institutional changes, including the Second Vatican Council, the evolution of the Legion of Decency into the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, and the waning influence of the Production Code. Walker's work appeared before the MPAA replaced the code with the current age-based classification system. He frames the controversy over the display of a woman's bare breasts in *The Pawnbroker* (Lumet 1965) as a liberal issue. Walker's concern with female "sex appeal" precedes scholarship that critiqued the sexual objectification of women since the 1970s.

A significant essay collection (Atkins 1975) develops more fully themes and issues that Walker (1966) addressed. Lennig, Renold and Becker focused on censorship, the classification system and the relationship between sexuality, morality and film. Losano, Evans and Keyser explored "the sex genre", horror, and sexuality in European film. Phillips contributed an early essay on representations of homosexual practices in film, laying the groundwork for later writers (Dyer 1977; Russo 1981). A section of the book entitled "landmark films" featured essays on specific films, including *Midnight Cowboy* (Schlesinger 1969), *Deep Throat* (Damiano 1972), *Last Tango in Paris* (Bertolucci 1972) and *Cries and Whispers* (Bergman 1972). The selection of "landmark films" reflects a concern with works that stand out from popular film in terms of their perceived progressiveness. Atkins' collection represents how film studies continues to approach sexual representation, with in-depth appreciation of particular arthouse or pornographic films, an emphasis on European and sexually graphic films, and treatment of Hollywood's outlier films.

Atkins (1975), in his own contribution, explores sex in Hollywood feature films by focusing on “troubled sexuality”, concentrating on key films from the 1950s, including *The Wild One* (Benedek 1953) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ray 1955). He contrasts the Method acting style of Marlon Brando with the older approach of established stars such as Spencer Tracy and Humphrey Bogart. He claims that the Method performers were at their best “in divided parts based on the unresolved tension between an outer social mask and an inner reality of frustration that usually has a sexual basis” (Atkins 1975:114). He also argues that the rock ‘n’ roll musical with stars such as Elvis Presley also made “a direct challenge to the repressive atmosphere of the fifties” (121). Atkins partly frames his analysis as revealing the dissolving constraints that we understand to occur at this time. Atkins attempts to substantiate the “standard narrative” in his analysis of sexual representation in 1950s popular film.

Atkins traces the familiar narrative of European arthouse directors, such as Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni and Pier Paolo Pasolini, working with more provocative sexual themes. Film in the 1970s went through “a transitional period... when many of the accepted characters and cherished formulas no longer seem to be working” (Atkins 1975:131). Atkins suggests that “a few gutsy European directors are leading the way into unexplored territory, particularly in their complex treatments of sexual identity” (ibid). His remarks seem also to describe the first part of the twenty-first century, when film studies scholars continue to champion the ways in which the provocative and sexually graphic works of primarily European arthouse auteurs present “troubled sexuality” and a reconfiguration of pornographic aesthetics as transgressive. Atkins’ analysis emerges from considering “landmark films” rather than a comprehensive engagement with Hollywood’s considerable output, and concentrating on films in which sexual themes are provocative, challenging or transgressive, an approach that prevails in contemporary film studies.

Keesey (2012), a professor of film and literature at California Polytechnic State University, employs the term “contemporary erotic cinema” to describe his selection of just over a hundred films from the USA, Mexico, Japan, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and elsewhere. Less than forty of these films were released after 2005, and his notion of “contemporary” includes several films (*Behind the Green Door*, *Deep Throat*, *Last Tango in Paris* and *Score*) from 1972. His selection omits significant films such as *Fatal Attraction* (Lyne 1987), *Basic Instinct* (Verhoeven 1992), *The Piano* (Campion 1993) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (Kubrick 1999). Nine films, including *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee 2005), *A History of Violence* (Cronenberg 2005), and *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* (Smith 2008), achieved a wide release after 2005. Keesey divides his survey of “contemporary erotic cinema” into three parts (erotic genres, themes, acts), providing short descriptions for each film selected. There is no coherent discussion or analysis that ties these together.

While Keesey (2012) discusses disparate films, Forshaw (2015) identifies a unifying theme as he

celebrates arthouse directors demolishing taboos in his analysis of the erotic in British, American and world cinema. His historical approach elaborates on “the standard narrative”, but he presents a contradictory picture of sex in contemporary popular film. He refers to “explicit imagery now a particular part of mainstream cinema” (175) before positing a “new puritanism” in which “only certain erotic films can enjoy massive success” (181). He notes the popularity of comic-book adaptations, writing that “a juvenile audience must not be excluded if producers hope to accrue immense revenues” (182), justifying the relative absence of sexual content from such films. Focusing on the Swedish *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, rather than the Hollywood remake, reflects an emphasis on arthouse films, which push boundaries and perform “a very useful social function: to shock” (188). This, he says, discussing *Baise-moi*, “has always been the job of cinema” (177).

Whereas Keesey (2012) and Forshaw (2015) are vague in articulating the social function of “shocking” audiences with transgressive content, McNair (2013) posits a model that might explain this. He calls this the “cycle of liberalisation”. According to McNair (2013), subcultural transgression provokes critical commentary and analysis, which leads to mainstream commentary and analysis, as well as cultural celebration, pastiche, and parody, which in turns produces resolution, tolerance and/or acceptance, leading to the incorporation of transgression, which fosters further subcultural transgression (McNair 2013:8). Aspects of this model are questionable. Incorporating transgression into mainstream culture, according to McNair, involves celebration, pastiche and parody, but this might neutralize any transgressive element. This opens up the question of how mainstream or popular films actually deal with potentially transgressive content such as alternative sexual identities and practices or gender role reversal and subversion. McNair’s model also fails to consider homogenising tendencies in a capitalist global film industry, where only several distribution companies dominate the industry.

McNair (2002, 2013) cites the “mainstreaming of gayness” as an indication of how subcultural transgression gains tolerance and acceptance through the “cycle of liberalisation”. McNair (2002) threads this narrative around films such as *Cruising* (Friedkin 1980) and the music of the Village People through glam rock and *Velvet Goldmine* (Haynes 1998) and the string of 1990s films (*The Birdcage*, *In & Out* and *My Best Friend’s Wedding*) that “celebrated gay sub-culture with genuine affection” (McNair 2002:139) and which were commercially successful. Kagan (2018) characterizes these films as “gay redemption” and problematizes the trope of the “New Gay Man”, where films such as those cited by McNair represent a “a white, bourgeois, domesticated image of gayness” (Kagan 2018:21). McNair’s model therefore raises questions specifically about how popular films represent sexual practices and identities that are not heterosexual. Are these couched within McNair’s optimistic celebration, pastiche and parody, or limited to “gay redemption”? Are other processes involved? What are these processes?

Three aspects of the standard narrative emerge as significant for this study. The first concerns an understanding of “mainstream” or “popular film”. The standard narrative, as it applies to film,



refers to a perceived increased occurrence and graphicness of sexual themes and imagery in popular film. This perception arises from engagement with selected texts without attending sufficiently to commercial realities and aesthetic practices in film distribution and exhibition. Both Attwood (2002) and Smith (2010) call for studies on sex to attend to the particularities of different media. McNair differs in what he takes “pornographication” to mean but he mimics Paul (2005), Dines (2010) and Lynch (2012) in choosing examples that support his arguments rather than engaging in a more systematic or comprehensive analysis. What do we mean by “popular film” or “mainstream movies”? Several film theorists (e.g. Bordwell 1979; Nichols 2010) specify useful ways of distinguishing between mainstream movies from arthouse fare. These criteria comprise commercial, aesthetic and interpretive elements.

Nichols (2010:139) identifies linear plots, causality in sequencing scenes, relatively unnoticeable style, coherent and plausible diegesis, characters’ preoccupation with achieving goals, and closure as characteristics of mainstream cinema. Episode plots, which favour exploring states of mind or feelings over causality, with incoherent or fragmented links between characters, situations and events and a preoccupation with doubt, anxiety or uncertainty, and which end arbitrarily characterise art cinema. His distinction explains why arthouse films attract much discussion in terms of aesthetics. “Art cinema is a cinema of interiority (mental states) and style more than of exteriority (physical action) and plot” (Nichols 2010:138). Graphic portrayals of sexual intercourse, fellatio, cunnilingus, and other sexual acts, constitutes some of the stylistic choices that are more noticeable in art cinema. Nichols (2010:73) also distinguishes between modes of engagement: emotional investment, intellectual engagement, and ideological involvement. These forms of “participating in cinematic worlds” occur in both mainstream movies and art cinema, though the latter may be more deliberately intellectual.

Bordwell (1979) distinguished between three modes of film practice – mainstream (or Hollywood), art cinema, and avant-garde/experimental film – suggesting that each possessed “a definite historical existence, a set of formal conventions, and implicit viewing procedures” (56). Bordwell provides a useful framework that entails attending to the historical existence, formal attributes and viewing expectations associated with each mode of film practice. This reflects Attwood and Smith’s calls for contextualising academic engagement with sexual representation and attending to the specificities of cultural products and practices. The project of understanding sexual representation in both historical and contemporary cinema within this framework becomes the project of analysing sexual representation in different modes of film practice. Bordwell’s distinction proves especially useful in understanding and contextualising the discussion of sexually graphic portrayals in recent cinema, especially those that contend that the sexually graphic has entered the mainstream (e.g. Williams 2001). Writers making such assertions are not so careful as to attend to the commercial realities of film.

Developing Bordwell’s distinctions between modes of film practice creates a framework for

appreciating contemporary cinema. “Definite historical existence” relates to systems of production, distribution, and presentation. Gomery (2005:200-1) substitutes “presentation” for exhibition in relation to contemporary film due to the channels in which films are screened: in theatres, on DVD, television (pay-per-view, cable and broadcasting), and Internet streaming. “Mainstream cinema”, or “Hollywood”, refers to films distributed by the Big Six (Disney, Fox, Sony, Paramount, Universal, Warner Bros) (Gomery 2005:198). “Art cinema” refers to films distributed by “independent” distribution companies, and avant-garde/experimental film refers to films screened at film festivals, museums, and art galleries. Nichols’ distinction between mainstream and art cinema, set out above, reflect Bordwell’s distinction based on formal conventions. Differences in emphasis between Nichols’ categories of “participating in cinematic worlds” reflect Bordwell’s differences in “viewing procedures”. The standard narrative implies an increased freedom for cinema audiences to enjoy and engage with a proliferation of sexually graphic and diverse content.

The idea of freedom constitutes the second aspect of the standard narrative. McNair (2002, 2013), Pennington (2007) and Forshaw (2015) correlate the perceived increase in frequency and graphicness of sexual content in film with the reduction in institutional constraints, whether they be legislative or legal, regulation through industrial practice, or aesthetic. The absence of such constraints allows filmmakers to make more graphic sexual content. This focus on institutional regulation conceives as sexual representation as something that can be freed or liberated. Indeed, they might even conceive as sex as something from which we can free ourselves, a position with which diverse authors take issue. De Botton, for example, writes: “This narrative of enlightenment and progress, however flattering it may be to our powers of reason and our pagan sensibilities, conveniently skirts an unbudging fact: sex is not something that we can ever expect to feel easily liberated from” (5). Critiques of sexualisation from a Foucauldian perspective also take this view.

A fuller engagement with this Foucauldian perspective occurs later in this chapter. For now, it is necessary to address the third aspect of the standard narrative, the transgressive potential of sexual representation.

### **The Rhetoric of Transgression**

Whereas social science studies on sexual representation appear preoccupied with the exclusion of sexually graphic scenes from the most popular films, for fear of the potential harm these might have for vulnerable audiences, film studies scholars focus on the most sexually graphic scenes that occur. The concern with sexual explicitness in such scholarship is outside the “effects paradigm”. Whereas social science and public health researchers focus on films that are the most popular, especially those most likely to be viewed by children and adolescents, the discourse on cinematic sexual representation in film studies operates within a paradigm that emphasises the transgressive potential of a reconfiguration of pornographic aesthetics primarily in art cinema. Differences between these disciplines are important to consider. McKee (2014), in an article for

*Porn Studies*, identities several factors in this regard. Differences between the disciplines account for how discourses have become mutually exclusive. Social scientific and public health discourse makes no reference to sexually graphic art cinema.

Gill (2012) criticises research within the “effects paradigm” for its reliance on content analysis, despite its well-known limitations. While Gill contrasts this research tradition with a qualitative approach that conceives of media audiences as critical media consumers—literate, discerning and seeking pleasure—there is no corresponding critique of the discourse on porno chic that Frey (2016) characterises as the “transgressive rhetoric of today’s art film culture”. The discourse on sexualisation and the rhetoric of transgression appear to be mutually exclusive with the emphasis on the most popular in the former and the most graphic in the latter. Only McNair (2013) includes references to art cinema as constituting an important aspect of “cultural sexualisation” or “pornographication”, as he phrases it. McNair’s approach comes within the transgressive rhetoric. Transgressive texts, and the commentary and analysis that they attract, are central to McNair’s “cycle of liberalisation”, but his approach represents the response to such films that Frey (2016) characterises as the “aesthetic embrace”.

Frey (2016:34) suggests that contemporary scholarly and journalistic studies, commentary and debate on “extreme cinema” split between two camps that differ in their perspectives on issues of aesthetics and cultural value. The first, the “cynicism criticism”, regards sexually or violently graphic films as having failed or absent artistic intentions. Criticism in this vein views films such as *Irreversible* (Noé 2002) as “exploitative exercises in self-promotion and the result of art cinema’s dumbing down” (Frey 2016:39). Christopher Tookey, an English film critic for the *Daily Mail* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, exemplifies this criticism. Tookey speculated, with regard to *Irreversible*, that “sadists will be longing for the video release” so that they can repeat its scenes of rape and violence “again and again for the pleasure, titillation and inspiration that they will doubtless bring to those that way inclined” (Tookey 2015:235). The “cynicism criticism” views sexually graphic films as lacking artistic quality and exploiting shocking, crass or debased material for commercial motives.

The “cynicism criticism” manifests in various anti-pornography critiques: “What turns these people on is making money.” (Dines 2010:xvi) Dines emphasises the profit orientation of producers of sexually graphic materials over claims that pornographers may produce work to further sexual empowerment and creativity. Critiques within the alternative camp, according to Frey, the “aesthetic embrace”, allow for “the pornographic” to signify or function “as a metaphor or allegory for something bad, evil or negative” (McNair 2013:50). McNair, and other critics that might fall within the “aesthetic embrace”, attempt to articulate the social function of shock. McNair’s “cycle of liberalisation” emphasises the importance of subcultural transgressive texts, the analysis and commentary that they provoke, and the seeping of such texts into more mainstream outlets. Frey (2016), for example, refers to seventeen separate articles appearing in

*The Guardian*, a British newspaper, which discussed various responses to *Nymph()maniac* (von Trier 2013). The “aesthetic embrace” centres on the question of whether sexually graphic films constitute art.

The “aesthetic embrace” often employs complex academic theories, attends principally to textual and formal characteristics, and explains how selected texts differ from lowbrow genres such as horror and pornography (Frey 2016:34). Extreme films “defy the processes of representational homogenisation” and “are really preoccupied with deeply humanist issues even as they at times seem disturbingly misanthropic” (Grønstad 2016:163-164). Frey (2016:37) summarises this “mode of criticism” as implying and accepting auteur theory, decoding films for their significance in domestic cinema rather than how such cultures translate in international reception, positing a fictional “spectator” in place of the critic’s claims about the film’s effects, and paying little attention to commercial or industrial determinants. Several commentaries (Krzywinska 2006; Williams 2008; Coleman 2016) represent the “aesthetic embrace” and its limitations as Frey outlines them, but it is also necessary to consider these commentaries within the useful summary of differences between research methods in the humanities and social sciences that McKee (2014) outlines in *Porn Studies*.

McKee (2014) identifies textual analysis as a primary research method in the humanities. He distinguishes between four forms of textual analysis. The first, ideological, looks for hidden ideologies such as patriarchy or racism, which McKee says results in a concentration on negative interpretations. The second kind, which he labels post-structuralist, entails researchers making informed guesses about the meanings that audiences make by reference to the text, its genre, its industrial context, its likely audience, and its wider cultural context. The third kind, appreciation, constitutes the primary method that occurs in film studies scholarship on sexual representation, reflecting McKee’s comment that this “is most common in the disciplines of literary studies, film studies, and visual arts” (2014:56). It involves the researcher celebrating the text, understood as a work of art, “talking about its beauty or other aesthetic achievements” (ibid). McKee views the fourth kind, exegesis, in which the researcher explains ideas put forward in a text, as a subset of appreciation.

McKee (2014) identifies the orientation towards difference and similarity as an important point of divergence between humanities approaches to textual analysis and the social scientific approach to statistical analysis and quantitative studies. Sample sizes in content analyses allow researchers to acquire a good indication of common trends or patterns in large populations, but, in doing so, “they favour commonality rather than uniqueness” (McKee 2014:60). The textual analyses that prevail in film studies, on the other hand, frequently study films that, in McKee’s words, “are idiosyncratic rather than representative” (ibid). McKee suggests that in such films “it is their very lack of representativeness that is prized” (ibid). This divergence between the disciplines in orientation towards difference and similarity accounts for the emphasis on art

cinema that prevails in scholarship on sexual representation in film studies. The preference for novelty or uniqueness in aesthetic significance within film studies limits the production of knowledge of cinematic sexual representation from outside the “effects paradigm”.

McKee (2014:55) also outlines that “the humanities have not traditionally been rigorous in reflecting on or accounting for their own research methods”. The major studies on sexual content films identified in the social scientific and public health literature clearly define and justify the selection of films for analysis. Such sampling processes are not apparent in film studies scholarship. Journalistic commentary, which is significant in McNair’s “cycle of liberalisation”, also reflects this emphasis on novel or unusual film content. Frey (2016:33) quotes correspondence from Xan Brooks, film critic at *The Guardian*, who favours films screened at Cannes and elsewhere where there was “more chance of seeing films that are out of the ordinary, from different parts of the world... summer season, with its homogenised blockbusters, always feels a little more like work”. Such comments are not explicit in film studies scholarship, but the existing discourse reflects a preoccupation with art cinema over Hollywood fare, which limits scholarship outside the effects paradigm.

*Sex and Storytelling in Modern Cinema* (Coleman 2016) typifies the “aesthetic embrace” and the emphasis on uniqueness over representativeness or commonality. The book’s purpose is to address the issue that Frey (2016) characterizes as central to the “aesthetic embrace”: “This book will explain how, rather than being pornographic, explicit sex can be an essential element of storytelling in narrative cinema” (Coleman 2016:4). Frey (2016:38) suggests that the aesthetic embrace “extols authorship at the expense of materialist analysis”, which includes the commercial and industrial aspects of film production and consumption. Coleman describes as “mainstream” *Maitresse* (Schroeder 1976), which the BBFC refused to certify in 1976 and which screened in private clubs only in 1980, and *Basise-moi* (Despentes & Trinh Thi 2000), which achieved just over 50,000 ticket sales in France, when the top 75 films each achieved over half a million ticket sales. If “mainstream” refers to popular, or to other criteria (Bordwell 1979; Nichols 2010), these films are not mainstream.

The standard narrative implies a tendency towards increased graphicness within the cultural mainstream as restrictions on distributing sexually graphic material ease. McNair’s “cycle of liberalisation” implies the incorporation of transgressive material, and Coleman’s characterisation of minor art films as “mainstream” suggests this is ongoing. Two further studies (Krzywinska 2006; Williams 2008) on cinematic sexual representation reflect the emphasis on non-simulated sex in contemporary film. Krzywinska (2006), in *Sex and the Cinema*, organises her inquiry into the subject around “themes of transgression”, reflecting the conception of sexual representation as centring on the breaking of sociocultural or moral boundaries, dealing with adultery, bestiality, incest and sadomasochism before the final chapter on “real sex”, which reflects the primary issue within the aesthetic embrace, as identified by Frey (2016), in that “the spectacle of real sex in

recent art cinema is subject to a number of textual and contextual qualifications that legitimise its presence and mark such films off from low-brow hard-core” (Krzywinska 2006:217).

Social science research indicates that cinematic representations of sexual acts typically involve characters who are not married to one another. Krzywinska (2006) offers a Lacanian perspective on adultery in *Zandalee* (Pillsbury 1990), *The Bridges of Madison County* (Eastwood 1995) and other films. She identifies narrative patterns in plots centred on a female character’s affair: equilibrium in the woman’s marriage, disruption with her meeting the “object of desire”, her feelings of “elation, furtiveness and riskiness” during the affair, the crisis or choice her conflicted feelings provoke, and the negative resolution. Such plots “enable the viewer to identify with the dilemmas and emotions experienced by the central protagonist” (Krzywinska 2006:138). The continuing “cultural saliency” of adulterous plots, in her Lacanian view, derives from our experiencing “a gap between what we wish for and what we have” (ibid). Krzywinska’s focus on transgression themes means that she offers no analysis of the prevailing kinds of sexual encounters in popular film, which involve unmarried characters.

McKee (2014) outlines the relative absence of methodology in the humanities, but the textual appreciations offered by Krzywinska (2006), Williams (2008), Coleman (2016) and others reflect the “influence of Althusserian Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and post-Saussurean linguistics” (Knight 1993:321) that characterise “film theory”, but not the criticism (e.g. Knight 1993; Bordwell 1996; Carroll 1996) that this attracts. Knight criticised “film theory” for its construction around “a rhetorically powerful series of analogies and metaphors” (323), arguing that there has been in film studies “the mutation of theory into method” (324). She distinguishes between appropriated theories and appropriating theories. The former include those that film theorists employ: psychoanalysis, linguistics, etc. The latter is contemporary Althusserian-Marxist-psychoanalytic film theory. The mutation constitutes a “bricolage”, “of making use of whatever comes to hand” (Knight 1993:326). This bricolage downplays the specific roles that voyeurism, fetishism, scopophilia play in Freudian theory, or that the mirror phase, or the infant’s imaginary identification with his mirror image in Lacanian theory.

Williams (2008), in her “impressionistic chronicle” (325) of “screening sex”, focuses on idiosyncratic texts and a range of theoretical frameworks. *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee 2005) is the only recent film in Williams’ analysis that could be understood as “mainstream” or “popular”. The film features the first depiction of consensual anal intercourse between male characters in American mainstream film. Williams treats its sex scenes “as crucial primal scenes—traumatic first witnessings of obscure forms of pleasure that might not initially be understood as pleasure, indeed, that have been understood as pain” (2008:222). The chapter commences with an interpretation of two Pedro Almodóvar films, which draws on Foucault’s confessional, before moving onto her Freudian interpretation of sadomasochism in *Blue Velvet* and anal sex in *Brokeback Mountain*, concentrating on seduction and castration. Williams selects *Brokeback*

*Mountain* as a decidedly unrepresentative film and interprets it according to a theoretical model that appears relevant. She offers no further analysis of representations of homosexuality in mainstream film.

Williams' book moves onto a chapter entitled "philosophy in the bedroom: hard-core art film since the 1990s", in yet another analysis of the sexually graphic (primarily European) art films that feature depictions of non-simulated sexual acts, focusing particularly on *9 Songs* (Winterbottom 2004), *The Idiots* (von Trier 1998), the films of Catherine Breillat, and *Shortbus* (Mitchell 2006). Williams (2008) cautions specifically against a narrative that favours increasing graphicness, yet this is the trajectory of her book. Williams (2006, 2008) describes the "long adolescence of American movies", in which a sequence she describes as the "ellipsis" prevailed, where characters engaged in a passionate kissing where an edit indicates the passing of time with the implication that sexual intercourse takes place in this gap. She reads a sequence in *Casablanca* (Curtiz 1942) that might be open, but not necessarily so, to this interpretation. The "ellipsis", with its implied link to sexual intercourse, constitutes the primary portrayal of kissing that takes Williams' interest.

Works by Krzywinska (2006), Williams (2008) and Coleman (2016) represent what might be called a "case study" approach to analysing sex in film, favouring idiosyncrasy and transgression in art cinema over discerning trends in popular fare. Carroll (1996:42) notes that the journal literature reflects this case study, one article/one film trend, and this proves true also for the journal literature in film studies on sexual representation, which also favours art cinema over Hollywood. A survey of one journal suffices. A broad search for the terms "sex" or "sexual" in *Film Quarterly*, where Williams (2014) contributed recent update on "cinema's sex acts", returns 155 articles for the period 1995-2010. This excludes articles dealing exclusively with television, videogames or other media but includes articles such as Tyree's article on representing the 1960s in *A Serious Man* (Coen Brothers 2009) and television's *Mad Men* (AMC 2009). It excludes editorial introductions that describe articles elsewhere in the publication, but includes film reviews and interviews.

Of the 155 articles identified, 117 (75%) deal with art films, that is, those exhibited in arthouse cinemas or distributed through independent film companies, i.e. not Hollywood's Big Six or the mini-majors. Seven articles (6%) deal with avant-garde/experimental film, and two (2%) deal with pornography. Only 27 (24%) deal with Hollywood films. Of these, 14 deal with films released before 1990. Of the 13 articles dealing with contemporary or more recent Hollywood films, six deal solely with *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee 2005). The others include a round table on *Showgirls* (Verhoeven 1995) and articles on *Eyes Wide Shut* (Kubrick 1999) and *The New World* (Malick 2005), i.e. films made by directors known for their independence from Hollywood. The remainder include a reference to Iron Man's sexism (Tyree 2008), and pieces on transnationality and identity in *Vanilla Sky* (Herbert 2006) and racial camp in *The Producers* (Gubar 2006). This

survey clearly indicates a preference for sex in art cinema over Hollywood film.

Knight (1993), Bordwell (1989, 1996) and Carroll (1988, 1996) criticise “film theory” as a methodological approach and in terms of its theoretical concepts. This project is not about proving or disproving the accuracy or otherwise of interpretations such as those of Krzywinska (2006), Williams (2008), Coleman (2016) or others, nor is the purpose of this review to dismiss this scholarship entirely. It identifies the limited way in which such authors engage with popular film, especially in selecting films for analysis. Krzywinska (2006), Williams (2008) and Coleman (2016), in seeking out idiosyncratic films to conduct appreciative textual analysis, using psychoanalytic and other theoretical concepts, avoid dealing specifically with mainstream film. The journal literature, with the focus on analyses of single films, most frequently on art films, reflects the approach taken by Krzywinska, Williams and Coleman. Knight (1993:322, citing Carroll 1988) warned that the continuing prevalence of the “film theory” paradigm “prevents the successful formulation of questions that beg to be studied”.

Two paradigms appear to prevail in research on sexual representation in popular film. The first, arising within the discourses on cultural sexualisation and pornification, employs quantitative methods to assess the extent to which sexually graphic content occurs in films popular with adolescents, and to test the effectiveness of age-based classification and ratings systems in screening out objectionable content. This study seeks to build on this approach in order to establish the extent to which sexual content at all levels of graphicness occurs, and establish in films of which genre and MPAA classification this sexual content occurs. The exclusion of less graphic material from analysis leaves unexplained much about the representation of sexual practices and identities. The methods employed in social science and public health research are systematic, explicit and comprehensive. This study departs from the framing of sexual representation as an issue of an issue of potential harmful negative effects, identifying patterns in sexual representation in a more open-minded manner.

The second paradigm, the transgressive, employs appreciative textual analysis (per McKee 2014) and reference to concepts in psychoanalytic theory in studies primarily on (European) art films. This paradigm essentially constitutes an inquiry into the signification of non-simulated sexually graphic scenes or the transgressive potential of a reconfiguration of pornographic aesthetics. For McNair, this kind of commentary and analysis constitutes an important element in his “cycle of liberalisation”, especially as it becomes incorporated within the mainstream, for example, through extensive coverage in newspapers such as *The Guardian* in the UK. Studies within this paradigm constitutes an example of scholarship that answers Attwood’s call to explore how “the pornographic” signifies through Western culture. This study takes a different perspective in its focus on the most popular films and exploring how sex signifies at less graphic levels. Discourses on sexualisation and transgression are mutually exclusive due to differences in research goals, methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks. This study addresses the gap between



them.

### **Heteronormativity**

Addressing this gap involves several shifts in focus. The first such shift relates to McKee's distinction between different kinds of textual analysis. Existing scholarship in film studies (e.g. Krzywinska 2006; Williams 2008; Coleman 2016) generally comes within the category of appreciative textual analysis (McKee 2014) or the "aesthetic embrace" (Frey 2016). This study shifts towards the first kind of textual analysis identified by McKee where scholars engage in uncovering hidden ideologies within a text. McKee (2014:55) identifies "a lack of interest in the surface level of what texts appear to be saying, and.... in what interpretations audiences say they make of texts" as characteristics of this kind of textual analysis. This study, however, is interested in both the surface and the deeper levels, taking both a quantitative and qualitative approach to generate an accurate description of the kinds of sexual content that occur in popular films, identifying what patterns exist, and in generating an explanation of these patterns and trends.

This project also entails a shift with regard to its approach to audiences and their interpretation of recent popular films. Textual analysis in film studies frequently invokes a theoretical "spectator". Frey (2016) criticises theoretical considerations of spectatorship in place of empirical research, arguing that researchers post a fictional spectator as standing in "for the critic's claims about the film's effects and modes of address" (37). Knight (1993), Bordwell (1989, 1996) and Carroll (1988, 1996) outline broader criticisms of "subject position theory", where, as Bordwell comments, "the subject is neither the individual person nor an immediate sense of one's identity or self" and that "subjectivity is constructed through representational systems" (Bordwell 1996:6). This perspective entails the development of conceptions of subjectivity in linguistics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Althusserian thinking about ideology. This project does not attempt to interpret sexual themes and imagery in recent popular film with "film theory *tout court*" (Bordwell 1996:6) or to approach the representations identified as constructing subjectivity.

The focus for this study also shifts from theoretical frameworks that prevail in the discourse on sexualisation within social scientific and public health scholarship. Ward (2003) and Wright (2009) identify three prominent theoretical models for understanding the mechanism in which exposure to media "affects" its audiences: cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross 1976), social learning theory (Bandura 1986), and script theory (Gagnon & Simon 1973). Cultivation theorists examine the long-term effects of exposure to media content, suggesting that the more time viewers spend with television, for example, the more likely their outlook on social reality will align with the "reality" portrayed on television. The methods that prevail in cultivation theory include content analysis, to identify the "reality" portrayed in the media, and surveys, to identify viewers' outlooks on subjects such as crime or sex to see how these compare. Social learning theory and script theory refer to viewers' learning through the observation and imitation of mediated models of behaviour, or "scripts".

Social scientific and public health researchers draw on these psychosocial theoretical models to substantiate claims about how “exposure” to sexual content in mainstream media “affects” viewers. Gill’s criticises this “effects paradigm” for conceiving media audiences as passive dupes and outlines scholarship in which researchers explore how media consumers engage with sexually graphic material, citing Smith’s work as being important for countering the conception of pornography as a “mono-logic tool of ideological discourse” (Smith 2007:224). Bufkin and Eschholz (2000) posit three perspectives on audiences: the dominant ideology position, interpretive reception research, and a mixed approach. They identify an assumption that cuts across these models: “... they all assume a manifest hegemonic message in media presentations” (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000:1321). This study aims to explore whether we can consider films a “mono-logic tool of ideological discourse” by investigating whether there are hegemonic messages about sex in popular films and, if so, what these may be. This raises issues of ideology and hegemony.

Before clarifying how this study relates ideology and hegemony, it is necessary to comment on its conception of the audience. Briefly, it contributes nothing in terms of understanding the audience, its attitudes or how audiences engage with the sexual material identified. This empirical study answers specific questions, set out presently, about the nature of sexual content that occurs in recent popular film. It shifts from the problematic “generality” of sexualisation (Gill 2012:492), instead seeking to provide a more accurate description and explanation of sexual themes and imagery in mainstream movies by identifying the range and nature of practices and identities portrayed. It does not construct the viewer through theoretical speculation about subject positions nor does it operate on “the assumption that conclusions about the nature of media content (e.g. its sexualised quality) can be taken as evidence of the effects of that content upon audiences” (Gill 2012:488). It identifies the prevailing trends and patterns that audiences of popular films negotiate.

Moviegoing audiences pay to engage in this negotiation. Film developed as an entertainment industry rather than an educational instrument or art form (Adorno & Horkheimer 1947; Kellner 1998:354). The profit motive for the Hollywood studios became crucial determinants of the ideological function of popular films, which needed to resonate with audiences’ dreams, fears, and social concerns to attract large audiences, and, as such, they reflected the social mores, conflicts, values and beliefs of the American public (Kellner 1998:355). Kellner (1998:355) acknowledges that films are not “a simple representation or mirroring of an extra-cinematic social reality,” writing that “films refract social discourses and content into specifically cinematic forms which engage audiences in an active process of constructing meaning”. This study seeks to identify the specifically cinematic forms of sexual representation that occur in popular films. Mainstream movies may reflect a system of ideas, beliefs and values about sex, which could be considered a dominant ideology, a possibility that necessitates some clarification.

Bufkin and Eschholz (2000) refer to the dominant ideology position as one of the three major approaches to the study of media and its impact on the lives of consumers. They say that this views the media, including popular films, as inundating audiences “with a one-dimensional view of how the world works, and consumers passively incorporate this view into what they ‘know’ about the world” (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000:1318). Gill (2012) critiques this passive consumer. Abercrombie (1990) disputes “the dominant ideology thesis” from a sociological perspective, revising his original critique (1980) to take into consideration “the increasing significance of leisure”, “the significance of pleasure in consumption” and the “relative neglect of the private sphere”. Abercrombie (1990) provides several useful insights in approaching ideological textual analysis, the first category of textual analysis that McKee (2014) identifies. Abercrombie’s insights include the identification of relevant features in considering popular culture as an ideological force, and important distinctions between ideological “moments” and within textual ideology.

Abercrombie (1990) identifies four relevant features when it comes to understanding whether popular culture has ideological force: one, whether the “popular culture encapsulates a particular (hegemonic) view of the world, even if this has to accommodate other views”; two, whether this particular view is widely available or perhaps the most widely available; three, whether popular culture conceals, misrepresents and secures an order of domination; and, four, whether this concealment is in the interest of a particular (ruling) group, social formation or form of society (Abercrombie 1990:202-203). Abercrombie (1990) draws on Hall (1980) in distinguishing between three moments (production, text and appropriation) when carrying out a sociological analysis, which might commence with a reading (ideological textual analysis per McKee 2014) that “establishes the dominant themes, codes, or discourses in the text”. Abercrombie notes the need to know why a text carries a particular discourse and how audiences might engage with it but he allows for the possibility of studying each independently.

Abercrombie (1990) also distinguishes between textual ideology (“the ideology encoded in the text”), ideology setting, the production processes through which certain ideologies are encoded, and ideological effects, the process whereby the textual ideology “affects an audience in such a way that an order of domination is secured” (Abercrombie 1990:203). He goes on to identify coherency and dominance as two important aspects of textual ideology. With regard to coherency, Abercrombie suggests that “for textual ideology to be a credible idea, there has to be some degree of coherence in the text and across texts” (Abercrombie 1990:204). Abercrombie believes that a text is not ideological if it contains contradictory coding. “Similarly,” he writes, “a set of texts cannot constitute an ideological formation if the texts are incoherent with each other” (ibid). Analyses of single texts or a small group of texts are unrealistic because pop culture entails the experience of “a welter of very different texts” (210). Abercrombie’s insights here are key.

Abercrombie’s insights inform the methodological decision taken in this study. Whereas textual

analysts in film studies (e.g. Krzywinska 2006; Williams 2008; Coleman 2016) seek out idiosyncratic texts that are not representative of popular film, other commentators construct arguments about prevailing cultural trends based on a small group of films. Commentaries on the “pornification” of popular film (e.g. Paul 2005; Dines 2010) lack the systematic and comprehensive analysis necessary to establish the required coherency across texts. Dines (2010:81) claims that we must attend to the “cumulative effect of the subtextual themes found in the system of images, which together create a particular way of looking at the world”. This study carries out the work of identifying the themes that occur in cinematic sexual representation based on a systematic analysis of a wide range of texts. The limitations of scholarship outlined so far in terms of representativeness and reading strategies necessitates an open-minded approach, including an openness to a lack of coherency.

Dominance constitutes the second important aspect of textual ideology, according to Abercrombie (1990), who distinguishes between textual dominance and social dominance. Textual dominance occurs where “one can say of a text that there is a dominant or preferred meaning which is sufficiently powerful to organize other, subordinate meanings” (Abercrombie 1990:204). Social dominance occurs where “one can say that a text expresses an ideology which is otherwise dominant in society” (Abercrombie 1990:204-205). He cautions that these may not always be “closely connected”. Dominant themes can organize a text, but these themes may bear little relationship to a socially dominant ideology (ibid). These distinctions allow for the examination of sexual themes and imagery popular film to assess whether there exists dominant or preferred meanings that are powerful enough to organise and subordinate other meanings. Should these exist, it does not follow that this dominance extends to the social world, and this study does not provide empirical evidence to support such a proposition.

One further important point arises in relation to Abercrombie’s criticism of the “dominant ideology thesis” and how this projects relates to Marxist approaches to ideology and hegemony. Abercrombie (1990) recognised that his original analysis (1980) was limited by its focus on its “production” orientation, “concentrating on those values, beliefs and practices to do with work or the class structure” (Abercrombie 1990:199). Emphasising this focus on “production”, Hill (1990:4) restates the claim (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner 1980) that “the foundation of the social stability of the advanced capitalist societies has been non-normative and mainly economic in character”. Economic constraints compel people to work, and the commitment of subordinates to the capitalist system derives from “pragmatic acquiescence rather than normative or ideological involvement” (Hill 1990:3). The analysis in this study of sexual representation in cinema is concerned with norms around sexual behaviour. This thus shifts the analysis from a Marxist conception of ideology to a concern with the normative construction of sex.

This shift to a concern with normativity in recent cinematic sexual representation then brings this project within a Foucauldian theoretical framework, aligning it with a feminist perspective on

sexualisation (Gill 2012). Gill (2009) describes her work as “queering” sexualisation. The operation of the “democratisation of desire” (McNair 2002) in visual culture excludes many (Gill 2009). McNair (2002, 2013) does not take into account that the commercial logic of his “cycle of liberalisation” may lead to the opening up of cultural productions to only certain kinds of sexual practices and identities. Gill (2009:137-138) stresses that “sexualisation does not operate outside processes of gendering, racialisation and classing, and works within a visual economy that remains profoundly ageist and heteronormative”. Existing scholarship (e.g. Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Dempsey & Reichert 2000) substantiates the ageist and heteronormative nature of sexual representation in film, but the limitations related to content analysis and quantitative studies, as Gill outlines, calls for a more qualitative engagement and analysis.

Gill’s perspective represents a specifically feminist and Foucauldian approach to thinking about contemporary mediated sexual representation. Gill develops the Foucauldian notion of “technologies of the self” to examine how “contemporary sexualised, consumerist, and neoliberal societies call forth a new feminine subject who is ‘incited to be compulsorily sexy and always ‘up for it’.” (Gill 2014:591) The ongoing projects for this feminine project include “beauty, desirability and sexual performance(s)” (ibid) and entail an exhortation to lead a “spice up” sex life, the limits of which, including heterosexuality and monogamy, are policed even when effaced or disavowed through playful or experimental discourse (Harvey & Gill 2011). Gill’s contributes an important development of Foucault’s thought and approaches to sexual norms and heteronormativity from a feminist perspective, but it is important for this project, and the analysis of sexual representation in popular film, to consider the development, intersections and divergences of “heteronormativity” as a concept through the years from both feminist and queer perspectives.

Gill’s approach reflects an awareness of the need to address gender and sexuality when analysing heteronormativity, reflecting the development of the concept within feminist and queer theory. Marchia and Sommer (2019) traced this development from its origins before Warner and Seidman (1991) coined the term. Theorists framed sexuality, specifically heterosexuality, as embedded within power and oppression, focusing on sexuality alone (Foucault 1976; Seidman 1991; Warner 1991) or by combining gender and sexuality (as “compulsory heterosexuality” in Rich 1980; a sex/gender system in Rubin 1984; and “presumptive heterosexuality” in Butler 1990). Marchia and Sommer (2019) credit Foucault’s deconstruction of ideas about the oppression of homosexuality as the earliest forerunner of the term. Foucault writes of “a policing of sex: that is, not the rigor of a taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses” (Foucault 1976:24-25). Gill focuses on policing and regulating a feminine subject, but what processes are at play for other sexual identities and practices?

Herz and Johansson (2015) provide a good theoretical framework for exploring the “normativity” within heteronormativity and its link to “ideology”. For Herz and Johansson, “heteronormativity

theoretically focuses on and problematizes the dominant position of heterosexuality in society” and refers to “a body of lifestyle norms” (1010-1011). What are these norms, and how are they constructed through the representation of sexual practice and identity in recent popular film? Whereas Gill’s work, especially on advertising (2003, 2009), specifically interrogates the construction of “sexual agency” and feminine subjectivity, the open approach in this study led to an analysis and exposure of “the everyday and mundane ways in which heterosexuality is privileged and taken for granted, that is, normalized and naturalized” (Herz & Johansson 2015:1011, citing Myers & Raymond 2010). This study is concerned with identifying recurring patterns of representation in relation in recent popular film and how these might relate to the privileging of heterosexuality. This analysis entails both quantitative and quantitative research methods.

Herz and Johansson (2015) provide a good theoretical framework for developing research questions related to heteronormativity and ideology, drawing on a useful distinction between three aspects of ideology (Ricoeur 1986): “Ideology works on three different levels. First it serves to legitimate the existing order. Second, it works to distort information to present the existing order as an ideal order. Finally, it has an integrative function” (Herz & Johansson 2015:1017). The first two aspects are more pertinent in considering the prevalence of a system of values and beliefs and how recent popular film may legitimate a certain set of attitudes or values around sexual identity and conduct, having regard, as per Abercrombie (1990), to coherence and dominance. It is also concerned with what kind of distortions may be occurring. For example, existing scholarship indicates the prevalence of encounters between young characters who have recently met. This study is less concerned with integration, with how viewers actually engage with cinematic sexual representation.

This literature review establishes that differences between theoretical frameworks and methodological considerations in social science and public health research, on the one hand, and the humanities, on the other, open a gap with regard to the study of sexual representation in popular film. The continuing emphasis on art cinema and studies that concentrate on a single film or auteur in film studies compounds the surprising dearth of scholarship on film noted in reviews of empirical research within the sexualisation or “effects paradigm” (Ward 2003, 2016; Wright 2009). Proponents of the “pornification thesis” and the “standard narrative” posit explanations of an apparent increasing occurrence in frequency and graphicness of sexual themes and imagery in popular culture, including film, even though existing scholarship may not support this (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000; Pardun 2002). This study aims to provide a more accurate description and explanation of sexual themes and imagery that occur in recent popular film based on a comprehensive and systematic analysis.

Generating this description and explanation of sexual content in recent popular film thus entails quantitative and qualitative research methods. What constitutes “popular film”? How to identify

what constitutes “popular film” is set out in the first section of the next chapter. This involves a survey of financial data freely available online relating to revenues from box office takings and home entertainment sales. Having identified a relevant sample, it is necessary to ask what sexual content occurs in popular films. At what levels of graphicness does this sexual content occur? How many films feature at least one scene? How many films feature none? What is the mean/average number of sex scenes per film? At what levels of graphicness does sexual content occur in films of different MPAA classifications and genres? What kinds of sexual acts are depicted? What kinds of sexual acts do characters speak about? The results provides a means for positioning the analysis in relation to existing empirical studies.

This literature review identified several explanations for the occurrence of such themes in popular film. Proponents of the pornification thesis suggest that “porn chic” prevails, which, from conservative (Paul 2005; Ingraham 2007; Hatch 2012) and feminist anti-pornography perspectives (Dines 2010; Long 2012; Lynch 2012), either threatens traditional family values or maintains the patriarchy through the misogyny and sexual objectification, degradation and humiliation of female characters. Advocates of the standard narrative (McNair 2002, 2013; Pennington 2007; Forshaw 2015) praise the apparently increasing acceptance, tolerance and celebration of sexually diverse identities and practices in mainstream movies. Film studies scholars inquire into themes of transgression in sexually graphic films that they claim have entered the mainstream. Foucauldian feminist scholars (Gill 2007, 2009, 2012) caution against the liberation of sexuality, instead examining the policing and regulation of feminine sexual agency. This study remains sensitive to each of these perspectives in answering its primary qualitative research question: how does sex signify in recent popular film?

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology, which comprises three stages, each of which draws on established practices in both social scientific and film studies scholarship. The first stage entails selecting films for analysis. The second stage involves identifying in the films elected all scenes featuring sexual content. This stage provides quantitative findings suitable for comparison with the seven major studies on sexualisation and film (Ward 2003; Wright 2009). It also generates data suitable for analysis using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006), a method developed as a qualitative research method that entails constant comparative analysis and no preconceived hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Grounded theory involves coding data (creating categories and properties), integrating categories, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory.

### Selecting Films for Analysis

The means for selecting films for analysis, where it is made explicit in existing scholarship, occurs by consulting published data on two markets, the domestic market, that is, revenues for films released theatrically in the USA and Canada (e.g. Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010), or video rentals in the USA (e.g. Dempsey & Reichert 2000). This project's method for selecting films for analysis develops these models by using more detailed data available freely online to contextualise the extent to which the films selected for analysis account for admissions of all films released theatrically and home entertainment sales. It also considers the relative popularity of the films selected in major western theatrical markets, an aspect not explicitly considered in existing scholarship.

The method for selecting films adapts the model established in the first comprehensive investigation into sexual material in films (Sampson 1970). The survey of film distribution and the contextualising of general release, arthouse, and exploitation films in the late 1960s is absent from studies thereafter. Social science and public health researchers, though transparent in setting out how they selected films for analysis, do not establish the extent to which the films studied reflect films generally in the period considered. Some study as few as five films per year (Abramson & Mechanic 1983), others up to fifty (Dempsey & Reichert 2000). The method here enhances approaches in current scholarship by comprehensively surveying film distribution in domestic, foreign, and home entertainment markets.

Terms relating to tracking available financial data for films require definition and clarification. "Popular" has two meanings: "liked or admired by many people or by a particular person or group" and "intended for or suited to the taste, understanding, or means of the general public rather than specialists or intellectuals" (Soanes & Stevenson 2005:1370). The second meaning is more relevant. This study concerns films that are intended for the public rather than films championed by film academics, critics, cinephiles and aesthetes. Filmmakers may intend a film



for the public, but it may fail to find an audience. This project is concerned with films that garnered significant audiences, as reflected in the number of admissions they achieved at the box office.

Industry terminology requires definition. “Gross” means revenue earned and recorded in US dollars from box office earnings. It does not include revenues from home entertainment sales and rentals, online streaming or downloading, television rights, product placement fees, merchandise, or other sources. “Domestic” means a release in the USA and Canada. “Foreign” or “international” means release in territories outside the USA and Canada. “Worldwide” combines “domestic” and “foreign” or “international”. “Admissions” means the number of tickets sold and differs from the value of the tickets sold. Using admissions overcomes the problem of inflation, avoiding the assumption that “box office takings were a proxy for viewing numbers” (Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell 2005). Newer films may achieve higher grosses but sell fewer tickets.

“Calendar year” means a year from January 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>. A film’s theatrical release may run across more than one calendar year. This holds especially true for films released in December. Films may be released in years other than the original release date, sometimes in a new format (3D, IMAX). Available charts list only the films released that year, excluding re-releases or films still on release, or they list the calendar gross for each film on release during the year. The latter provide a more accurate record of theatrical admissions during a specific period. Previous studies covering longer periods (Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell 2005; Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010) are unclear on whether they used total or calendar-year grosses.

This project commenced in 2013, originating in a master’s thesis that began in 2011. Funding for the project from the Irish Research Council continued until 2017. Practical considerations, including the length of time for which funding was available and how long it would take to identify and source films for analysis, view all films selected and identify scenes for coding, determined the period within which to select films. A start date of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011, and an end date of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015, permitted the beginning of analysis of films then already available and ensured that all selected films would be available for analysis within the project’s timeframe. Films from this period do not feature in the major studies identified.

### ***Domestic Markets***

The analysis of the domestic market draws on data available from three sources. The first are annual reports on theatrical statistics published by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), a trade association founded in 1922 that now comprises the Big Six film distribution companies. These reports provide annual data on the numbers of films released domestically, the number of films rated by the Classification and Rating Administration (CARA), and the total number of admissions for all films on domestic release. These reports source data from comScore,

a media measurement and analytics company, which acquired Rentrak in 2016. Rentrak previously consolidated its position as the sole provider of box office data by acquiring the Nielsen Company's EDI division (Fritz 2009).

The second source is BoxOfficeMojo, one of two websites that make available freely online more detailed financial data for individual films. Amazon, the retail giant, owns the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), which itself owns and operates BoxOfficeMojo, which has tracked financial information on films since 1999. The website features a range of charts, including charts that rank films by domestic revenue and grosses for each calendar year since 1980. BoxOfficeMojo also provides individual webpages for each film featured on its charts. Each webpage details the film's domestic distributor, genre, MPAA rating, runtime, domestic, foreign and worldwide gross. A button on the pages for the annual charts and the individual film pages allows adjustment of domestic gross to estimated ticket sales.

The third source is The-Numbers. Nash Information Services has operated this website since 1997, and it now tracks financial data for more than 20,000 films. It features two kinds of annual charts. The first kind details the total gross for films release for the first time during each year. These charts exclude films released in previous years, and the total gross includes earnings from later years. The second kind of annual chart is more useful. The annual movie chart ranks all films on release during the calendar year by gross for that year only. This chart displays ticket sales for each film on release during the year. It provides for each film the release date, distributor, genre and MPAA classification.

I created an Excel spreadsheet to record the available data. Excel provided a useful means for sorting and collating textual and numerical data. I allowed one row per film. The first column recorded film titles. The next column recorded the admissions for each title for the calendar year 2011 per BoxOfficeMojo, the next for 2012, and so on until 2015. I created a column to total the admissions for each film for the specified period. I repeated the process for figures available from The-Numbers, using the same spreadsheet. The collation of data across the years is necessary because a film's theatrical run may span more than one calendar year. Comparing the data available from two sources enhances accuracy and reliability.

I also created columns to record details on each film available from BoxOfficeMojo and The-Numbers. These details included, where available, each film's distribution company, runtime, MPAA classification, source, production method, and creative type. The latter three are available on The-Numbers. Source refers to the material on which the film was based, e.g. fictional novel or short story, real life events, factual book or article, etc. Production method refers to whether the film is live action, animation or mixed. Creative type refers to the kind of story the film tells, whether contemporary fiction, factual, science fiction, etc. Recording these details enables comparison of the films selected for analysis (the sample) with all films for which data is available

(the general population).

Duplication poses problems in recording data this way. Using Excel's conditional formatting functionality and additional sourcing of data overcomes these problems. As noted, films may appear on more than one annual chart. Using Excel's conditional formatting highlights any titles which appear more than once. Films may be released under different titles. Film names may differ as between BoxOfficeMojo, which may use English titles, and The-Numbers, which may use a film's title in its original language. Recording the name of the film director as per BoxOfficeMojo and The-Numbers, and where not noted, per the Internet Movie Database, and then checking for duplication, provides another means for overcoming this problem. Collating the data ensures that each film appears in only one row.

The first step in analysing box office data is assessing the accuracy and reliability of the data available. Comparing data available from BoxOfficeMojo and The-Numbers with one another and with an external source, that is, figures published by the MPAA in its annual theatrical statistic reports, establishes the accuracy and reliability of the data available on the websites. It is possible to compare various figures relating to the specified period, including the number of films released, the number of films for which data is available, the total number of admissions achieved by all films on domestic release, and the total number of admissions accounted for by films for which data is available. This process establishes the reliability of sources used.

The next step in analysing the financial data is to provide a summary of admissions. This involves reporting the findings as above. It also involves calculating the average number of admissions for a film on theatrical release in specified period, how many films achieved more than average, and the share of all admissions for which films that achieve more than average account. The sample must consist of a number of films that is manageable to view in their entirety, identify scenes in which sexual content occurs, and to code data generated. It is then necessary to calculate the share of all admissions for which the films selected for analysis account. Comparing the charts for both websites enhances accuracy and reliability.

Analysing financial data by distributor type provides an insightful picture of contemporary film. It enables comparison of the relative size of audiences for films on general release with those for arthouse fare. Film distributors may be major, a major subsidiary, a mini-major or independent. The major studios comprise the Big Six film distribution companies that emerged from the studio system that dominated Hollywood (Gomery 2005). These are Disney, Fox, Paramount, Sony, Universal and Warner Brothers. The conglomerates that own the Big Six also own or operate divisions or subsidiaries that specialise in genre or arthouse fare. The mini-majors, which include Lionsgate, CBS Films, among others, are independent distribution companies that compete with the majors. Independents are all other distribution companies.

I recorded the distributors listed for each film on my spreadsheet as one of four types: major,

major division/subsidiary, mini-major or independent. This allowed me to sort films by distributor type and to calculate the share of all admissions per BoxOfficeMojo accounted for by each distributor type. I compared the share of numbers of films on release accounted for by each type of distribution company with the share of admissions achieved by all films. I compared similar statistics as per The-Numbers. This analysis investigated the existence of “the long tail” (Anderson 2006) and the centrality of Hollywood’s output in theatrical admissions for films on domestic release. This analysis comprises survey of film distribution, facilitating distinction between “Hollywood” and independent film.

BoxOfficeMojo and The-Numbers provide details about films listed on the charts. Analysing these details facilitates comparison of the make-up of the sample, that is, films selected for analysis, with that of the general population, that is, all films released. Both websites provide the MPAA classification and genre of each film. MPAA classification consists of non-restrictive ratings of films suitable for younger viewers (G, PG, PG-13) and restrictive ratings (R, NC-17), to which people aged younger than 17 may not be admitted. Films may be non-rated too. Genre refers to the kind of film according to visual style, character types or narrative elements. Comparing genre designations as between the two websites assists in making more manageable the number of genre categories.

The-Numbers provides three further details for each film listed: production method, source material and creative type. Production method denotes whether the film is live action, animated, or a mixture. Source material refers to the kinds of previously published material on which a screenplay is based, such as fictional novels, factual books or articles, comic books, and television programmes. Creative type refers to the kinds of stories told, whether contemporary, historical, children’s or science fiction, fantasy or real live events. Analysing these details assists in presenting a more accurate understanding of contemporary “popular film” that establishes the extent to which superhero comic book adaptations account for popular film. It facilitates comparison of the makeup of the sample with the general population.

I calculated the share of total admissions accounted for all films of each type within each category (MPAA classification, genre, production method, source material and creative type). I calculated the share of admissions accounted for each type within each category for the 250 films selected for analysis (“the sample”). I compared the shares of admissions achieved by each type within each category in the general population with the shares of each category type in for films in the sample. I compared admissions for each category based on data available from BoxOfficeMojo and The-Numbers. The findings from this analysis go to addressing issues arising from the quantitative studies on film within the “effects paradigm” and the discourses on sexualisation and pornification.

***International Markets***

Comparing box office performance between domestic and foreign or international markets poses problems. Release dates for films differ between markets, so different films are in circulation at different times. Revenues may be denoted in local currencies, so currency conversion compounds problems related to inflation. The availability of data is also a problem. This project analyses foreign markets to contextualise the sample in relation to films on release in major markets in the western world, and this is less problematic. The approach requires two stages: identifying western markets with which to compare the domestic market, and collecting box office data for those markets. Again, both the MPAA annual theatrical statistic reports and the website BoxOfficeMojo provide easily accessible and relevant data.

This project focuses on the western world, which here means economically developed countries in which the classical culture of Greece and Rome, western Christianity and Enlightenment ideas inform tradition, culture and thinking (Kurth 2003). This contrasts with countries where Hindu, Buddhist or other traditions prevail. Discourses on sexualisation and the rhetoric of transgression focus on western culture (e.g. Attwood 2009). In terms of studies on film, existing scholarship focuses exclusively on domestic release; however, Hollywood ranks as a prominent, if not dominant, player in foreign markets. Contextualising the extent to which the 250 films selected for analysis feature in western markets facilitates discussion of how this study contributes to understanding and theorising sex in films popular in the western world.

The MPAA reports annually on theatrical statistics from markets around the world. The reports list the value of the largest markets measured by revenue in US dollars, the top ten in 2011 and 2012, and the top twenty for 2013, 2014 and 2015. They do not report on the number of admissions in foreign markets. The top performing international markets include territories outside the western world (China, Japan, India and South Korea). The data collected on revenues earned in the largest international markets are reported in chapter four. I identify the largest Western markets by analysing these data. I selected the six largest markets to contextualise the sample and further justify the selection of the 250 films chosen for analysis.

BoxOfficeMojo provides annual charts for major foreign markets, ranking films released that year in that territory by gross revenue in US dollars. BoxOfficeMojo does not provide figures for admissions in foreign markets. It provides charts for the territories as selected above: Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the UK and Ireland. I added columns to the spreadsheet for each territory and recorded the gross for all films listed. Films titles may differ as between markets, so I checked for duplicates, using Excel's conditional formatting tools, to check titles and film directors, referring to IMDb to identify each film's director. Films appear once only in each territory as they are listed on the chart for the year of first theatrical release.

Recording the data as set out above makes it possible to calculate total revenues for each selected

foreign market for all films listed on the charts available on BoxOfficeMojo for each year in the specified period. It is also possible to calculate the revenues achieved in each foreign market by whichever of the 250 films selected for analysis were released in each market. This process assists in providing data that indicates the share of revenues for which the films selected for analysis account in each territory. It is another step in justifying the selection of these 250 films, establishing their relative popularity in western culture. This process analyses the performance of the films selected for analysis, not Hollywood's output generally.

### ***Home Entertainment Market***

This section reports on data collection for the US home entertainment market. Its purpose is to contextualise the 250 films selected for analysis within this market. Video rental revenues in 1998 exceeded theatrical revenues, and this justified using video rentals as an indicator of popularity in one study (Dempsey & Reichert 2000). Theatrical revenues in 2016 hit \$11.37 billion, while revenue from sales and rentals of films and television programmes totalled \$12 billion for the same year (Faughnder 2017). Though revenues from sales and rentals of DVDs and Blu-Rays declined from 2011, these formats remained a significant channel for consumption. Streaming and downloads overtook such sales in the UK by 2016 (Sweeney 2017) but not in the USA (Faughnder 2017).

Data relating to sales and rentals for specific titles on DVD and Blu-Ray formats is more difficult to obtain than that for box office figures. The-Numbers provides some data on DVD and Blu-Ray sales. It provides charts that rank titles by the number of units sold on both formats in the USA for each calendar year. These charts prioritise units sold over revenue generated because prices for units differ greatly. Titles listed include films originally released in cinemas, TV series box sets, and other titles released directly to DVD or Blu-Ray. Box sets are more expensive, so they may generate higher revenues by selling fewer units. The charts on The-Numbers are limited to the one hundred best-selling titles per year.

The-Numbers estimates DVD and Blu-Ray sales based on their weekly surveys of retailers in the USA. These estimates form the basis for building market share estimates for each title. Industry reports on the overall size of the market, including those published by *Home Media Magazine*, form the basis for converting market share into a weekly sales estimate. The website provides an example of how this works. If the weekly survey estimates that a title sold 1% of all units that week, and industry sales reports sales of 1.5 million units in total for that week, then The-Numbers estimates 15,000 units sold for that title. Estimates are refined as more data becomes available. The data are more accurate for best-selling titles.

I added columns to the Excel spreadsheet to record the units sold for each title in each year, and another column to total the number of units sold. I also added a column to record the value of the units sold for each title in each year, and another column to total the number of units sold. The-

Numbers provides a figure for the value of revenues generated on some of its pages for individual films, but these data are incomplete and unreliable. Prices of titles available on DVD and Blu-Ray change frequently over time, thus creating difficulties in estimating the number of units sold. This may explain the absence of estimates of units sold on the pages for individual films.

The purpose of this process is to assess how performance of the 250 films selected for analysis (“the sample”) compares to all titles for which data is available. It is not possible, based on the data available, to establish the share of all home entertainment units sold for which the sample accounts. However, it is possible to compare the unit sales of the top 100 titles for each year and the extent to which films selected for analysis account for a share of the best-selling titles. It is also possible to make general observations regarding the decline in units sold by best-selling DVD and Blu-Ray titles and how titles originally released theatrically compare against both television programmes and straight-to-video titles.

### **Identifying Content**

This section reports on the generation of data for analysis from the 250 selected films. It reports on the process for identifying sexual content. It sets out two levels of analysis, the scene and the film. Scenes consist of action, dialogue and film form (*mise-en-scène*, cinematography, montage and sound). Analysis at the film level involves considering narrative and character development. This section describes how the methodology here, which is qualitative, combines basic film analysis (Bordwell & Thompson 2015; Roberts & Wallis 2001) with the quantitative methodologies in social science research (e.g. Greenberg et al 1993; Leone 2002). The process described generates scene descriptions and transcription of dialogue, which will be analysed using grounded theory, as reported in the next section.

The process at this stage involved watching each of the 250 films in their entirety and recording details of sexual themes and imagery. It involved converting the stream of images and sounds that constitute films into intelligible and analysable data, i.e. words. There were two levels of analysis: the scene and the film. The scene level involved assessing whether each scene in the film contains sexual themes or imagery in its action, dialogue and film form. The film level involved assessing whether narrative and character development imply sexual content in scenes. The data generated consisted of transcriptions of dialogue and detailed scene descriptions, which record sexual behaviour and how form (*mise-en-scène*, cinematography, montage and sound) emphasised a figure’s sexual attributes.

I obtained a digital copy of each of the 250 films from a range of sources, including DVD, streaming and other sites online. Unlike in other studies (e.g. Abramson & Mechanic 1983), there were no difficulties in obtaining a copy of any film. Where more than one cut was available, I preferred the original cut of films screened theatrically in the USA. Digital copies afforded ease of access in terms of playing, pausing and rewinding as one paused to record the relevant

information as set out below, and the digital copies included timestamps, which facilitated noting the time at which each relevant scene commenced. I watched each film in the same room on the same screen during this identification process.

I created an Excel spreadsheet to record the data, allowing one row for each scene in which any sexual content, imagery or style occurs. Table 3.1, below, displays an extract from this spreadsheet to assist the reader's understanding. The first column lists the film title. The second column records the time at which the scene commenced per the digital timestamp. The third column shows the detailed scene description, which records any characters (named or not) who engage in any explicit or implicit sexual action, and description of how film form emphasises a figure's sexual attributes. I transcribed relevant dialogue that occurs within each scene. I set out below the parameters for deciding on what constitutes "sexual content" or "sexual dialogue".

This section justifies the methodology set out above. It distinguishes its qualitative approach from the quantitative methods that prevail in existing social scientific and public health research. It sets out how it draws on these studies in generating scene descriptions and transcription of dialogue, the required data for analysis. It differentiates between the use of pre-existing categories for coding used in a deductive approach to quantitative content analysis, on the one hand, and the inductive creation of coding categories in grounded theory, on the other. This chapter also reports on the explicit, transparent and systematic use of close textual analysis that prevails in film studies, with a focus on film form, narrative and character development, which enhances the qualitative approach.

Studies on sex in film within social science and public health research tend to be quantitative. Methods involve developing a means of breaking the film into units (scenes, five-minute segments) in which sexual content can be measured and counted. Researchers also devise scales to distinguish between levels of graphicness (Leone 2002; Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010) or intensity of passion (Dempsey & Reichert 2000), but again such studies are quantitative in nature. This project is concerned with investigating the nature of sexual content, imagery and themes, the conditions in which they emerge, the nature of relationships between characters, and how these relate to narrative and character development. Identifying scenes in which sexual content occurs constitutes the first step in analysis

Content analysis constitutes the most frequent methodology employed in existing studies (Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Greenberg et al 1993; Bufkin & Eschholz 2000; Dempsey & Reichert 2000; Pardun 2002; Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell 2005; Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010). Qualitative content analysis differs from grounded theory in terms of intent and design (Cho & Lee 2014). Qualitative content analysis involves testing a hypothesis, and a deductive approach to developing codes or categories is appropriate. Framing sexual content in film as a problem of child protection generates hypotheses regarding the extent to which graphic



content occurs and the effectiveness of regulatory systems in screening out such content. This project, by contrast, seeks to generate a substantive theory based on detailed observation.

Film	Time	Scene Description	Dialogue
Act of Valor	00:13:50	Rorke kisses his wife on the lips before deployment. They hug. The soldiers also hug their children. This occurs in a montage while Rorke addresses his platoon on a beach at night time before they set out.	NA
Act of Valor	00:15:15	Dave reassures his wife, puts his hands on her face, and kisses his wife on the veranda of their home before he leaves. He speaks to his unborn child in her womb. She has said that she is proud of him.	DAVE'S WIFE: It's gonna be okay. It's gonna be fine. ... I'd like to be able to look into your eyes when our first child is born. DAVE: You know I'll do my best. I love you, baby. DAVE'S WIFE: Love you. DAVE (V/O): War is a country of will. There's no room for sympathy. If you're not willing to give up everything, you've already lost.
Act of Valor	00:46:35	Christo and Abu Shabal meet. Christo raises a glass to Shabal.	CHRISTO: From time to time, I get to see my old friends from my old life. And it's always – always disappointing. Some become assholes, others boring, and I can't believe I tried to get them in bed all those years ago.
Act of Valor	00:58:20	The camera follows a woman wearing a white bikini bringing a drink to Christo on his yacht. It focuses on her rear end. Dave phones home, telling his wife, who prepares home for new baby, that he loves her. CUT TO The yacht and the woman in white bikini shot from the front, coming downstairs in yacht. CUT TO A view of her back as she deposits the drink on table for Christo, who raises the glass and takes a sip.	

Table 3.1

The purpose of the identification process used in this project and described in this chapter is to generate detailed descriptions of sexual content occurring in films. Scene descriptions and transcriptions of dialogue constitute the data on which the coding and other processes of analysis associated with grounded theory are then undertaken. For qualitative content analysis, the scenes would be the raw data and would be coded according to categories deduced from existing literature or that arise from hypotheses to be tested. This project investigates and explains the nature of sexual portrayals and references to sex in popular film rather than testing theories about the occurrence of sexual content. It is therefore necessary to identify “sex scenes”, and content analysis assists.

Critiques of content analysis focus on its quantitative nature, the fragmentation of textual wholes, its positive notion of objectivity, and a lack of a theory of meaning (Kracauer 1952; Burgelin 1972; Sumner 1979; Hansen 1998). The problem of fragmentation arises in one study (Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010), which broke films studied into five-minute sequences as units of analysis. This approach disregards character and narrative development or any contextual meaning relating to sexual themes, instead creating an artificial “explicitness” score. Researchers overcome the problem of fragmentation by employing two units of analysis, scene and film, so that they can consider plot, context and other cues within the film when making coding decisions. This study also uses two levels of analysis.

Two levels of analysis prevail in existing studies: the scene and the film. A scene consists of action occurring in the same time and space. A significant change in time or space indicates a new scene. Sequences may involve the rapid succession of scenes united in theme or content, e.g. opening credits, or an action montage in which crowds of people in various locations react to an erupting volcano or earthquake. These would count as one scene. A scene consists of three elements: action, the event(s) that occur(s); dialogue, any words spoken; and form, how the scene is constructed through *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, montage and sound. The next section details how sexual content may occur in each of the three elements.

Scenes inform the structuring of screenplays and shooting scripts. Writers use them as basic elements in creating dramatic events. The production crew use scenes to decide on locations, set up scenes to be filmed, and to decide which shots are required. The scene as unit is thus more intelligible than arbitrary five-minute units used in at least one study (Nalkur, Jamieson and Romer 2010). This unit fragments the textual whole. Researchers (e.g. Kunkel et al 1999; Dempsey & Reichert 2000) overcome this fragmentation by having regard to the entire film (or television programme) when coding for sexual content. This means considering plot and narrative development, character behaviour throughout the film, and use of repetition, subtext and innuendo when analysing scenes.

This section details the elements at each level of analysis for consideration in generating the

detailed scene descriptions and transcribing dialogue while viewing each film. The project intends to be as comprehensive as possible, taking a wide-ranging or “liberal” approach (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000). It shifts from the focus on penetrative sex. The first part deals with the scene level of analysis. Scenes consist of action (characters or figures doing something); dialogue, words spoken on- or off-screen; and film form, how the scene is filmed. A character is a dramatic persona in the story. A “figure” is a representation of a person that might appear in posters, advertisements, magazines, and the like. The second part details narrative and character development.

Social scientific and public health researchers studying sex in film seek to establish the validity of hypotheses relating to the extent to which graphic depictions of sexual acts occur or the effectiveness of regulatory regimes in screening out such sexual content. The most frequent methodology in such studies is quantitative content analysis in which researchers devise their categorical scheme based on advice from or research by sex researchers (Abramson & Mechanic 1983) or behavioural psychologists (Smith 2012); categories developed in previous studies (Dempsey & Reichert 2000); or developing a Likert-type scale (Leone 2002; Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010). This approach represents the deductive determination of categories (Strauss 1987; Berg 2004), which differs from the inductive approach used in this project.

The deductive approach to devising a categorical scheme involves considering what kind of acts, behaviour or conduct constitutes a “sex act” and then coding units of analysis, whether that be the film, the scene, a five-minute sequence or an act, according to this categorisation. Greenberg et al (1993), for example, used eight categories: prostitution, rape, homosexual, intercourse (married), intercourse (unmarried), petting (excluding kissing), long kissing, and other. Dempsey and Reichert (2000) also used these categories. This approach differs to this project’s inductive grounded-theory methodology, which is based on providing full descriptions of scenes in which something, however slightly, sexual occurs. Creating categories occurs in the coding and analysis of these scene descriptions, alongside the analysis of dialogue and film form.

Leone (2002) devised a Likert-type five-point scale that distinguished between five levels of sexual graphicness. “Most graphic” depictions consisted of simulated intercourse or any sexual penetration or masturbation where characters appeared completely naked or wearing clothing such as garter belts or crotchless panties, or visible genitalia with sexual activity. “Very graphic” content included foreplay while naked, simulated intercourse while clothed, and visible genitalia independent of any sexual activity. “Graphic” included foreplay while clothed, exposure of female breasts with sexual activity, but no penetration or masturbation. “Somewhat graphic” included kissing, seductive dancing while clothed, or exposure of female breasts independent sexual activity. Nalkur, Jamieson and Romer (2010) used Leone’s scale. It omits nonverbal indicators of desire, subtle, if nongraphic, sexual behaviour.

The range of facial expressions, movements, gestures and other non-verbal indicators of desire is wide. Smith (2012) compiled a list of the nonverbal behaviours that indicate sexual desire, based on research in behavioural psychology (Moore 1995; Grammer et al 2000; Renninger, Wade & Grammer 2004). These include various head movements (tilting, tossing, nodding), eye movements (flashing eyebrows, eye contact, glancing), mouth movements (smiling, biting or licking lips, puckering), flipping hair, touching, laughing, and whispering. The focus on sexually graphic depictions in most studies excludes this important category of sexual behaviour. Roberts and Wallis (2001) regard figure expression and movement as one of four major components of the *mise-en-scène*, and this study analyses nonverbal indicators of desire arises under this heading.

The method involves recording a full description of any and all sexual action that occurs in each scene. No description or record is kept of scenes in which no sexual action occurs. The description requires an indication of the sexual act concerned, who takes part, where it takes place, why it takes place, details of what happens, and why. The full range of sexual behaviour must be noted, from the most graphic display of intercourse with nudity, through foreplay and seductive dancing, to nongraphic nonverbal indicators of desire. These scene descriptions provide the data required for undertaking the coding (open, axial, selective), creating categories, and constant comparative analysis that constitute the grounded theory method set out later in this chapter.

Spoken references consist of conversations between two or more characters, monologues, voice-over narrative, scripted material in background elements such as other films and television or radio programmes. In short, it refers to words spoken in each scene. Dialogue performs several functions, including exposition (providing information relating to the plot), character development (revealing characters' thoughts and attitudes), and generic functions (jokes in comedies, establishing period setting, or jargon in science fiction). Dialogue constitutes an important element making scenes intelligible, yet it does not feature in existing scholarship in which content analyses focus on visual elements. The exclusion arises from the framing of sexual content as an issue of child protection and an emphasis on graphic content. Including dialogue enhances our understanding.

Analysing spoken references as a component of sexual content features more prominently in existing scholarship on television programmes. The methodology used in reports of the Kaiser Family Foundation on sex on television (Kunkel et al 2005) identifies six categories of "type of talk about sex". These are, one, comments about own/others' sexual actions or interests; two, talk about sexual intercourse that has already occurred; three, talk towards sex; four, talk about sex-related crimes; five, expert advice; and six, other. Later studies (MacKeogh 2004) also used these categories, which relate to the functions of dialogue in relation to exposition and character development. Attending to generic functions reveals other categories, for example, jokes and innuendo in comedies, and slang in specific settings.

A distinction between explicit and implicit sexual content also arises in relation to dialogue. Explicit references are not problematic. Direct references to sexual subjects, such as sexual acts (intercourse, foreplay, kissing and such), sexual topics (such as sexuality, reproduction, contraception, abortion, family planning), and sexually transmitted infections (including but not limited to HIV/AIDS) are clear. Less clarity attaches to subtext, a dramatic device used to show what characters really think or believe, and innuendo, that is, allusive or oblique remarks about sex. Attending to character and narrative development facilitates the apprehension and comprehension of implicit references to sex. Considering a character's behaviour throughout a film and appreciating repetition make subtext, innuendo and irony intelligible. These considerations address Gill's concerns (2012).

How researchers record and analyse dialogue varies. Some studies (e.g. Anderson & Daniels 2016) use screenplays published in books or those available online. The disadvantage is that these may differ to the words spoken in films by including scenes omitted from theatrical presentation, or excluding scenes shot from a different draft of the script. The method used here is to record dialogue in which explicit or implicit reference is made to sexual subjects, having regard to the character's attitudes and behaviour throughout the entire film. However, reference to screenplays available online assist in ensuring accuracy in recording the dialogue. The transcription of dialogue lends itself to the coding and thematic analysis that feature as part of the grounded theory approach.

Film form comprises three major elements: what is to be filmed (*mise-en-scène*); how it is filmed (cinematography); and how the material is joined together (montage or editing) (Roberts & Wallis 2001). This section defines each major element and outlines how each component may consist of sexual content. Current scholarship emphasises certain elements (especially costume design, framing it as attire) over others, paying less attention, for example, to cinematography, montage, and sound. The breakdown of film form into *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, montage and sound occurs in well-established introductions to film analysis (Nichols 2010; Lewis 2014; Bordwell & Thompson 2015). This section identifies how I use the techniques and elements of analysis that form the foundations of film studies to identify sexual content.

*Mise-en-scène* comprises setting; costume and makeup; lighting; and figure expression and movement. Brothels, strip clubs, and pornographic film sets are clearly "sexual". Advertisements, posters and other elements of the setting may also emphasise the sexual attributes of a figure. Setting includes props, some of which serve sexual purposes (condoms, sex toys), and others may be used for such (mobile phones, books on sexual topics). Costume design and makeup refers to characters' clothing. "Attire" features as an indicator of sexualisation. Degree of nudity, exposure of genitalia and female breasts, and the context in which these occur are important. Lighting may highlight part of a character's body. Figure expression and movement refers to actors' performance and includes flirtatious behaviour or sexual poses.

Cinematography comprises placement, mobility, film stock, and choice of lens. Framing, the use of closeups, long shots, and zooms, directs the viewer towards certain elements within the scene, or generates meaning through different camera angles, levels, heights, and distances from the action. Sequences in black-and-white or colour may convey meaning. Cinematography may open or close the interpretation of a sequence. The use of framing and close-ups may emphasise the sexual attributes of a character, especially in the framing of female figures, focusing on buttocks or cleavage. Panning away from couples about to engage in sexual intercourse serves as an element of the visual shortcut known as the ellipsis (Williams 2008), which serves as a nongraphic indicator that intercourse takes place.

Montage refers to the relationship of shots within sequences, and sequences within the entire film. Considering montage involves four areas: graphic, rhythmic, spatial and temporal relations between two shots (Bordwell & Thompson 2015:221). Considering the relationship of shots within scenes facilitates understanding of emphasis. An insert of action unrelated to the narrative, such as clips of the inter-racial kiss in television's *Star Trek* during a lovemaking sequence in *Anchorman 2*, draws attention to the inter-racial aspects of the coupling. It is difficult to be prescriptive in how such meanings and relationships arise, as these are specific to each film. It is necessary to consider how each area as identified by Bordwell and Thompson may relate to sexual themes and imagery.

The final element of film form is sound. The audibility of sexual pleasure, especially women's sexual pleasure, constitutes an important element of depictions of sexual acts in film, pornography (Williams 1989), and popular music (Stratton 2014). Audio cues may indicate unseen sexual conduct. Examples of this include heavy breathing or screams of orgasmic pleasure. Sound may also indicate less graphic conduct such as kissing. Non-diegetic sound, that is, sound occurring on the film soundtrack but not within the world of the film (e.g. original musical underscoring or a popular song), may affect the scene's mood. I record in the scene descriptions how both diegetic and non-diegetic sound contribute to sexual content, whether by indicating offscreen conduct or emphasising on-screen behaviour.

Narrative films consist of linear plots in which action sets up and leads to subsequent actions. The sequencing of scenes suggests causality: each action or decision taken by a character causes later actions or forces later decisions. The diegesis, the world in which the film's action takes place, is coherent and plausible (Nichols 2010:139). Such worlds may be realistic, as in depictions of historical or actual events, or fantastic, as in science fiction. Nichols (2010) characterises Hollywood films as maintaining this coherence, plausibility, and chain of causality. Actions that occur relate in a meaningful way as the movie unfolds. This means that I must consider depictions of sexual acts and spoken references to sexual activity in relation to plot development.

Characters' behaviour, the decisions they make and the actions they take, is goal-oriented

(Nichols 2010:139). Obstacles to achieving clearly defined goals creates the dramatic conflict that drives the plot and engages the audience. Films end with the resolution of the initial problem. Dramatic conflict may be exterior, arising from obstacles that occur outside of the characters, or interior, personal issues or problems that make life difficult. Conflict around sex may arise from a rival's interest in a romantic partner. Characters engage in spoken references to sexual activity and participating in sexual acts, and these are related to their development over the course of the film. I must consider such references and depictions of such acts in relation to character development.

Linking sexual content, that is, actions, dialogue and film form, to the unfolding narrative and character development makes possible the re-integration of scenes that become fragmented through the identification of sexual actions, dialogue and film form. Narrative and character development provide assistance in the apprehension and comprehension of subtext – underlying or indistinct or implied themes in scenes – and innuendo, where unusual references or odd behaviour become manifest and understandable through repetition or explanation later in the film or, in some cases, later instalments of a franchise. Finally, narrative and character development provide the context in which the conditions for sexual actions or statements arise. They provide the means for answering the all-important question of why sexual actions or references occur.

### **Generating Theory**

This study aims to generate a substantive theory of sexual representation in recent popular film. This section outlines the ground theory approach used to generate a substantive theory based on detail observation outlined above and the analysis of the data collected from the films studied. The first phase involved selecting films for study, the second phase generated data for analysis, and this third phase analyses the detailed scene descriptions and recorded dialogue. This section defines grounded theory, sets out its historical background, outline its strengths and weaknesses in relation to its use in this study, and then sets out precisely the use of a grounded theory approach to generate the theory elaborated in the analysis and discussion section that follows.

What do I mean by referring to generating a substantive theory? The purpose of the project is to provide the best explanation possible of sexual themes and imagery that occur in popular films. The logical process at play is abduction. Thornberg and Charmaz identify abduction as the logical process that guides the generation of grounded theory. They define abduction as “selecting or inventing a hypothesis that explains a particular empirical case or set of data better than any other candidate hypotheses, as a provisional hypothesis and a worthy candidate for further investigation” (Thornberg and Charmaz (2013). The grounded theory that I generate arises from empirical investigation, but it is not meant to be conclusive. Abduction gives it definitiveness and authority.

Bryant et al (2011) define grounded theory as a method that “comprises a systematic, inductive,

and comparative approach for the purpose of constructing theory”. Martin and Turner (1986) characterise grounded theory as “a systematic qualitative research methodology in the social sciences emphasizing generation of theory from data in the process of conducting research”. Researchers use this method to discover social and psychological processes. Its primary purpose is to generate theory, and it differs significantly in this regard from other methods (e.g. content analysis), which are better suited for testing hypotheses. “Grounded theory refers to a set of systematic inductive methods for conducting qualitative research aimed towards development.” (Charmaz 2004:440). So, grounded theory is a systematic, inductive, and comparative research method.

Various versions of grounded theory emerged as it developed. These include divergences between Glaser (1978) and Strauss (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1999), who “discovered” the method in the 1960s (Glaser & Strauss 1965, 1967), situational analysis (Clarke 2003, 2005) and multi-grounded theory (Goldkuhl & Cronholm 2010). I adopt the constructivist version (Bryant 2002; Charmaz 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz 2012). Despite this variety, there are significant points of convergence. These include analysis of processes, use of comparative methods, drawing on data to develop new conceptual categories, inductive development of categories through systematic data analysis, emphasis on theory construction rather than description or application of current theories, and the search for variation in categories or processes (Charmaz 2010:11; Thornberg & Charmaz 2013).

It is important to distinguish grounded theory from qualitative content analysis. Cho and Lee (2014) made the distinction by contrasting the purpose for which researchers use the methods. Qualitative content analysis involves testing the validity of hypotheses deduced from existing scholarship. Grounded theory involves generating theory, analysing data with no preconceived ideas or hypotheses (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The theory emerges inductively from the data (Chesebro & Borisoff 2007). The formulation of categories in qualitative content analysis may be deductive (e.g. Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Greenberg et al 1993) or inductive (e.g. Pardun 2002). The major distinction is that qualitative content analysis results in a description of categories or themes, while grounded theory generates substantive theory (Cho & Lee 2014).

Holton (2008) argues that understanding the distinction between conceptualisation and description is necessary to understand the nature of grounded theory. The accuracy of descriptive units, which, by contrast, is the thrust of qualitative data analysis or description, or, in relation to a project such as this, the process identified in the previous section for generating descriptions, is less important in grounded theory than the process of abstraction, the formulation of concepts through constant comparative analysis and the integration of categories and their properties that emerge from coding the data. Analysing the relationships between concepts, categories and their properties then leads to the generation of hypotheses and the formulation of a substantive theory grounded in the data generated through empirical observation.



Pardun (2002) employed a grounded theory approach as developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Pardun frames her study of sexual scripts as “identifying the romantic agenda” in fifteen films that the Simmons Market Research Bureau listed as popular with teenagers. She describes this approach as involving viewing the selected films with “no previous expectations other than a general understanding of ‘looking for romance’” (Pardun 2002:216). Pardun contrasts the method with one other study (Ward 1995), where the researcher creates the coding list and looks for the previously defined sexual or romantic themes in the films studied. Pardun’s approach, by contrast, involves “searching through the data, looking for ways for the data to reveal insights on the meaning of romantic interactions”.

The great strength of a grounded theory approach in this study is that the method suits areas of research that have received prior little academic attention, or where the existing scholarship lacks breadth or depth, or where a new point of view on familiar topics appears promising (Milliken 2010). The literature review established that the major studies on sexual content in popular films are limited by the framing of the studies as investigations into the effectiveness of the MPAA age-based classification system in screening out such content and in using small unrepresentative samples. The aim of this project is to generate a substantive theory based on empirical observation that is freed from the assumptions and frameworks that limit existing scholarship.

The weaknesses of a grounded theory approach are that large amounts of data can be difficult to manage. Researchers must be skilful. There are no standard rules for identifying categories. It is possible that the study could fail to acknowledge the embeddedness of the researcher, obscuring the researcher’s agency in data construction and interpretation (Bryant & Charmaz 2007). Objectivity and the role of the researcher is problematic for other methods, including content analysis (Gunter 2000). I address weaknesses by being transparent in the methods used, that is, by setting out exactly the steps taken. Completing the project demonstrates my skill as a researcher, and the completion of the project also demonstrates that I have managed the large amounts of data.

This study’s sampling process differs from strict grounded theory. It is important not to confuse the sampling procedures in other research methods with theoretical sampling in grounded theory. “Theoretical sampling” refers to “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what to collect next and where to find them” (Glaser & Strauss 1967:45). Theoretical sampling for this project then would involve analysing and coding the first film, then the next, and so on until reaching “theoretical saturation”, that is, a point when “fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of the generated [grounded theory] and its categories or concepts” (Thornberg & Charmaz 2013).

Sampling in other research methods refers to the method for selecting films for analysis. Referring

to financial data and box office revenues as an indicator of popularity of films constitutes the prevalent means of selecting films for analysis in social science and public health research on sexual content (e.g. Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Bufkin & Eschholz 2000; Dempsey & Reichert 2000). Such processes are geared towards establishing a sample of films that represent “popular film”. Theoretical sampling, by contrast, refers to an exercise in developing theory where the researcher continues to analyse and code the data until the process no longer reveals new categories or properties. The meaning of sampling requires clarity. One further clarification on theoretical sampling is necessary.

A strict grounded theory approach would require viewing ever more films, identifying further scenes in which sexual content occurs, recording dialogue and generating scene descriptions, and coding and analysing the data until “theoretical saturation” is reached, that is, until the process no longer reveals new categories or properties. The problem with this approach is that it makes it impossible to judge ahead of time how long the process will take. It is also difficult to predict, and later to be certain, when one reaches the point of theoretical saturation. I resolve these difficulties by acknowledging that the grounded theory produced is provisional and subject to revisions that future scholarship may make necessary. This resolution relies on abduction, as outlined above.

What is the coding process grounded theory? It entails a central element of grounded theory, which is the “constant comparative method” (Glaser & Strauss 1967). This involves comparing incidents occurring within the data with one another, categorising incidents according to similarities and differences between them. This process requires the identification of codes or categories, which are names given to classes of incidents that share similar properties. This process involves “naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz 2006:43). For this project, the method involves going through both the dialogue transcribed and the detailed descriptions of sexual behaviour occurring in scenes generated according to the method set out above.

Coding in grounded theory involves three levels: initial or open coding, focused or axial coding, and selective or theoretical coding. Charmaz (2006) prefers the terms “initial”, “focused” and “initial” coding for constructivist grounded theory, and I adopt those here. Coding in grounded theory is not a linear process, proceeding from one stage to another, because “in order to be sensitive to theoretical possibilities, researchers move back and forth between the different phases of coding” (Thornberg & Charmaz 2013). However, “initial coding”, as the term implies, occurs more at the beginning of the process than at the end. The other coding processes occur concurrently. Memo writing assists in recording working definitions and identifying properties of initial, focused, and theoretical coding categories.

Initial coding involves going through the data word by word, line by line, incident by incident,

scene by scene, film by film, identifying categories that best describe the data. Questions that guide this process include, “What is this data a study of?”, “What category does this incident indicate?” and “What is actually happening in this data?” (Glaser 1978:57). Charmaz (2006:51) elaborates on these questions by focusing on identifying which processes are at issue in each incident, how each process can be defined, how it develops, when, why, and how does the process change, and what are the consequences. Charmaz (2006) advises that researchers should keep initial codes short, simple, precise, and active. Coding with gerunds proved useful for this study.

Coding with gerunds means using noun forms of verbs, i.e. in the English language, words that end with “-ing”. This approach focuses coding on identifying processes and actions (Charmaz 2006). This approach facilitates the comparison of action and dialogue. It is easy to appreciate how this applies to depictions of sexual conduct, where initial coding involves naming the act that occurs (kissing, fellatio, intercourse, etc.). This process permits the rating of scenes identified according to the Leone (2002) scale according to the level of graphicness. This rating facilitates comparing scenes according to graphicness both for the purposes of this study and for comparing findings from this study with existing scholarship. But how does coding using gerunds assist in coding dialogue?

Categorising dialogue may occur by referring to the words used, grammatical constructions, repeated phrases, the use of slang, and so on. Dialogue consists of speech acts, or the performance of speech as part of a more complex process. I clarify this with an example. Sexual dialogue may involve a character referring to another character’s appearance: “You’re hot,” “looking good,” “he’s cute,” et cetera. A focus on words used would look at the contexts in which “hot”, “good” and “cute” occur. A focus on social processes and interactions, however, looks at whether the dialogue involves a character complimenting or admiring another. This shift to a focus on social interactions facilitates comparison between spoken references to sex and depictions of sex acts.

I recorded initial categories for each of the 2,645 scenes identified. I created a column in my Excel spreadsheet containing the rows of scene descriptions and dialogue transcriptions for each scene identified. I added columns to describe the process, as mentioned above, in gerund form. I identified 72 categories for dialogue and 62 categories for action. Some scenes involved more than one category. I provide a definition of each category in Appendices C and D. Properties for categories vary. I noted whether the sexual activity occurred between characters of the same or opposite gender, involved characters who might be bisexual or trans, or referred to sexual activity between adults and minors or between humans and animals.

Focused coding occurs as researchers identify the most significant or frequent initial codes that make the most analytical sense (Thornberg & Charmaz 2013). This process again involves constant comparison of categories, and their properties, identifying similarities and differences. Glaser (1978) suggests that the researcher identifies and selects a single core category that refers

to the most significant and frequent code, which relates to as many other codes as possible and more so than other candidates for the core category. In other words, Glaser suggests choosing one core category that guides both further data collection and coding. However, Glaser's approach limits the analytic rendering of data and the theoretical usefulness of the completed report (Charmaz 2003, 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz 2013).

I again adopt the approach advocated within constructivist grounded theory, adopting an openness to more than one significant or frequent initial code, for the reasons set out below: "The constructivist position of grounded theory is more flexible by being open for more than one significant or frequent initial code in order to conduct this further work. Such openness also means that the researcher continues to determine the adequacy of those codes during the focused coding." (Thornberg & Charmaz 2012:48) It involves aligning similar categories and the formulation of more analytical concepts that account for, describe or relate each subcategory within the new concept. The purpose is to identify how processes and interactions identified in initial coding link to one another.

The work of focused coding involves the formulation of "analytic" or "conceptual" categories. It involves giving conceptual definitions and assessing the relationships between them (Charmaz 2003, 2006). It involves constantly comparing and grouping codes, comparing codes with emerging categories, comparing different incidents, comparing data from the same or similar phenomena, actions or processes in different situations or contexts, comparing different characters, and comparing categories in analysis with other categories (Charmaz 2003:101). Focused coding involves identifying and defining the concepts, assessing the relationships between them, and these concepts and their relationships will then constitute the building blocks of the conceptual framework for the substantive theory based on empirical observation. Focused coding occurs at a higher level of abstraction than initial coding.

Five conceptual categories emerged from examining, integrating and regrouping the initial codes and their categories for spoken references to sex. I group these into two major groups and one minor group. Discipline, the first major group, refers to spoken references to sex where characters express approval or disapproval of another's appearance or behaviour or where a character attempts to influence another character's sexual conduct. Disclosure constitutes the second major group, and this refers to spoken references to sex where a character reveals, admits or confesses to sexual attitudes or behaviour. "Sex talk" constitutes the minor group, which encompasses spoken references to sex that occur in scenes featuring the depiction of sexual behaviour but do not fall into the other categories.

Theoretical coding involves analysing how the categories and codes constructed from the data analysis relate to one another as hypotheses to be integrated into the theory (Glaser 1978). It involves further investigation of the relationships between the categories and their properties.

Glaser (1978, 1998, 2005) advises that the researcher should develop codes as analytical tools to organise and conceptualise codes and categories with each other to develop a coherent grounded theory. Holton (2007:283) describes the process as “the identification and use of appropriate theoretical codes to achieve an integrated theoretical framework for an overall grounded theory”. Charmaz (2006:63) refers to specifying “possible relationships between categories you have developed ... [that] may help you tell an analytic story that has coherence”.

Theoretical sensitivity guides theoretical coding. The approach differs between the original or strict grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967), on the one hand, and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), on the other. The purpose of grounded theory is to generate a new substantive theory, so one proposed strategy is effectively “to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to assure the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas” (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The problem with this approach is how one goes about excluding pre-existing theoretical ideas and presumptions (Holton 2008). Constructivist grounded theorists (Charmaz 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz 2012) propose an alternative to address these difficulties.

Thornberg and Charmaz (2012) characterise this alternative as “theoretical agnosticism” (Henwood & Pidgeon 2003:138). This position involves the researcher becoming aware of relevant theories from different fields, or to “investigate all kinds of extant theories in different research disciplines to figure out embedded theoretical codes”. For example, the schema set out by Lynch (2012), which sets out seven aspects of “porn chic” (including sexual objectification, misogyny, blurring of private/public), are potential analytic categories that might arise, but they ought not direct nor limit the theoretical coding. Thornberg and Charmaz (2012) advise that researchers must “remain critical of applying theories throughout the research process”. Thus, theoretical sensitivity refers to allowing the analysis of data guide the application of potential theoretical codes.

This chapter set out the methodology for the project. The method comprises three phases that arise to address the project’s three aims. The survey of box office results, theatrical statistics and other financial data generates a more accurate picture of popular cinema and the place of art cinema within general distribution. The significance of this dataset lies in this accurate picture, particularly in addressing the standard narrative and McNair’s approach to the cycle of liberalisation, which, as noted, posits too close a link between radicalism, demand, capitalism and media output (Attwood 2006:82). The second phase, identifying sexual content, takes the “liberal” or approach to defining “sex” as relating to physical intimacy. This allies with a developing understanding of the “transformation of intimacy” that has occurred at the end of the twentieth century into the twenty-first century (Giddens 1992). The significance in this dataset lies in its distinctions between levels of graphicness and the transcription of spoken references, which do not feature significantly within existing scholarship. This constitutes a major

contribution to developing our understanding of sexual themes in popular film. The third phase, the grounded theory approach, leads to the identification of processes of discipline and disclosure. Setting out the operation of these processes through the exclusion, repression and repudiation of homosexuality, the privileging of heterosexuality, the policing of exclusivity, and parental guidance through sexual mores constitutes the qualitative analysis. Before embarking on this, it is necessary to set out the results of the quantitative analyses and how these guide the qualitative analysis that follows.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter reports on the quantitative findings from the study which can be compared with the major studies on sexual content identified reviews of the sexualisation literature (Ward 2003; Wright 2009). It also provides empirical evidence that builds a more accurate picture of film distribution and the extent to which Hollywood dominates. The findings here also establish the extent to which less graphic portrayals prevail, which justifies the focus for the qualitative analysis of the kinds of representational practices that emerge in relation to these, and for the identification of the processes that underpin spoken references. In short, this chapter outlines the results of the comprehensive survey of film distribution and sexual content that establish the need for a qualitative analysis of less graphic portrayals of physical intimacy.

This first section reports findings from the analysis of theatrical revenue and admissions for films on domestic release during the specified period and for the 250 films selected for analysis. It compares the breakdown of both all films on release and the films selected for study (the sample) in terms of distributor type, MPAA classification, production method, and genre. It demonstrates that the 250 films are a representative sample of all films on release in each category. This chapter also establishes how the 250 films selected for analysis represent “popular film” by establishing the extent to which they account for the best-selling titles in the home entertainment market in the USA and in major Western theatrical film markets.

### Films

#### *Domestic Releases*

SOURCE	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	TOTALS
<b>MPAA (RELEASED)</b>	609	677	661	709	708	3,364
<b>MPAA (RATED)</b>	758	726	713	708	613	3,518
<b>BOXOFFICEMOJO</b>	732	810	833	852	850	NA
<b>THE-NUMBERS</b>	718	715	711	740	802	NA

*Table 4.1*

Table 4.1, above, lists the following: the number of films that released (or opened) according to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA); the number of films rated by the MPAA; the number of films on the annual charts ranking films by box office revenue per BoxOfficeMojo; and the number of films on the annual charts ranking films by box office revenue per The-Numbers. The numbers diverge because the MPAA includes only films that opened; BoxOfficeMojo and The-Numbers include films still on release in the calendar year that opened previously. The MPAA-rated films also include ratings of non-theatrical releases and re-ratings of older films.

According to the MPAA, 3,364 films opened on domestic release between January 1st, 2011, and December 31st, 2015. Films may appear on more than one annual chart from BoxOfficeMojo and

The-Numbers, so providing totals would be misleading. Collating the data provided by BoxOfficeMojo establishes that it tracks data for 3,465 films on domestic release for the specified period. Collating the data provided by The-Numbers establishes that it tracked data for 3,216 films. The difference arises because the MPAA counts only films that opened each year. BoxOfficeMojo tracks data for more films than The-Numbers, justifying greater reliance on BoxOfficeMojo for analysing data on domestic release.

How reliable are these websites in providing to data on admissions (ticket sales)? Establishing the reliability of these figures founds the accurate analysis of the breakdown of admissions achieved by films in various categories. The MPAA publishes annual reports on theatrical statistics that include figures on the number of cinema tickets sold, in billions, by films on domestic release for each calendar year. The charts ranking films by revenues and ticket sales for each calendar year freely available online from BoxOfficeMojo and The-Numbers provide totals of admissions achieved by all films listed. Table 4.2, below, displays these data, rounding totals to the nearest billion.

SOURCE	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	TOTALS
MPAA	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3	6.6
BOXOFFICEMOJO	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3	6.6
THE-NUMBERS	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3	6.6

*Table 4.2*

Three important points arise. First, the figures according to three sources, while rounded to the nearest billion, are similar, implying that the figures are reliable and accurate. Second, the number of admissions for films on domestic release in the period generally remains around 1.3 billion, indicating the relative stability in the specified period in the numbers of people purchasing cinema tickets. Finally, BoxOfficeMojo and The-Numbers track the data of enough films such that they account for almost all tickets sold during the specified period. These points justify reliance on the data freely available online for surveying and analysing the breakdown of films and admissions.

The pie charts in figures 4.1 and 4.2, below, contrast the 250 films selected for study in terms of their share of the number of films on domestic release and their share of admissions. Figure 4.1 shows that the sample films account for just 7% of the 3,465 films on domestic release per BoxOfficeMojo. Figure 4.2 shows that the selected films achieved ticket sales of more than 4.6 billion, accounting for 71% of all admissions. These figures indicate that conceiving “popular film” or “mainstream movies” as the films that most people pay see in a cinema theatre encompasses a relatively small number of films.



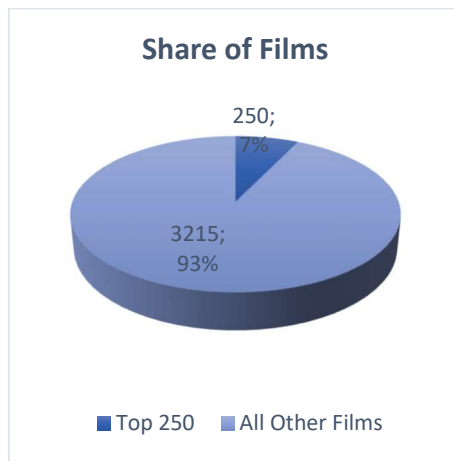


Figure 4.1

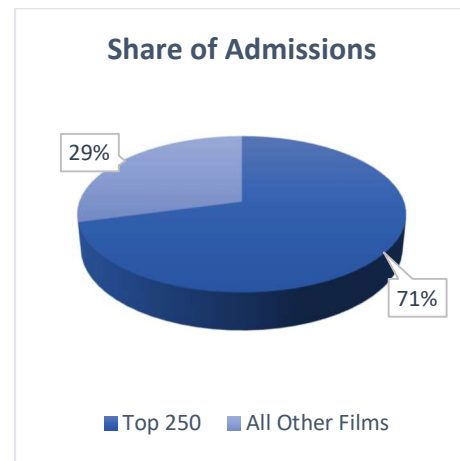


Figure 4.2

### Distribution Company

This section reports findings on the number and share of both films and admissions achieved by the major, mini-major and independent distribution companies. It establishes the extent to which Hollywood dominates ticket sales, identifying the extent to which Hollywood films achieve a disproportionate share. This analysis provides evidence that tends to support the existence of “the long tail” (Anderson 2004, 2006; Epstein 2017; Thompson 2017). It also assists in contrasting popular film with “art-house porn” or “hardcore cinema”. Finally, it provides a means of comparing the make-up by distributor of the 250 films selected for study with that for all films on domestic release.

DISTRIBUTOR TYPE	FILMS	%	ADMISSIONS	%	AVERAGE ADMISSIONS
<b>MAJORS</b>	772	22	5,411,630,900	82	7,009,885
MAJOR UNIT	509	15	5,114,336,500	78	10,047,812
ART/GENRE UNIT	263	8	297,294,400	5	1,130,397
<b>MINI-MAJORS</b>	361	10	1,041,397,000	16	2,884,756
<b>INDEPENDENTS</b>	2,332	67	126,710,200	2	5433
<b>TOTALS</b>	3,465	100	6,579,738,100	100	1,898,914

Table 4.3

Table 4.3, above, lists the three distributor types, the number and share of films on domestic release for each type, the number and share of admissions per distributor type, and the average admissions per film for each distributor type. It shows the major units (the Big Six) and the arthouse/genre units of the conglomerates. The majors distributed over a fifth of films on domestic release but these accounted for over four-fifths of ticket sales. Independents accounted for more than two-thirds of films on release but these 2,000 plus films accounted for just 2% of ticket sales. Figures 4.3 and 4.4 represent this breakdown graphically.

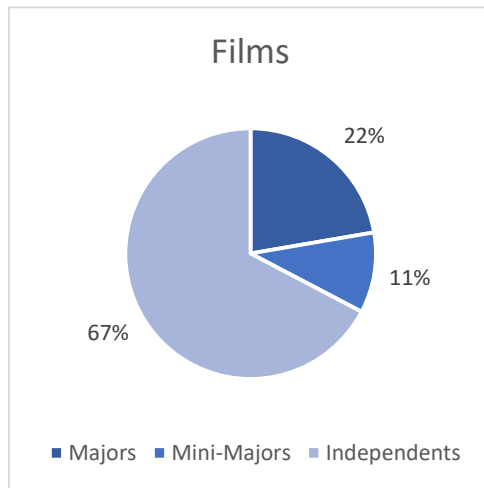


Figure 4.3

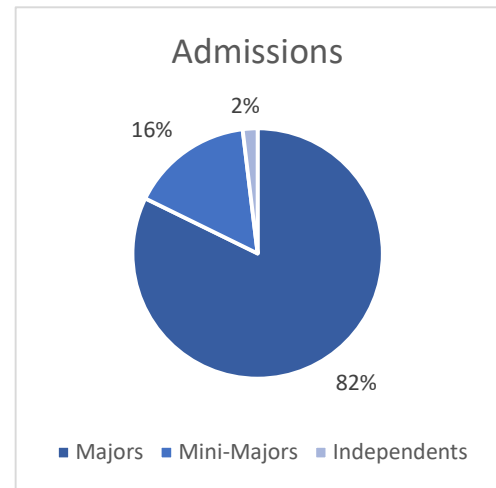


Figure 4.4

The films selected reflect the dominance of the majors and the significant share of admissions achieved by the mini-majors. Figures 4.5 and 4.6, below, depict this graphically. The majors distributed 90% of the 250 most popular films. The mini-majors distributed the remaining 10%. Figure 4.6 shows that the majors accounted for a similar share of the admissions achieved by the top 250 films (90%) as they did for the admissions achieved by all films on domestic release (82%). The mini-majors accounted for 16% of admissions achieved by all films and 10% of the admissions achieved by the top 250. The sample excludes independent films.

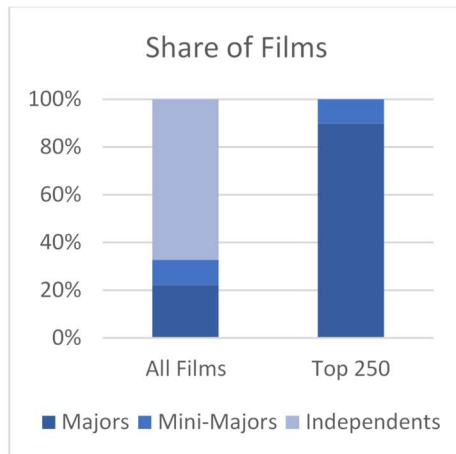


Figure 4.5

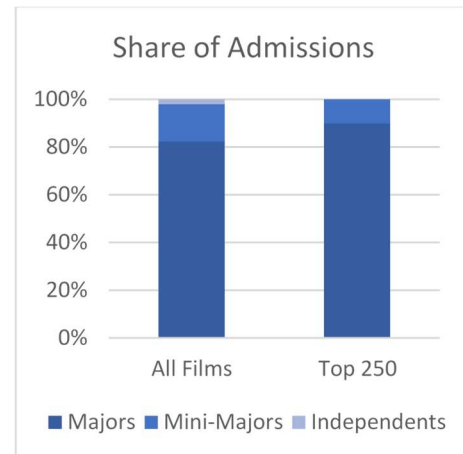


Figure 4.6

### MPAA Classification

The second category for analysis is MPAA classification. There are two kinds, non-restrictive (G, PG and PG-13) and restrictive (R, NC-17 and unrated). An accompanying adult must purchase a ticket for an R-rated film for persons aged 17 and under, who are not admitted to NC-17 films. Major cinema chains do not exhibit unrated films. Table 4.4 shows for each MPAA classification the number and percentage share of films on domestic release, the number and percentage share of admissions, and average admissions per film. Films with non-restrictive ratings, accounting for less than a third of films on release, achieved almost three-quarters of ticket sales.

MPAA	FILMS	%	ADMISSIONS	%	AVERAGE ADMISSIONS
<b>G</b>	43	1	182,636,700	3	4,247,365
<b>PG</b>	258	7	1,301,173,800	20	5,043,309
<b>PG-13</b>	654	19	3,405,101,700	52	5,206,578
<b>R</b>	1,017	29	1,647,022,100	25	1,619,491
<b>NC-17</b>	5	0	1,030,100	0	208,020
<b>NR</b>	1,488	43	42,763,700	1	28,739
<b>TOTALS</b>	3,465	100	6,579,738,100	100	1,898,914

Table 4.4

Table 4.5, below, shows the breakdown by MPAA classification for the sampled films, which reflect the overwhelming popularity of films with non-restrictive MPAA classifications. Films suitable for family viewing account for three-quarters of the top 250 films and 80% of admissions achieved by the top 250 films. Films rated R account for just a quarter of the top 250 films and a fifth of the ticket sales achieved by the top 250 films. That films rated NC-17 and unrated films, which include the few featuring non-simulated sex scenes, achieved just 1% of all ticket sales justifies their exclusion from this analysis of popular film.

MPAA	FILMS	%	ADMISSIONS	%	AVERAGE ADMISSIONS
<b>G</b>	8	3	137,135,500	3	17,141,938
<b>PG</b>	58	23	1,026,516,600	22	17,698,562
<b>PG-13</b>	122	49	2,587,762,800	56	21,211,170
<b>R</b>	62	25	910,986,700	20	14,693,334
<b>TOTALS</b>	250	100	4,662,401,600	100	18,649,606

Table 4.5

The graphs below represent the breakdown by MPAA classification of both all films on domestic release and the 250 films selected for study. Figure 4.7 highlights the contrast in the share of the number of films. Figure 4.8 shows the breakdown by MPAA classification of the share of admissions achieved by all films and by the top 250 films. It shows that the breakdown for the sample bears close resemblance to that for all films. This establishes that the sample of 250 films selected for study is representative of the breakdown by MPAA classification for all films on domestic release in the specified period.

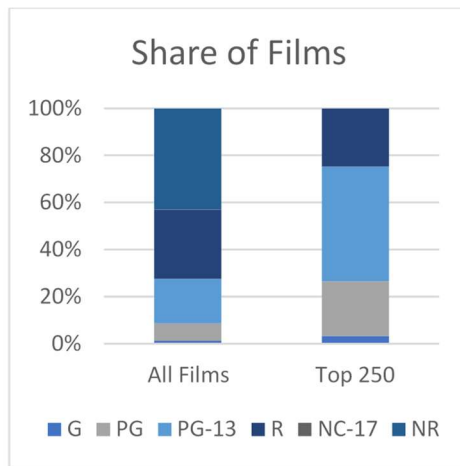


Figure 4.7

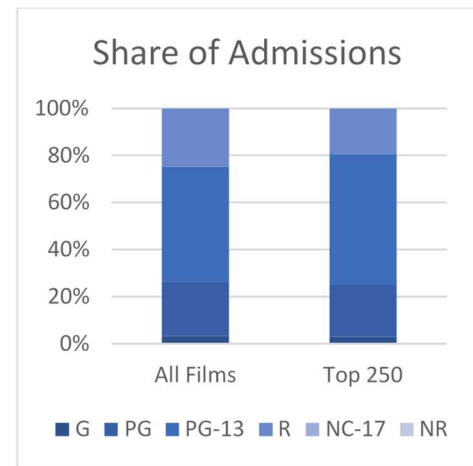


Figure 4.8

### Production Method

Films may be live action, animated or a mixture. Animated films may be hand drawn (classical or traditional), digital or use stop-motion techniques. One study on sexual content in film (Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell 2005) excludes animated films from their analysis because, they suggest, audiences are less likely to identify with their characters. However, animated films, or films in which animated characters play a significant role, may constitute a significant element of “popular film”, and to exclude them would skew the sample. This section analyses the breakdown of both all films and 250 films selected for study by the number and share of films and admissions, establishing the prevalence of live action and the significance of animation in popular film.

PRODUCTION METHOD	FILMS	%	ADMISSIONS	%	AVERAGE ADMISSIONS
LIVE ACTION	2,874	83	4,806,450,600	73	1,672,391
ANIMATION/LIVE ACTION	53	2	885,852,500	13	16,714,198
DIGITAL ANIMATION	62	2	827,459,400	13	13,347,119
HAND ANIMATION	32	1	25,716,700	0	803,647
STOP-MOTION ANIMATION	8	0	24,065,200	0	3,008,150
MULTIPLE METHODS	9	0	2,351,900	0	261,322
NO DATA	427	12	7,841,800	0	18,365
TOTALS	3,465	100	6,579,738,100	100	1,898,914

Table 4.6

Table 4.6, above, displays for each production method the number and share of all films on domestic release, the number and share of admissions achieved, and the average admissions per film. It shows that live action films account for 83% of films on release but only 73% of ticket sales. Animated/live action films, in which animated characters play a significant role (e.g. *The Hobbit*, *Paddington*), account for just 2% of films on release but 13% of ticket sales. Full-length animated feature films, digital, classical and stop-motion, account for just 3% of films on release

but 13% of admissions achieved. This establishes the significance in terms of ticket sales of animated films, especially full-length digitally animated films and animation/live action movies.

PRODUCTION METHOD	FILMS	%	ADMISSIONS	%	AVERAGE ADMISSIONS
LIVE ACTION	182	73	3,049,998,500	65	16,758,234
ANIMATION/LIVE ACTION	32	13	838,237,300	18	26,194,916
DIGITAL ANIMATION	35	14	762,296,600	16	21,779,903
HAND ANIMATION	1	0	11,869,200	0	11,869,200
TOTALS	250	100	4,662,401,600	100	18,649,606

Table 4.7

The 250 films ought to represent both the prevalence of live action film and the popularity of both full-length digitally animated films and animation/live action movies. Table 4.7, above, shows for each production method the number and percentage share of films within the sample, the number and percentage share of admission achieved by all top 250 films, and the average admissions per film. Both full-length digitally animated films and animation/live action movies account for 14% and 13% of the 250 films. Live action films account for just under three-quarters of the 250 films in the sample. This shows that the 250 films represent both the prevalence of live action film and the popularity of digitally animated and animation/live action movies.

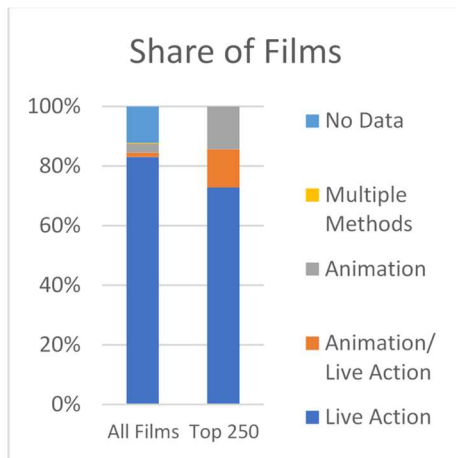


Figure 4.9

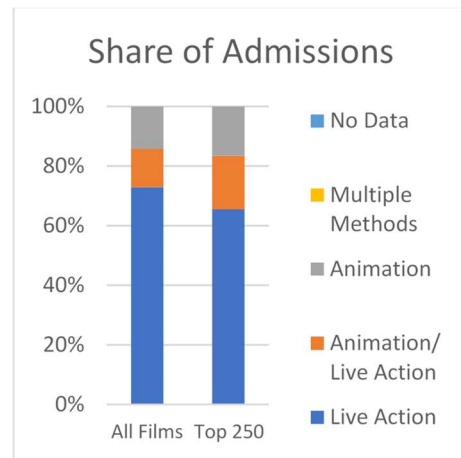


Figure 4.10

Figure 4.9, on the left above, represents visually the breakdown by production method of the percentage share of all films on domestic release and of the sample films, showing both the prevalence of live action films for all films and the sample, and the greater significance of animated films in the sample. Figure 4.10, on the right, shows the similar breakdown by production method of percentage share of admissions achieved, again highlighting the greater significance of animation in terms of popularity. This analysis demonstrates that the sample of 250 films represents the breakdown of all films by production method, reflecting both the greater prevalence of live action films and the greater popularity of animation, justifying the inclusion of animated films.

## Genre

This section reports the breakdown of films on domestic release by genre, which may have implications for the kind of sexual content that occurs. Comedies may involve innuendo and jokes about sex; dramas may portray serious issues. Sexual violence may feature in war films, westerns, thrillers, and horrors. Both BoxOfficeMojo and The-Numbers designate genres for the films that they track. Table 4.8, below, lists eleven categories of genre, and for each genre shows the number and share of films on domestic release of each genre, the number and share of admission achieved by films of each genre, and the average admissions per film. The top 250 films ought to reflect this breakdown by genre.

GENRE	FILMS	%	ADMISSIONS	%	AVERAGE ADMISSIONS
<b>ACTION/ADVENTURE</b>	353	10	2,408,405,300	37	6,822,678
<b>COMEDY</b>	652	19	1,401,467,500	21	2,149,490
<b>DOCUMENTARY</b>	675	19	76,863,400	1	113,872
<b>DRAMA</b>	1,045	30	911,783,300	14	872,520
<b>FANTASY</b>	43	1	278,22,700	4	6,470,295
<b>HORROR</b>	153	4	287,212,300	4	1,877,205
<b>MUSICAL</b>	23	1	74,191,400	1	3,225,713
<b>SCIENCE FICTION</b>	84	2	657,775,400	10	7,830,660
<b>THRILLER</b>	240	7	390,816,700	6	1,628,403
<b>WAR</b>	10	0	35,667,600	1	3,566,760
<b>WESTERN</b>	15	0	51,871,800	1	3,458,120
<b>OTHER</b>	172	5	5,460,700	0	23,502
<b>TOTALS</b>	3,465	100	6,579,738,100	100	1,898,914

Table 4.8

The table shows that drama is the genre that accounts for the largest share of films (30%) on release, but it accounts for just 14% of ticket sold. Action/adventure films account for only 10% of films of release but for 37% of admissions. The share of admissions achieved by science fiction and fantasy films also exceed their share of the number of films on release. Documentary, which accounts for just under one-fifth of films on release (19%), accounts for just 1% of ticket sales. Comedies account for about a fifth of both admissions and number of films on release. The sampled films should reflect the popularity of action/adventure, science fiction, fantasy, and comedy films.

GENRE	FILMS	%	ADMISSIONS	%	AVERAGE ADMISSIONS
<b>ACTION/ADVENTURE</b>	88	35	2,112,791,00	45	24,008,989
<b>COMEDY</b>	61	24	861,734,400	19	14,126,793
<b>DOCUMENTARY</b>	1	0	9,289,300	0	9289,300
<b>DRAMA</b>	30	12	476,873,000	10	15,895,767
<b>FANTASY</b>	10	4	239,867,300	5	23,986,730
<b>HORROR</b>	7	3	983,891,200	2	13,413,029
<b>MUSICAL</b>	3	1	44,637,100	1	14,879,33
<b>SCIENCE FICTION</b>	26	10	536,230,400	12	20,624,246
<b>THRILLER</b>	18	7	207,929,100	5	11,551,617
<b>WAR</b>	3	1	34,554,500	1	11,518,167
<b>WESTERN</b>	3	1	44,604,300	1	18,649,606
<b>TOTALS</b>	250	100	4,662,401,600	100	18,649,606

Table 4.9

Table 4.9, above, lists eleven categories of genre, showing for each category the number and share of the top 250 films, the number and share of admissions achieved by the 250 films, and the average admissions per film. Action/adventure films account for the largest number of films, followed by comedy, drama, and science fiction. Action/adventure accounts for the largest share of admissions by the top 250 films. Comedies account for almost a quarter of the films in the sample, though they account for just one-fifth of admissions. The single documentary counts as the least popular genre. The sampled films reflect the genre breakdown of all films on release, as shown in figure 4.11, below.

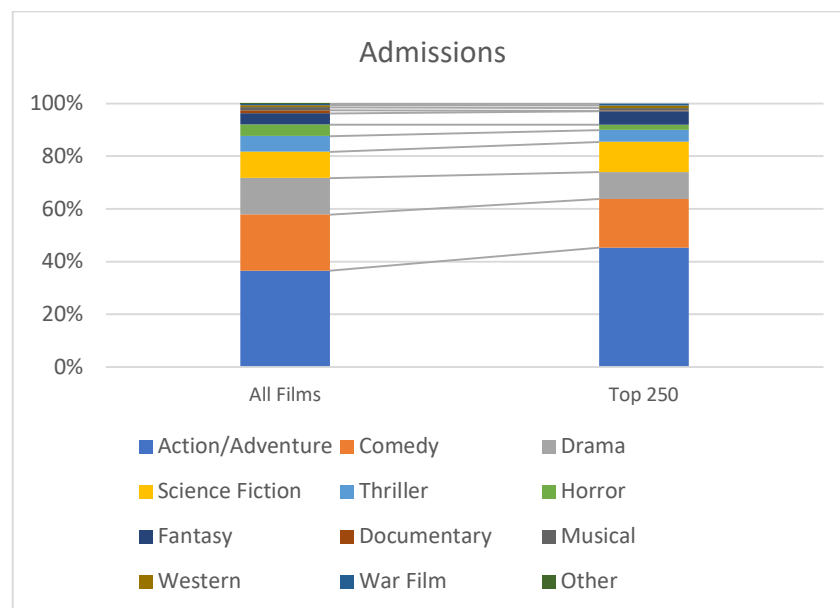


Figure 4.11

The results here establish that the 250 films selected for analysis are representative, in terms of MPAA classification, production method and genre, of the films that most people paid to see in

cinemas in the USA and Canada from 2011 to 2015. The sexually graphic films that attract the “aesthetic embrace” and emphasis on transgression in film studies account for a fraction of the 2,500 independent films on release, which, taken together, account for only 2% of ticket sales. The empirical evidence does not substantiate claims (e.g. Williams 2001, 2008, 2016; McNair 2002, 2013; Coleman 2016) that such films have entered the “mainstream”. What picture emerges from the analysis of the home entertainment market?

### ***Home Entertainment Market***

This section reports results of the analysis of best-selling titles on home entertainment formats, DVD and Blu-Ray, and the performance of the 250 sampled films in this market. Though declining, popular titles (e.g. *Frozen*) continue to make record-breaking sales (Graser 2014). Erotic thrillers released direct-to-video formed the subject matter of book-length studies (Andrews 2006A 2006B, Williams 2005). The performance of such titles in the twenty-first century against a background of declining home entertainment sales and the emergence of online streaming and subscription services merits comment. Collating the available data available freely online from The-Numbers reveals that 422 titles appeared across the charts for the five years. There were four categories of titles on the charts: theatrically released titles premiering on home entertainment formats; reissues of titles released previously in home entertainment formats; titles originally aired on television; and titles released directly into this market. Table 4.10, below, displays the number and percentage share of titles and units sold for each category.

CATEGORY	TITLES	%	UNITS	%
FILM	352	83	817,358,453	89
REISSUE	40	9	66,783,576	7
TELEVISION	18	4	18,677,980	2
DVD	12	3	15,630,569	2
TOTALS	422	100	918,450,568	100

Table 4.10

Theatrically released feature films account for 93% of the best-selling titles and 96% of the units sold by the best-selling titles. Feature films popular at the box office dominate the home entertainment market. The best-selling television title (*Game of Thrones*) sold 1.5 million units, which pales in comparison to more than 10 million sold by several films (e.g. *The Avengers*, *Despicable Me*, *The Hunger Games*) and 20 million by *Frozen*. Though attracting significant academic attention (Williams 2005; Andrews 2006A, 2006B), direct-to-DVD titles do not rank among the most popular titles. Table 4.11, below, lists by category the number and percentage share of best-selling home entertainment titles accounted for by the 250 films selected for analysis. It shows that 225 of the 250 selected films (90%) rank among the best-selling titles and account for 53% of the best-selling titles in the US home entertainment market. These 225 films account for 70% of units sold by all best-selling titles in the specified period.



CATEGORY	TITLES	%	UNITS	%
FILM	224	64	632,882,140	68.9
REISSUE	1	3	5,734,368	0.6
TOTALS	225	53	638,616,508	69.5

Table 4.11

### *Western Markets*

The analysis so far concentrates on the domestic market (USA and Canada). This section establishes the extent to which the 250 films selected for analysis represent popular cinema in the West. The importance in doing so arises from the framing of sexualisation as a phenomenon occurring in western culture (Attwood 2009) and investigations into the occurrence of sexual content in the UK (Bailey 2011; Papadopoulos 2010), Ireland (MacKeogh 2004; Kiley et al 2015) and Australia (Rush & La Nauze 2006). The MPAA includes reports annually on the revenues generated at the box office in major international markets (MPAA 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). Table 4.11, below, ranks market international market territories, i.e. those valued at more than US\$0.5 billion, by average annual value of box office revenue. Excluding Russia, Latin American and Asian countries, the major western markets for films, measured as those valued at more than US\$.05 billion, are the UK and Ireland, France, Germany, Australia, Italy, and Spain.

TERRITORY	MEAN	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	US\$ (bn)	US\$ (bn)	US\$ (bn)	US\$ (bn)	US\$ (bn)	US\$ (bn)
CHINA	4	2	2.7	3.6	4.8	6.8
JAPAN	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.4	2	1.8
UK & IRELAND	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.9
FRANCE	1.7	2	1.7	1.6	1.8	1.4
INDIA	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.7	1.6
SOUTH KOREA	1.4	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.6	1.5
GERMANY	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3
RUSSIA	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.2	0.8
AUSTRALIA	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.1	1	0.9
MEXICO	0.8	NA	NA	0.9	0.9	0.9
BRAZIL	0.8	NA	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.7
ITALY	0.8	0.9	NA	0.8	0.8	0.7
SPAIN	0.6	NA	NA	0.7	0.6	0.6

Table 4.11

This analysis uses revenue, not ticket sales, for films that opened during the period, not films already on release, thereby excluding films released in late 2010 that were successful in 2011, and similarly excluding films released in 2015 in the USA that were released in later years in international markets. Hollywood's share of revenues may be greater than that indicated because films other than those selected may have been more successful. Table 4.12, below, lists the six

major western markets. The second column shows the number of films on the annual charts per BoxOfficeMojo. The third column displays the total revenues of all films for the specified period. The fourth and fifth columns show the number and percentage share of films from the 250 selected for study that appear on the charts. The sixth column shows the combined revenue of the sampled films, and the last column expresses this as a percentage share of revenues achieved by all charting films.

The 250 films selected for study in this project account, on average, for 14% of the films on the charts for six major western film markets but 56% of revenues. In Anglophone markets, the shares are more significant. In the UK and Ireland, the films selected for analysis account for just 11% of the films on the chart but two-thirds (66%) of revenues. In Australia, the films selected for analysis account for just under one-fifth of the films on the charts but just under 70% of revenues. Again, it is important to note that differing release dates and the relative popularity of other Hollywood films actually underestimates that extent to which Hollywood dominates the international box office. It is also worth noting that territories in which there are relatively strong national cinemas, such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain, feature more populist fare akin to Hollywood films. The analysis establishes that the sampled films represent “popular film” across the West.

<b>TERRITORY</b>	<b>FILMS</b>	<b>REVENUES</b>	<b>SAMPLE</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>REVENUES</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>AUSTRALIA</b>	1,298	5,187,017,719	245	19	3,558,606,225	69
<b>FRANCE</b>	1,631	7,724,458,928	237	15	3,567,438,915	46
<b>GERMANY</b>	1,674	6,224,872,842	244	15	3,624,689,264	58
<b>ITALY</b>	1,504	3,804,711,794	234	16	1,720,983,685	45
<b>SPAIN</b>	1,992	3,658,352,094	237	12	1,987,627,017	54
<b>UK &amp; IRELAND</b>	2,239	9,337,737,980	248	11	6,195,724,965	66

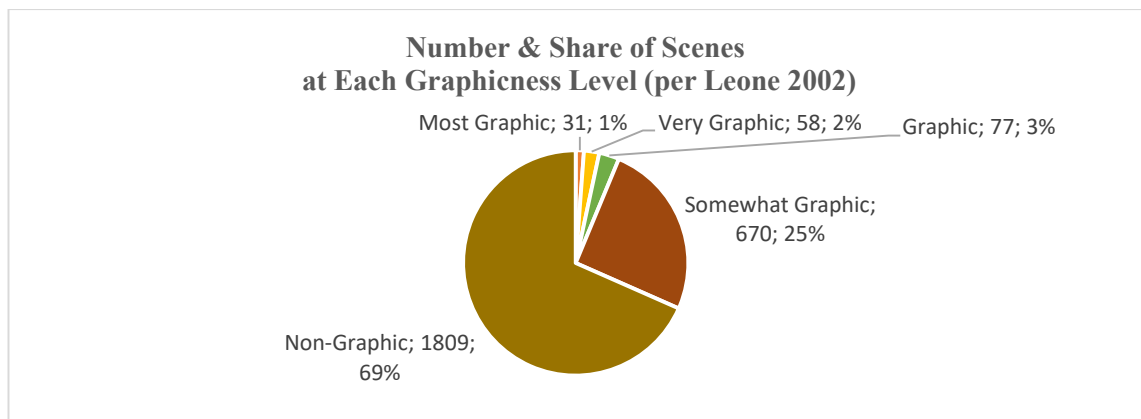
Table 4.12

The analysis here establishes the confidence that we can have in the analysis of sex in recent popular film. It establishes the dominance of the Big Six (Disney, Fox, Paramount, Sony, Universal and Warner Bros) of popular films which, though accounting for a fifth of films on domestic release from 2011 to 2015, achieved over 80% of all ticket sales. The mini-majors (e.g. Lionsgate, Relativity) constitute a significant element of popular film, accounting for just 10% of films on release but 17% of ticket sales. Over 2,500 independent films, none of which feature in the top 250, account for only 2% of ticket sales, justifying their exclusion from this study of popular film. The analysis here establishes the sample as representative of “popular cinema” in terms of MPAA classification, production method and genre, and also in relation to the US home entertainment market and theatrical markets in six major western territories. The findings also indicate the marginalisation of independent cinema.

## The Scenes

This section presents the quantitative findings on the identification of sexual content in scenes from the films studied. It commences with reporting an overview, setting out the number of scenes identified and the numbers of films in which these occurred. A breakdown follows in which it is set out how many scenes occurred in films grouped by MPAA classification, production method, creative type, and genre. It also reports the number and percentage share of scenes, and the median scenes per film, according to each category within which of these groups. It also reports a breakdown down by level of graphicness (per Leone 2002). These results provide the data with which to compare this study with the major studies on sexual content in film identified in the literature review.

There were 2,645 scenes featuring sexual content, whether that consisted of spoken references, depictions of sexual acts, or both. These scenes occurred in 241 films (96% of those studied). Only nine films had no scenes featuring sexual content. Figure 4.12, above, shows a breakdown of the scenes by level of graphicness (per Leone 2002). It shows clearly that scenes featuring non-graphic content account for the largest share (69%). This constitutes a major finding in the light of the current preoccupation with sexually graphic content that prevails in scholarship within both social sciences and public research, on the one hand, and film studies, on the other. Concern with whether sexually graphic content occurs, and the extent to which it occurs, neglects questions regarding the nature of less graphic content.



*Figure 4.12*

Of the 250 films studied, 191, or 76%, featured at least one scene at the somewhat graphic level or higher. Table 4.13, below, displays the average of mean number of scenes per film at each level of graphicness. It shows that this declines as the level of graphicness increases. The mean number of scenes per film that are at least somewhat graphic is 2.7. More and very graphic content (per Leone 2002) includes visible sexual intercourse where the level of clothing distinguishes between the levels. Table 4.13 also displays the median number of scenes per film at each level of graphicness. The median is more representative and provides a useful benchmark against which to compare films when grouping them by MPAA classification, production method, creative type,

and genre.

LEVEL	ANY	NON-GRAPHIC	SOMEWHAT GRAPHIC	GRAPHIC	MORE GRAPHIC	VERY GRAPHIC
AVERAGE	10.6	7.2	2.7	0.3	0.2	0.1
MEDIAN	7	4	2	0	0	0

Table 4.13

Two major points emerge from the findings thus far. First, sexual content, while prevalent, featuring in 96% of films studied, is rarely very graphic. Differences between defining sexual content make it difficult to accurately compare the findings from this analysis with existing scholarship. An insight into the historical development of sexual content in popular film, especially into whether it increases, decreases, or stabilises, depends on the level of graphicness. The broader approach used to identify sexual themes and imagery in this project results in a far higher mean number of sex scenes per film than in previous studies, but the mean number of the more graphic scenes is half than the lowest identified by others (Gunasekera, Campbell & Chapman 2005). Sexual content appears prevalent in recent popular film.

Secondly, these results indicate the prevalence of nongraphic sexual content in popular film. A breakdown of films and scenes identified by MPAA classification, which follows, further confirms the apparent effectiveness of that system in screening out graphic content. The analysis here establishes that most scenes identified feature nongraphic sexual themes or imagery, and there is a dearth of scholarship on the nature of these scenes. Analysing scenes by production method, creative type and genre furthers our understanding of the nature of scenes identified. It presents a more accurate description of the extent to which sexual content occurs, avoiding the skewing of samples that occurs elsewhere (e.g. Greenberg et al 1993; Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell 2005). It calls for the qualitative analysis to focus on less graphic sexual content.

### ***MPAA Classification***

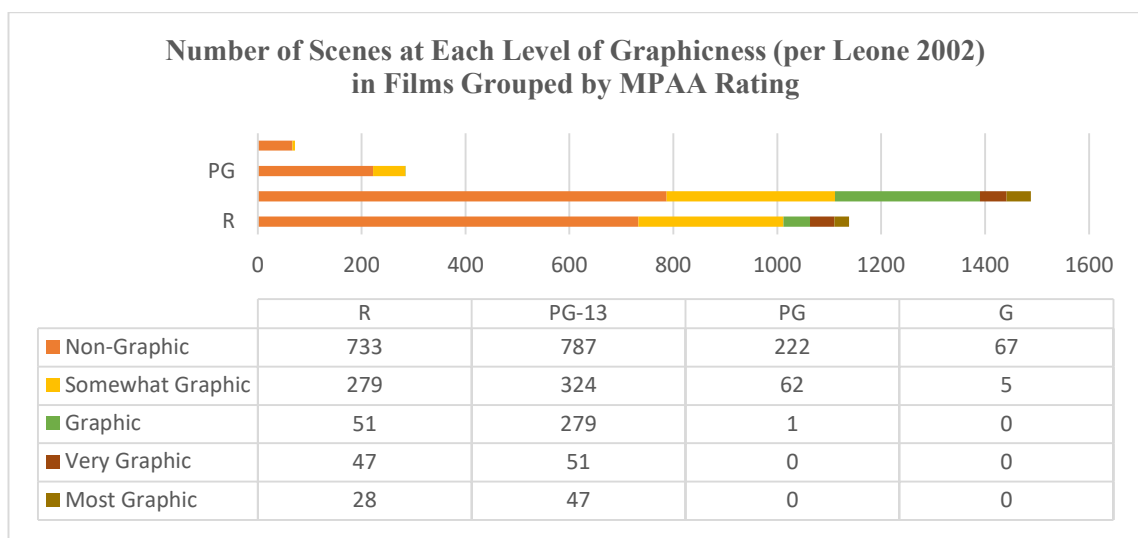


Figure 4.13

The table above lists the four categories of MPAA classification (G, PG, PG-13, R) and, for each classification, the number of scenes identified for all films of that classification at each level of graphicness (Leone 2002). Figure 4.13 shows that scenes featuring sexual themes or imagery occur in films of all MPAA classifications, with most occurring at the non-graphic level in films rated PG-13. The graph above the table presents the data in a stacked column chart, which shows the prevalence of nongraphic scenes across MPAA classifications. The relative dearth of very graphic and most graphics is also evident in the graph. The data set out below establishes that, as graphicness increases, the number of scenes decreases, and this trend is apparent across films of all MPAA classifications.

What percentage share of scenes do films of each MPAA classification account for at each level of graphicness? Figure 4.14, below, shows at the top line the share of films studied at each MPAA rating. The graph shows that films rated R account for a larger share of scenes at all levels of graphicness except graphic, where films rated PG-13 account for the largest share. It also shows that films rated G account for a similar share of non-graphic scenes as they do films studied. It shows that, as the MPAA rating becomes more restrictive, the greater the share of scenes identified accounted for by films rated R. The graph represents the apparent effectiveness of the MPAA classification system in screening out sexually graphic content from popular films.

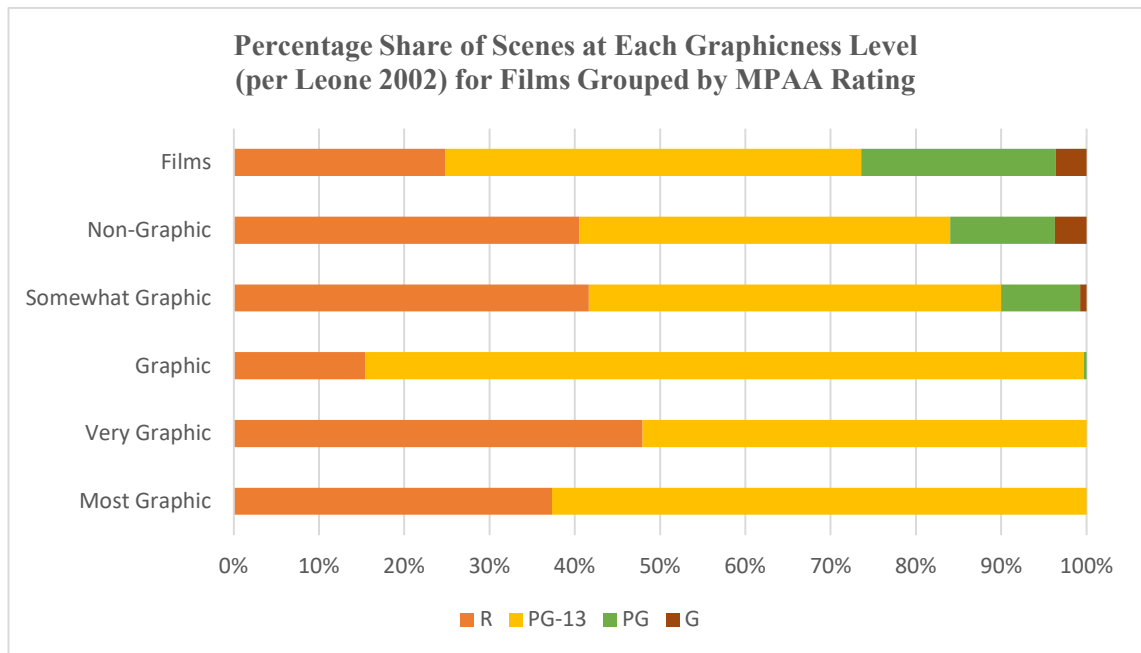


Figure 4.14

Figure 4.15, below, displays the median number of scenes per film identified for films of each MPAA rating at for any level of graphicness and the non-graphic and somewhat levels (Leone 2002). The median number of scenes per film identified at the graphic, very graphic, and most graphic levels is zero. The median scenes per film at any level, or the nongraphic and somewhat levels, is higher for films rated R than it is for all films studied. A surprising result is that the

median number of scenes identified for nongraphic sexual content is higher for films rated G than for films rated PG or PG-13. This finding contradicts the assumption that sexual themes or imagery do not occur in films rated G (Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell 2005).

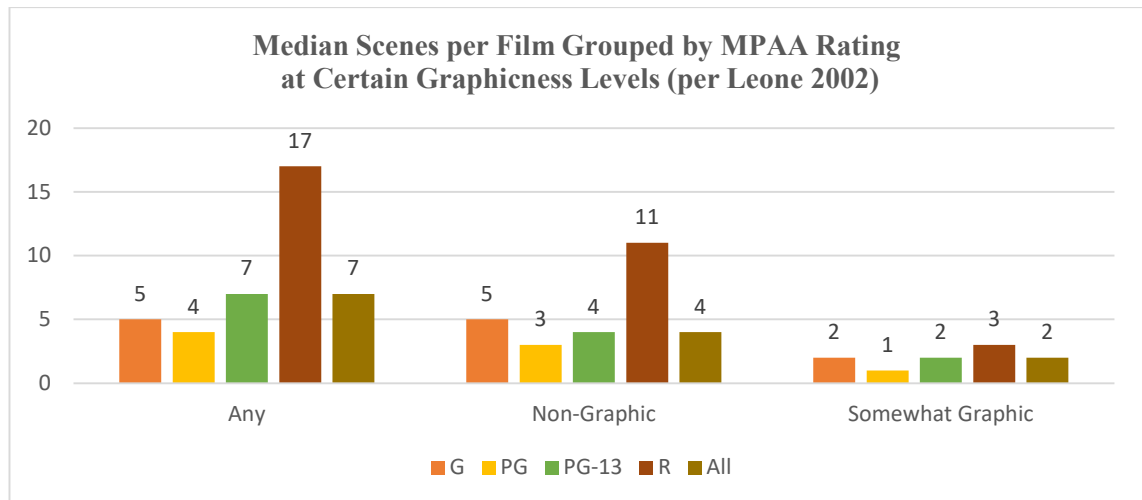


Figure 4.15

The results here establish that scenes featuring sexual content occur in films of all MPAA classifications but the frequency with which they occur at all, together with the frequency with which they occur at different levels of graphicness (per Leone 2002), varies. As expected, films rated R account for a share of scenes greater than the share of films, and the highest median number of scenes per film also occurs in films rated R. A surprising result was that films rated G have a median number of scenes at the nongraphic level higher than for films rated PG and PG-13. The most significant insights that arises is the prevalence of nongraphic sexual content in films of each MPAA classification, emphasising the need for deeper analysis of such content.

### ***Production Method***

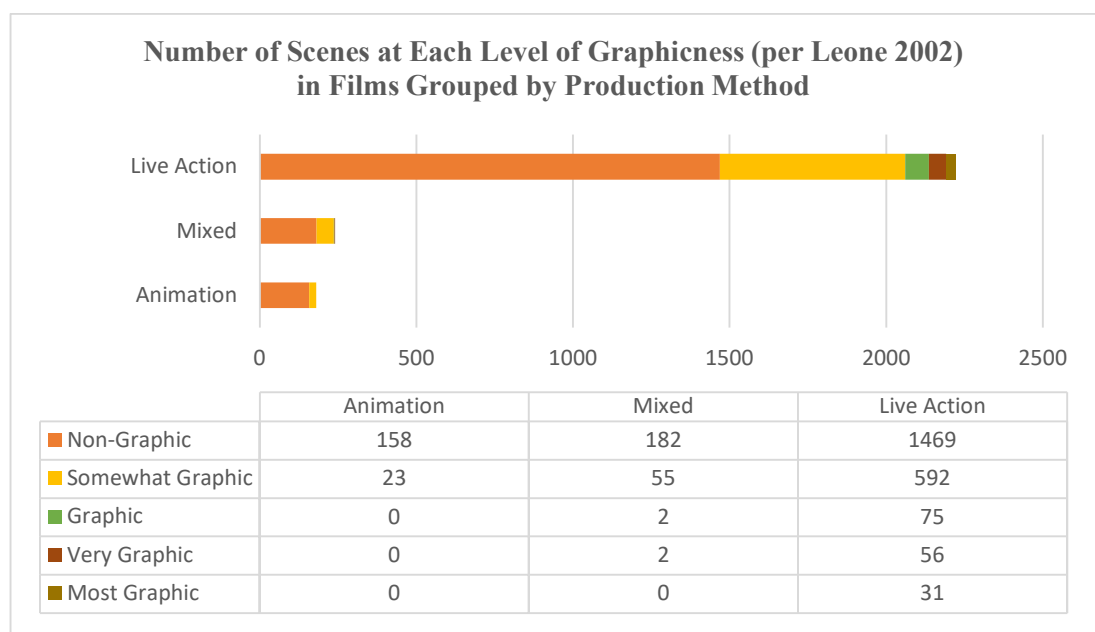


Figure 4.16

Gunasekera, Chapman and Campbell (2005) also excluded animated films from their analysis based on two assumptions: one, the non-restrictive MPAA classification that these films, largely aimed at family audiences, were unlikely to feature sexual content, and, two, audiences were less likely to identify with animated characters. The analysis here goes to address the first assumption. The data presented here cannot address the second assumption. The table in figure 4.16, above, lists the number of scenes at each level of graphicness (per Leone 2002) for films grouped by production method, of which there are three: live action, animation, and mixed (meaning live action films that feature substantial animated characters, e.g. *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *The Smurfs*). The graph clearly shows that live action films account for most scenes identified.

Live action films account for 73% of films studied and 84% of scenes identified. The stacked column chart, above, makes it clear that live action films account for the most scenes identified at each level of graphicness. Live action films account for 100% of scenes identified at the most graphic level (per Leone 2002). The results here also establish that scenes featuring sexual content, themes and imagery occur in mixed films, even at the very graphic level. Two films account for these scenes (*Ted* and *300: Rise of an Empire*). The main insight from these results so far though is again the prevalence of sexual content at the nongraphic and somewhat graphic levels (per Leone 2002). Looking at the median scenes per film makes this even more apparent.

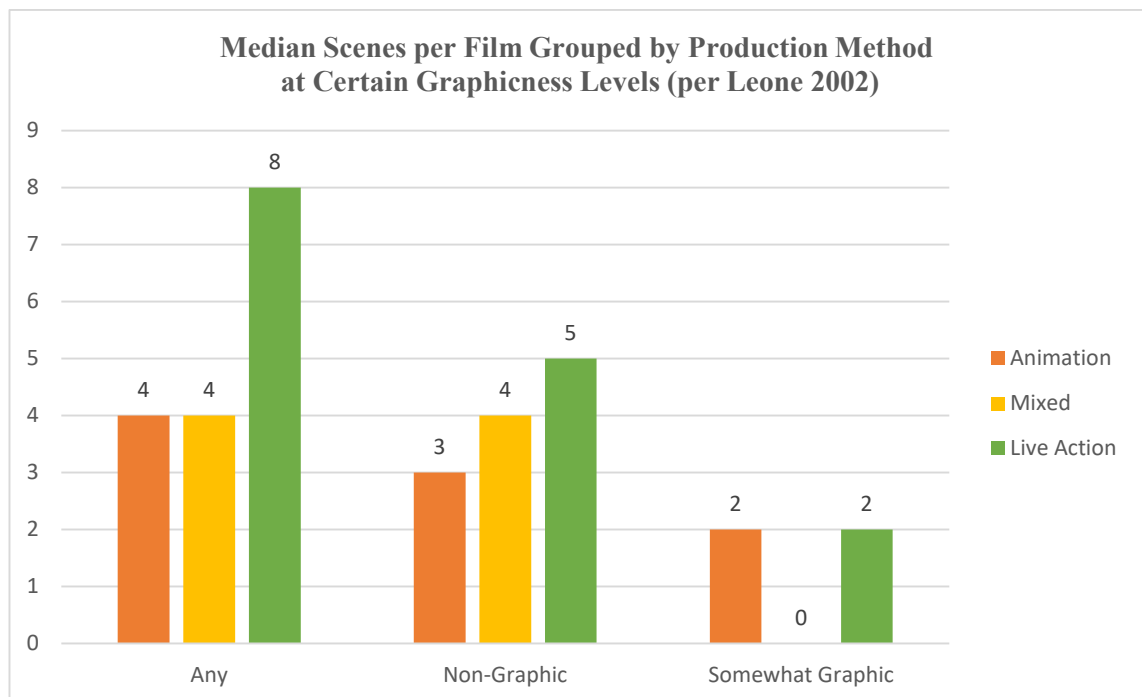


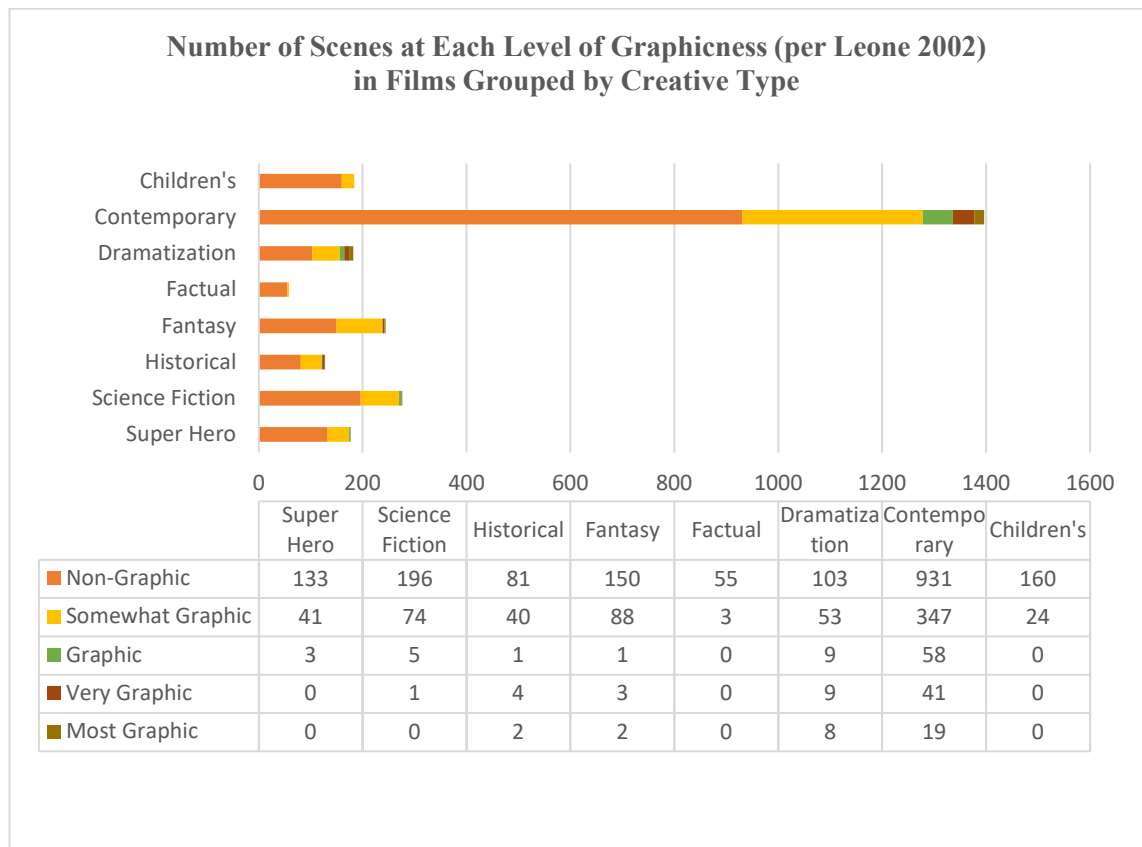
Figure 4.17

The graph in figure 4.17, above, lists the median scenes per film at any level of graphicness and at nongraphic and somewhat graphic levels, grouping films by production method. The median number of scenes per film at the graphic, very graphic, and most graphic levels are zero for each production method, accounting for their absence from the graph. It shows that median scenes per film at any level in live action films is twice as high than the median scenes per film at any level

of graphicness for animated or animated/live action films. The graph shows that the median number of scenes at the somewhat graphic level are the same (two) for both live action and fully animated films. The analysis must assess whether these differ in nature.

Live action films account for most scenes identified in which sexual themes and imagery occur, both in terms of the number and percentage share. However, the median number of scenes per film is similar for films of all production methods at the nongraphic level. As established in the section above, animated films draw larger audiences per film than live action features. Excluding animated features from analysis (as in Gunasekera, Campbell & Chapman 2005) may not be an appropriate approach to selecting films for analysis. The median number of scenes per film for animated movies is the same as that for all films studied. Excluding nongraphic content (as in Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010) also poses problems because it misrepresents the kinds of sexual themes and imagery that actually prevail.

### *Creative Type*



*Figure 4.18*

The table in figure 4.18, above, shows the eight categories of creative type (per The-Numbers). It lists, for each category of creative type, the number of scenes identified at each by level of graphicness. The stacked column chart above the table shows that contemporary fiction accounts for the largest share of scenes identified. Contemporary fiction accounts for only 30% of films studied but accounts for the largest share of scenes identified at all levels of graphicness. Dramatisations and contemporary fiction account for the largest shares of the most graphic



content. Children's, science fiction and superhero films, among the more popular creative types, feature few scenes at the more graphic levels. These results confirm the insight revealed by examining G and PG-rated films about the occurrence of sexual content.

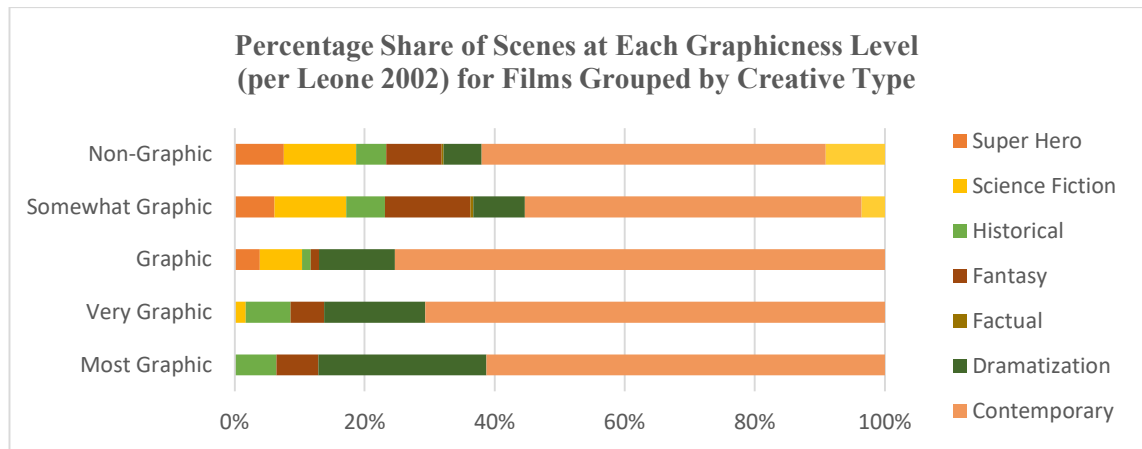


Figure 4.19

Figure 4.19, above, shows in a stacked bar chart the percentage share of scenes accounted for by films of each creative type at each level of graphicness. It shows that contemporary fiction films account for the largest share of scenes at each level of graphicness. It also shows that contemporary fiction and dramatisations account for the largest shares at the graphic, very graphic and most graphic levels. The yellow on the right at the nongraphic and somewhat graphic levels shows the small and declining share of scenes accounted for by children's fiction as graphicness increases. These results demonstrate the prevalence of sexual content at each level of graphicness by contemporary fiction and dramatisations. The most popular fare (super hero films) accounts for very little of sexual content identified.

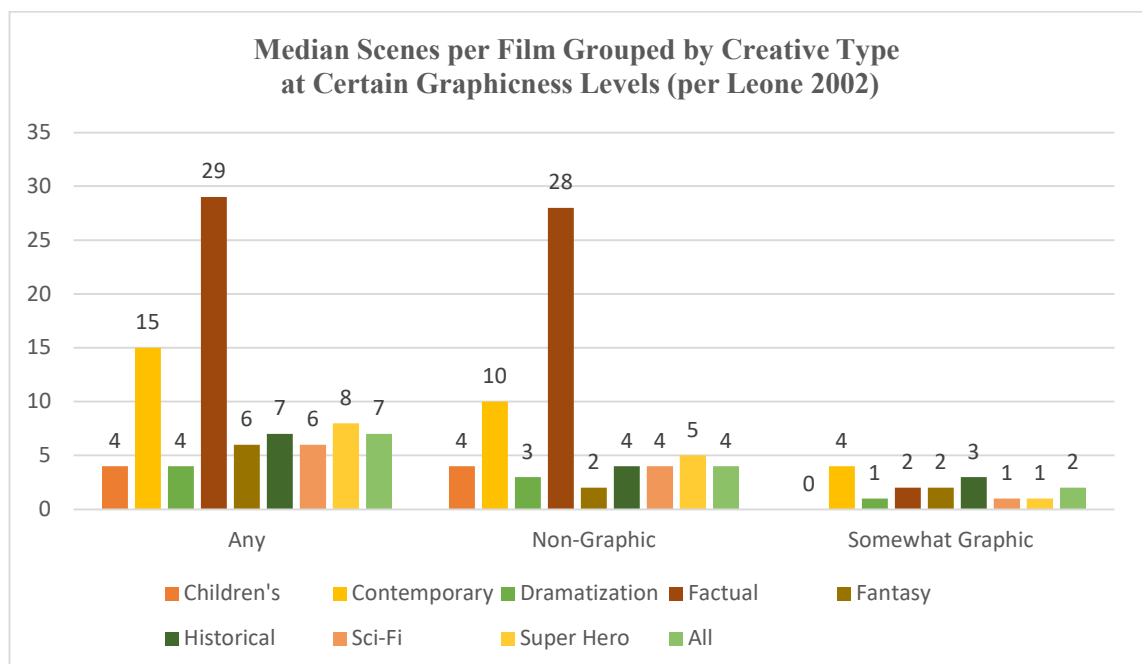


Figure 4.20

The graphs in figure 4.20, above, list the median number of scenes identified for each creative type at any level of graphicness and the non-graphic and somewhat graphic levels. The median number of scenes per film at the graphic, very graphic, and most graphic levels were zero. The median is at or higher than that for all films for factual, contemporary fiction, superhero, and historical fiction. It is lower than that for all films for fantasy, science fiction, children's fiction, and dramatisations. At the nongraphic level, the median is lower than that for all films for dramatisations and fantasy. At the somewhat graphic level, it is higher for contemporary and historical fiction. The two factual films have the highest median. The median for contemporary fiction ranks consistently high.

Creative type, like genre, denotes the kind of storytelling involved rather than the visual elements. Contemporary fiction accounts for most scenes identified at all levels of graphicness. Sexual themes and imagery may reflect current mores. Dramatisations account for a significant share of the more graphic content, and the median number of scenes is highest in factual films at the nongraphic level. The occurrence of such scenes in films based on people or events or filmed in the real world also suggests that modern attitudes and mores might prevail. The median number of scenes for children's fiction matches that for all films at the nongraphic level. Again, this indicates that sexual themes and imagery in children's fiction occurs, despite assertions (Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell 2005) that this is unlikely.

### Genre

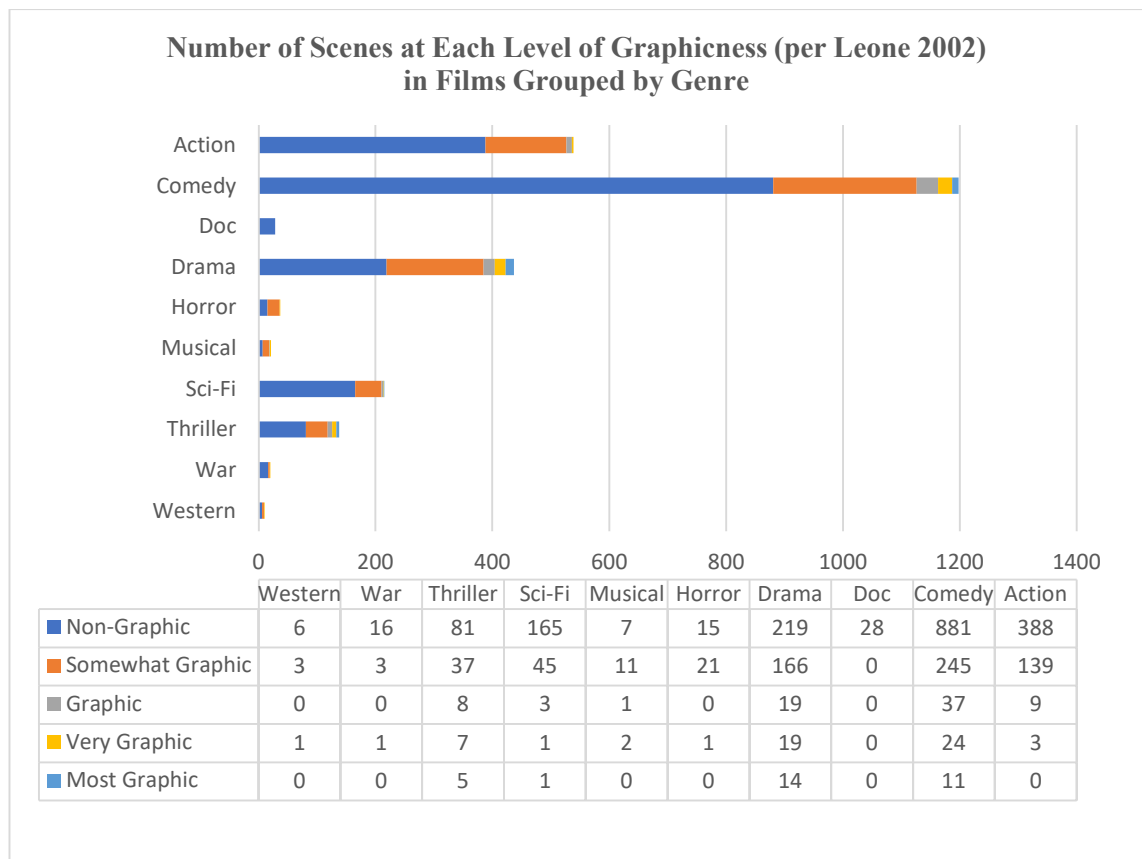


Figure 4.21

The table in figure 4.21, above, lists the number of scenes identified for films at each level of graphicness grouped by genre. As graphicness increases, the share of scenes accounted for by action/adventure films declines. The share accounted for by comedies remains significant, and the share for dramas and thrillers increases. Hollywood's classic genres – war films, westerns, musicals, and horrors – feature very few scenes at the more graphic levels. Comedies account for the greatest share of scenes identified at each level of graphicness except for the most graphic depictions, where dramas prevail. Sexual content primarily occurs in a genre where treatment of themes may be light-hearted or humorous, raising the question of what processes might manifest in such treatment and how this compares to treatment in other genres.

The table above also shows that scenes at the somewhat graphic, graphic, very graphic, and most graphic levels accounts account for almost a third of scenes in thrillers. More graphic sexual content occurs in genres where it is more likely to be treated seriously (in dramas and thrillers), rather than the more probable light-handed or humorous treatment in comedies. The bar chart below, in figure 4.22, clearly shows the significant percentage share accounted for by comedies (in light green) at each level of graphicness, the increasing share of more graphic scenes accounted for by dramas and thrillers (pale orange and darker green), and the declining share of action/adventure films (dark orange). It also shows that Hollywood's classic genres (musicals, westerns, and war films) barely register at each level.

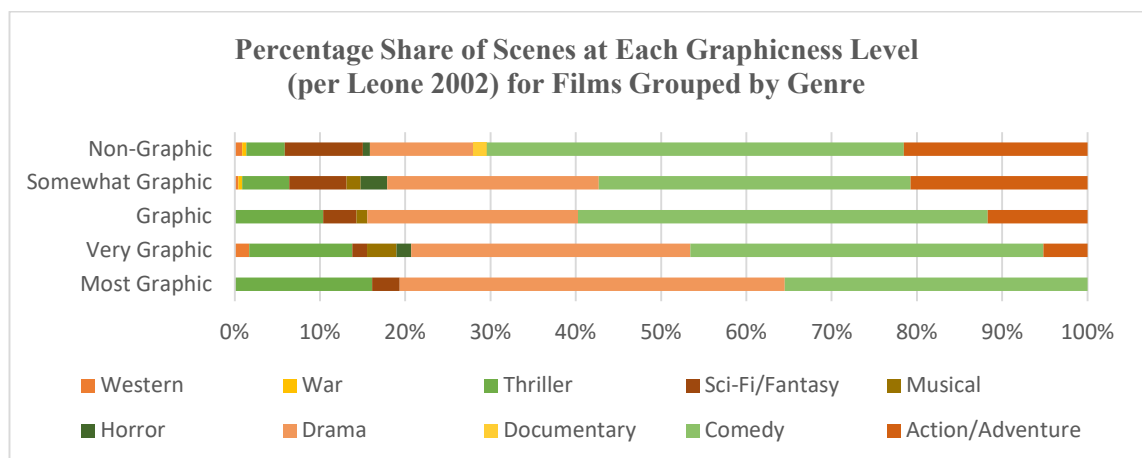


Figure 4.22

The charts in figure 4.23, below, shows the median number of scenes per film at each level of graphicness (per Leone 2002) for films studied grouped by genre. The median number of scenes per film at the graphic, very graphic and most graphic levels were zero. The median number of any scenes identified was the same or higher than that for all films for documentaries, comedies, dramas, westerns, and musicals. At the nongraphic level, the median number of scenes per film was lower than that for all films for action/adventure, sci-fantasy, musicals and horror. It was higher than the level for all films at the somewhat graphic level for comedies, dramas and westerns. The charts again demonstrates the prevalence of less graphic content across films of all genres.

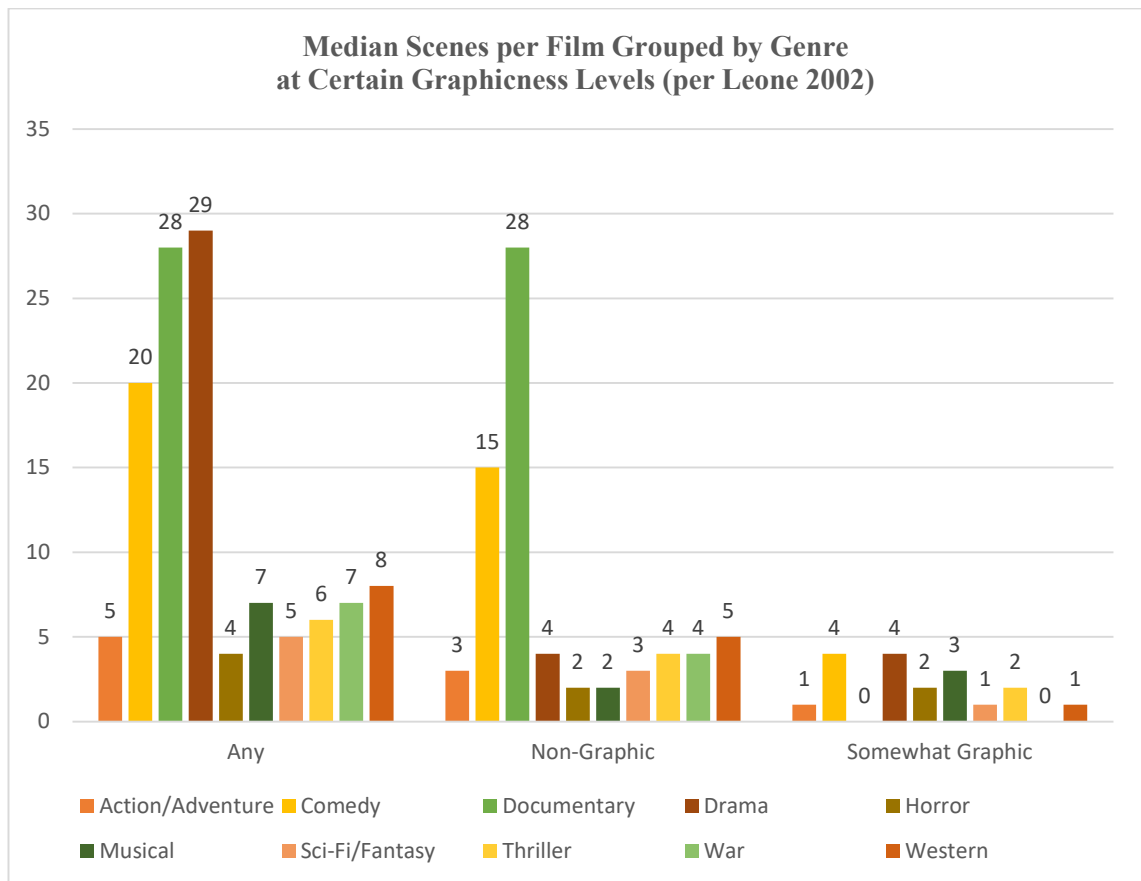


Figure 4.23

Comedies account for a greater share of scenes identified (45%) than films studied (23%). Action/adventure films, the most prevalent genre, account for a smaller share of scenes at any level of graphicness, and this declines as graphicness increases. The median number of sex scenes per film is highest for comedies, dramas, and westerns. The high incidence of scenes in comedies indicates that sexual content occurs in circumstances associated with an intention to cause people to laugh. These results indicate a need to consider elements associated with genre, such as the specifics of period and setting (westerns), or audience expectations (comedies should be funny). The single documentary features recurring scenes of teenagers admiring or expressing admiration of popstar Justin Bieber.

### Spoken References

The next two sections develop a more detailed account of the sexual themes and imagery that occur in the films studied. The first section reports findings from the analysis of dialogue recorded and transcribed, as described in the preceding chapter on methodology. These findings indicate how the analysis that follows ought to proceed, providing an indication of the extent to which certain themes occur, how categories and their properties emerge, how one might group, reassemble and reintegrate these categories and properties, and how the analysis that follows proceeds to generating theory in the next chapter. It is also necessary to consider findings on spoken sexual references in relation to findings on sexual acts reported in the next section. The report first details results relating to different film categories.

Before doing so, it is necessary to recap the four basic categories that emerged in the open coding process, as reported in the preceding chapter on methodology. The first category was the nature of the sexual activity referred to, whether it alluded to sexual activity between humans and animals (bestiality), between adult humans and minors (paedophilia), or between humans of the same, opposite or trans genders. The second category was the nature of the relationship between the characters speaking, whether they were married, friends, colleagues, et cetera. The third category concerns categorisation of dialogue as to the kind of statement made (whether insult, complaint, threat, etc.). The final category relates to the specific sexual act or topic referred to. These findings guide the qualitative analysis of sexual discourse.

Spoken references to sex occur in dialogue spoken between characters, on-or off-screen, voice-over narration and song lyrics. There were 1,867 scenes featuring such references. These scenes occurred in 227 films (91%). Only 23 films (9%) featured no such scenes. These findings indicate the prevalence of spoken references to sexual themes or topics, with at least one reference occurring in more than 90% of films studied. Figure 4.24, below, shows the number of scenes featuring spoken sexual references on the horizontal axis and the number of films featuring that number of scenes along the vertical axis. The scatter chart shows the distribution of scenes per film. The median number of scenes per film was four. This provides a benchmark for comparison of types of films within the whole sample.

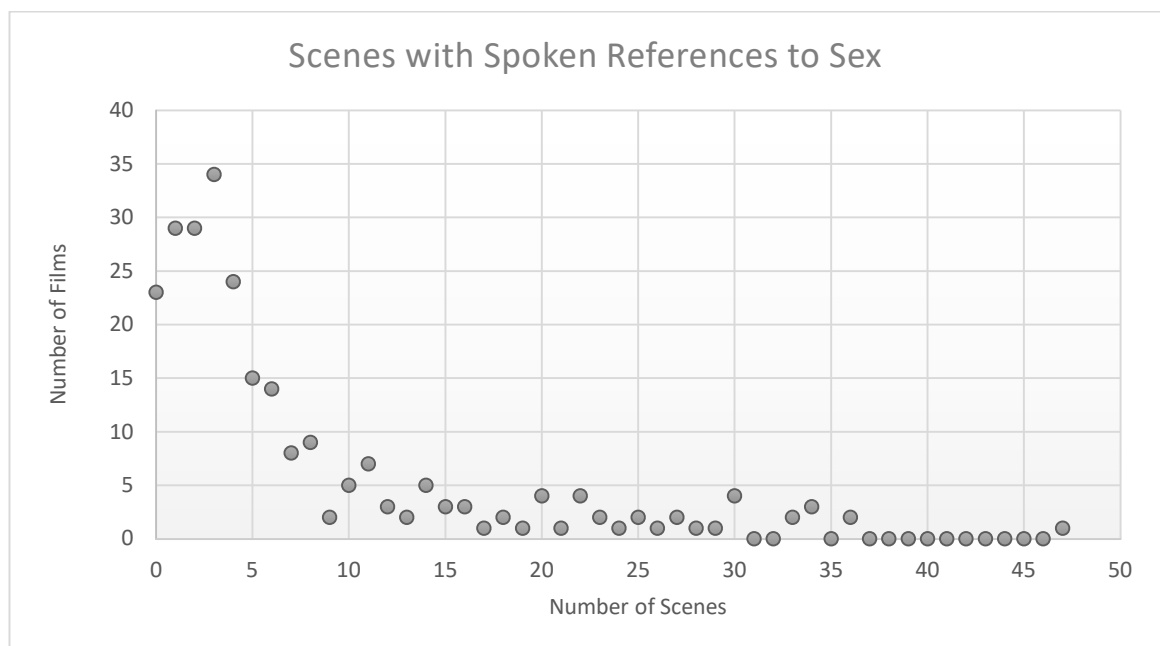


Figure 4.24

### ***MPAA Classification***

Figure 4.25, below, displays for films of each MPAA classification in the dark blue column on the left the percentage share of films studied and, in the middle grey column, the percentage share of scenes featuring spoken references to sex that occur in films of this classification. It also displays in light blue the median scenes per film for each classification. Films rated R accounted

for the greatest share of scenes in which spoken references to sexual themes occurred. Films rated R had the highest median number of such scenes per film. Films rated G accounted for both the smallest share of films studied and scenes featuring spoken references. However, as shown in figure 4.25, the median is higher for films rated G than for films rated PG.

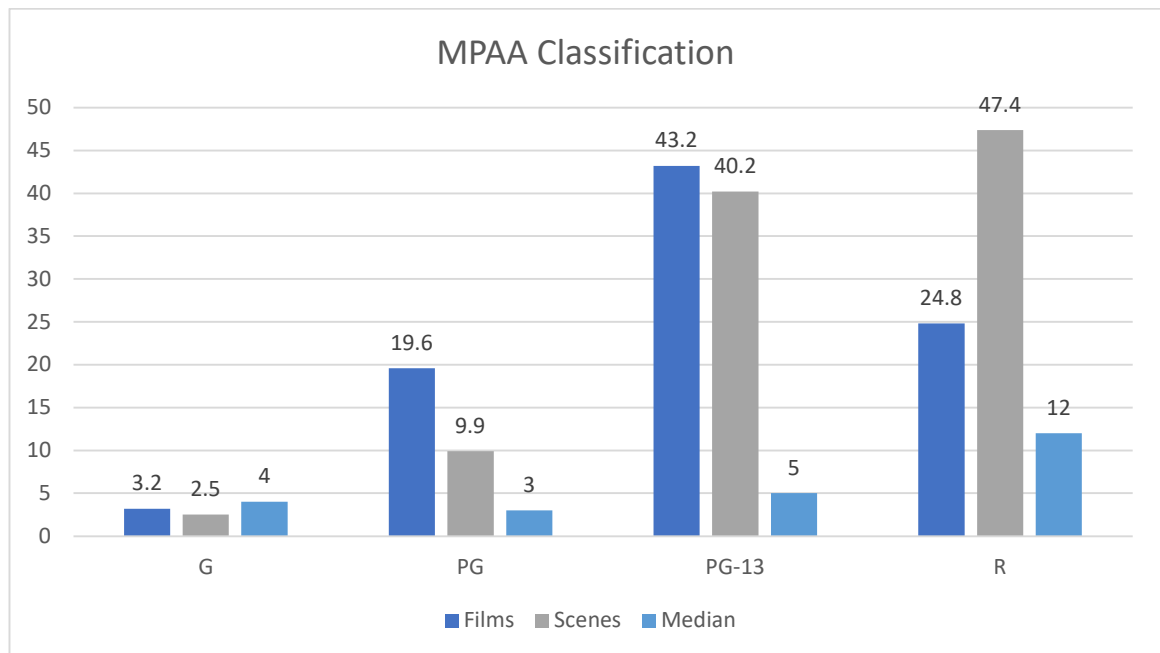


Figure 4.25

This analysis establishes that, although they account for less than a quarter of films studied, films rated R account for almost half of scenes featuring spoken references to sex. Films rated PG-13, which account for just under half of films studied, account for 40% of scenes featuring spoken references to sex. Although films rated G account for both the smallest share of films studied and scenes in which spoken references to sex occur, the median number of scenes per film is higher than films rated PG. These significant findings establish that spoken references to sexual themes and topics occurs most frequently in films classified as suitable for adult viewing but that there is a significant occurrence of such spoken references in films classified as suitable for younger viewers.

### Genre

Genre indicates the type of film, and the properties of genres may indicate the nature of spoken references to sex. Westerns may feature references reflecting attitudes that typify the setting in frontier USA during and after the American Civil War (1860-1865). Comedies may feature humorous or light-hearted references intended to cause amusement. Dramas may feature more serious treatments of sexual topics. Figure 4.26, below, displays the percentage share of films studied and scenes featuring spoken references to sex occurring in films by genre. Comedies accounted for more than half of such scenes. The chart also shows that the share of scenes in which spoken references to sex for comedies far exceeds the share of films studied. Dramas also account for a greater share of scenes than films studied.

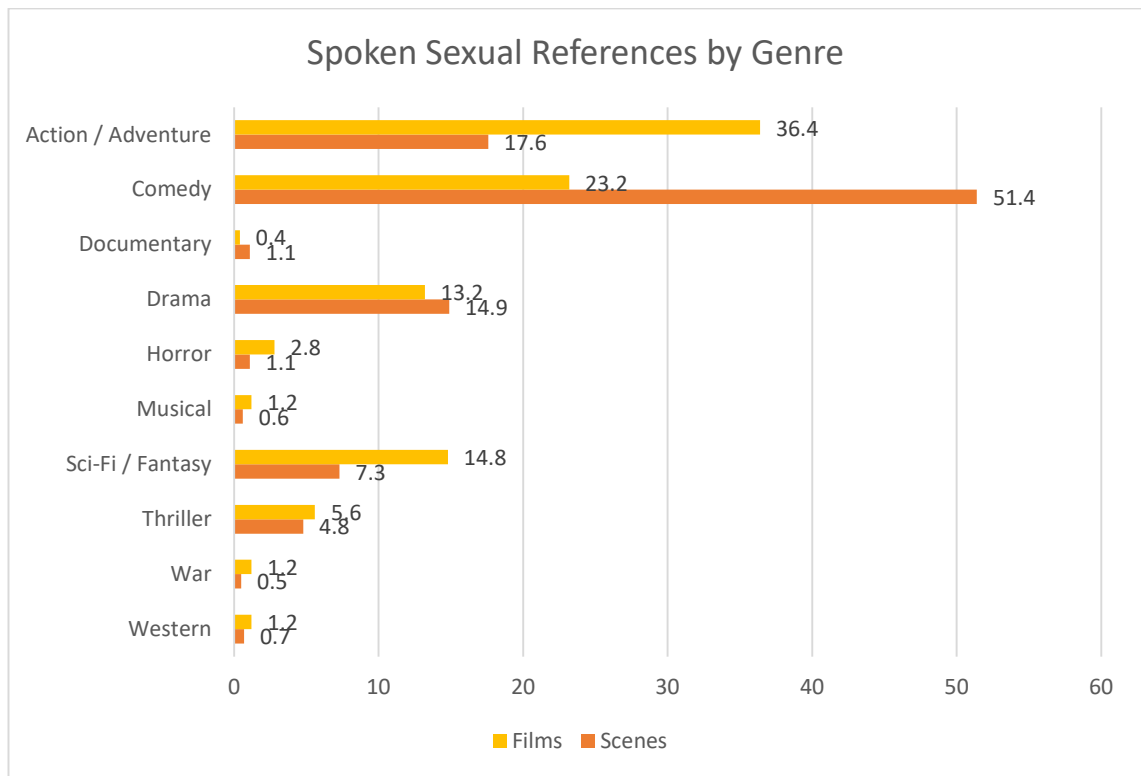


Figure 4.26

Figure 4.27, below, displays the median number of scenes featuring spoken sexual references occurring in films of each genre. The single documentary had the highest median, but this constitutes just 1.1% of scenes identified. The median for comedies was next highest, followed by drama. The median for all other genres was at or less than that for all films studied (four). More than half (51.4%) of scenes featuring spoken sexual references occur in comedies, even though they constitute less than a quarter of films studied. Genre films (horror, musicals, westerns) account for a smaller share of scenes featuring spoken sexual references than films studied. The prevalence of spoken sexual references in comedies indicates that humorous or light-hearted treatment of sexual topics in a manner intended to cause amusement.

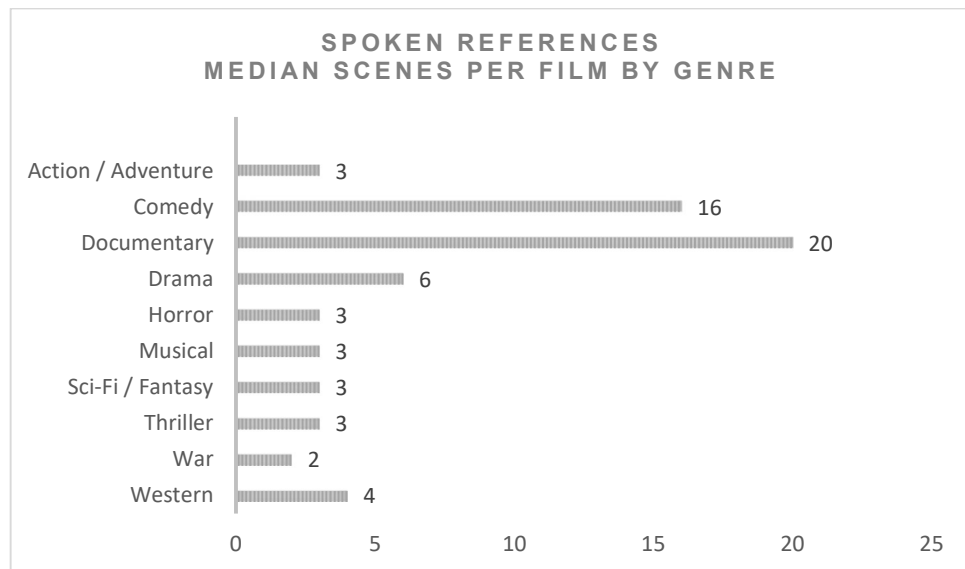


Figure 4.27

### *Creative Type*

Creative type indicates the nature of the story told. Contemporary fiction describes stories set in the current period, reflecting present-day attitudes and concerns. Historical fiction refers to an earlier period, whether centuries or decades previous, reflecting older, traditional or outdated attitudes. Fiction refers to invented events. The depiction of events that actually happened may feature the actual players (factual) or dramatic interpretation (dramatisation). These categories of creative type tend to be more realistic or naturalistic, lacking the unrealistic aspects that characterize fantasy, superhero, children's and science fiction (talking animals, superpowers, technology not yet existing). As Nichols (1981:76) puts it, they "represent recognizable social situations and character types with plausible motives and behaviour". To what extent do spoken references to sexual themes occur in these categories of creative type?



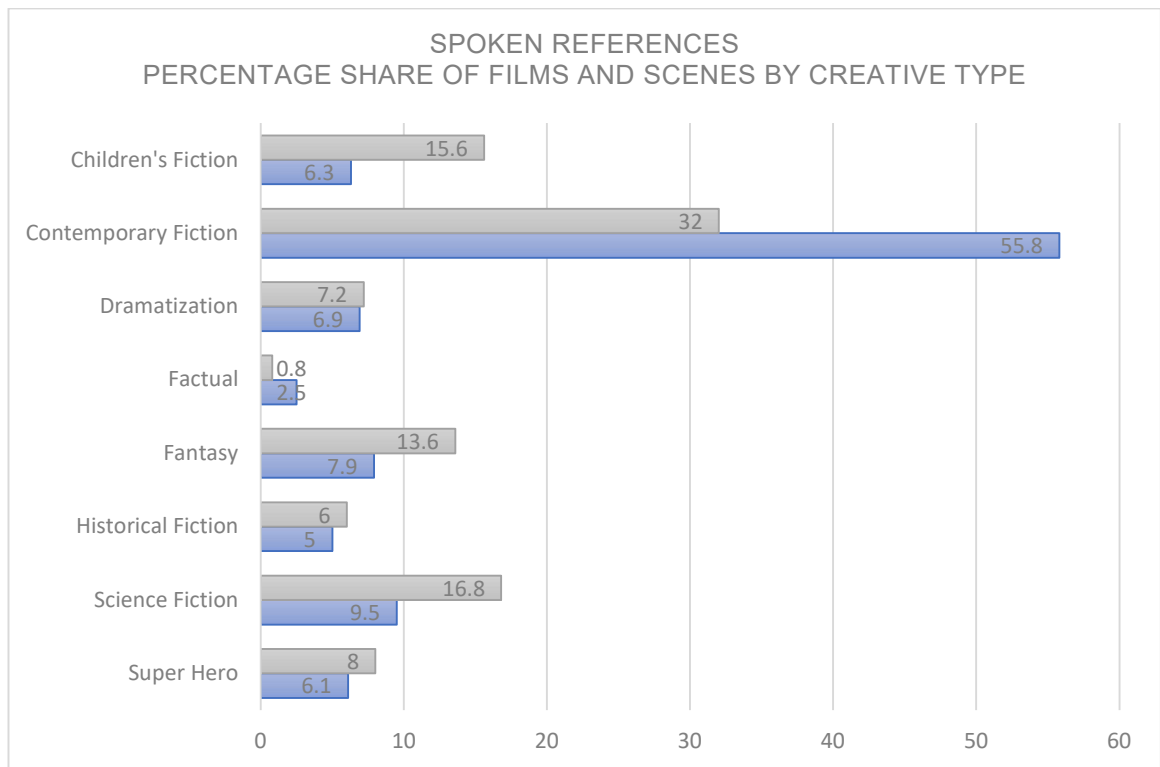


Figure 4.28

Figure 4.28, above, displays the percentage share of films studied (in grey) and scenes featuring spoken references to sex (in blue) in films of each creative type. The greatest share of such scenes occurs in contemporary fiction films. Children's fiction accounts for a far smaller share of scenes featuring spoken sexual references than films studied. The graph below shows the median number of scenes featuring spoken references in film by creative type. The highest median occurs in factual films, but these constitute less than 1% of films studied and only 2.5% of scenes identified. The next highest median occurs in contemporary fiction. Films with more naturalistic or realistic worlds (contemporary and historical fiction, dramatisations, and factual film) account for more than 70% of scenes featuring spoken sexual references.

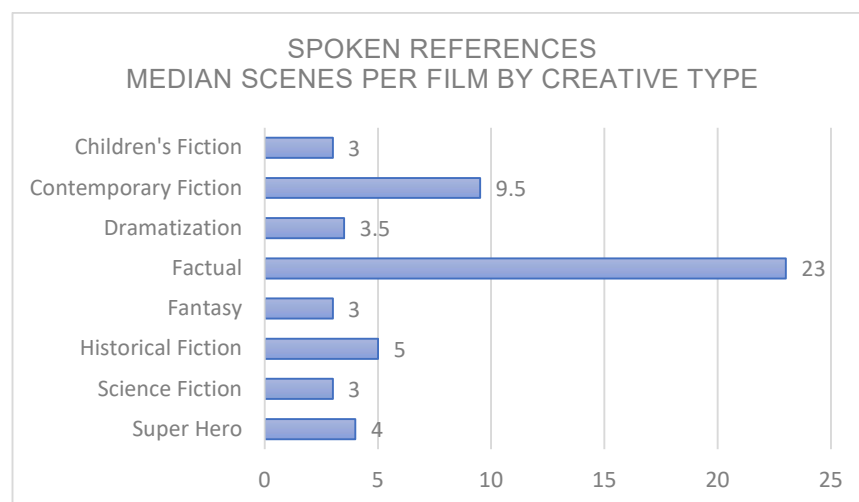


Figure 4.29

An overview of spoken sexual references in the most popular films on release between 2011 and

2015 emerges. References to sexual themes occur most frequently in comedies (implying humorous circumstances or light-hearted treatment), in films rated suitable for adults (implying explicitness and possible impropriety), and in contemporary fiction (implying a reflection or concern with current cultural mores and attitudes to sexual subjects). However, references, though occurring with varying frequency, occur in films of all MPAA classification, genre and creative type, and constant comparative analysis of all references constitutes the substance of this project. This report now moves into more detail in identifying the kinds of sexual themes and topics occur and the relationships between characters who engage in this discourse, though the reporting remains quantitative at this stage.

### ***Sexualities***

This section reports on findings that emerged from the coding, which constitutes the first phase of generating a substantive theory based on empirical observation in grounded theory. Four initial categories emerged: whether the sexual activity occurred between a human and an animal, an adult and a minor, a human of the same or opposite gender; the nature of the relationship between the speaking characters; the kind of statement made; and the specific sexual act referred to which reference is made. This section reports on the quantitative aspects of these findings. This reporting maps out the topics and relationships around which the discourse on sex occurs in recent popular film. Identifying and analysing the processes that operate within this discourse constitutes the subject of discussion in the next chapter.

### **Bestiality**

Eleven scenes featured spoken references to sexual activity between humans and animals. These scenes account for 0.6% of scenes featuring spoken references to sex. The eleven scenes occur in nine films (3.6% of films studied). These nine films comprise, by MPAA classification, four films rated PG, two rated PG-13, and three rated R; or, by genre, seven comedies and two action/adventure films; or, by creative type, five contemporary fiction, two children's fiction, one fantasy and one historical fiction. The occurrence of references to bestiality in comedies and action/adventure indicates humorous treatment intended to cause amusement. This contrasts greatly with the emphasis on bestiality as transgressive in horror films (Krzywinska 2006). These findings establish that almost all (99.4%) spoken references to sexual activity allude to sexual activity between humans.

### **Paedophilia**

Nineteen scenes featured references to sexual activity between an adult and a minor (a character appearing to be aged younger than eighteen years). These account for 1% of scenes featuring spoken references to sex. The scenes occur in sixteen films (6% of those studied), which comprise, by MPAA classification, one rated PG, five rated PG-13, and ten rated R; or, by genre, ten comedies, two dramas, and one horror, musical, thriller and western; or, by creative type, twelve

contemporary fiction, three fantasy, and one historical fiction. While the prevalence of references in comedies implies humorous treatment intended, the occurrence in other genres indicates more serious allusions to sexual activity between adults and minors. These allusions are rare. Almost all (99%) spoken references allude to sexual activity between adults.

### Queer Sexualities

SEXUALITY	FILMS	%	SCENES	%
BISEXUAL	4	1.6	6	0.3
GAY	64	27	156	8.4
TRANS	10	4	16	0.9
LESBIANISM	18	7	24	1.3

Table 4.14

There were 215 scenes featuring spoken references to sexual activity involving sexual practices that are not heterosexual. These scenes account for 12% of scenes featuring spoken sexual references. They occur in 78 films (31% of films studied). More than two-thirds of films exclude any reference to sexuality other than heterosexuality. The number of scenes per film ranged from one (in 33 films) to 14 (in one film, *Get Hard*). The average number of scenes per film was three, and the median was two. Table 4.14, above, lists for each sexuality the number and percentage share of films studied in which spoken references to queer sexuality occur, the number of such scenes so occurring, and the percentage share of scenes featuring any spoken references to sex ( $n = 1,867$ ).

MPAA	FILMS	SCENES	% SHARE	MEDIAN
G	0	0	0	0
PG	7	8	3.7	1
PG-13	32	64	29.5	2
R	39	145	66.8	3

Table 4.15

Table 4.15, above, shows for each MPAA classification the number of films featuring spoken references to queer sexuality, the number of such scenes so occurring, the median number of such scenes per film, and the percentage share of such scenes. Films rated R account for just under 70% of spoken references to queer sexuality. Although they constitute the largest cohort of films studied, films rated PG-13 account for 30% of scenes in which spoken references to queer sexuality occur. Films rated G feature no spoken references to queer sexuality. These results imply that the MPAA classification system regards references to queer sexuality as unsuitable for children. These findings establish that exclusion as the primary mode of representation with regard to sexual practices and identities that are not heterosexual.

CREATIVE TYPE	FILMS	SCENES	% SHARE	MEDIAN
CHILDREN'S	4	4	2	1
CONTEMPORARY	44	138	64	2
DRAMATISATION	8	25	12	3
FACTUAL	1	1	0	1
FANTASY	5	15	7	1
HISTORICAL	6	9	4	2
SCIENCE FICTION	5	17	8	2
SUPER HERO	5	7	3	1

Table 4.16

Table 4.16, above, shows for each creative type the number of films featuring spoken references to queer sexuality, the number of such scenes occurring, the percentage share of such scenes, and the median number of such scenes per film. Contemporary fiction accounted for both the greatest percentage share of such scenes. Table 4.17, below, displays for each genre the number of films featuring spoken references to queer sexuality, the number of such scenes occurring, the percentage share of such scenes, and the median scenes per film. Comedies account for both the largest share of scenes featuring references to queer sexuality, accounting for two-thirds of such scenes. These findings indicate that the discourse on non-heterosexual practices and identities ought to reflect contemporary mores but within humorous and light-hearted treatment.

GENRE	FILMS	SCENES	% SHARE	MEDIAN
ACTION/ADVENTURE	14	17	8	1
COMEDY	37	143	66	3
DRAMA	12	30	14	2
HORROR	1	1	0	1
SCI-FI / FANTASY	5	10	5	2
THRILLER	7	12	6	1
WESTERN	2	3	1	2

Table 4.17

### Heterosexuality

MPAA	FILMS	SCENES	% SHARE	MEDIAN
G	8	47	2.9	4
PG	49	172	10.5	3
PG-13	109	687	41.9	4
R	61	732	44.7	9

Table 4.18

Spoken references to sex between characters of opposite gender occurred in 1,639 scenes, accounting for 88% of all scenes featuring any spoken reference. These occurred in 225 films (90% of those studied). The number of scenes per film ranges from one (in 30 films) to 39 (in *The*

*Wolf of Wall Street*). The average number of scenes per film was seven; the median was four. Table 4.22, above, lists for each MPAA classification the number of films featuring scenes with such spoken references to sexual activity, the number and percentage share of such scenes occurring, and the median number of scenes per film. Films rated R accounted for the largest share and the highest median. The median for films rated G was higher than for film rated PG.

CREATIVE TYPE	FILMS	SCENES	% SHARE	MEDIAN
CHILDREN'S	33	113	6.9	3
CONTEMPORARY	77	896	54.7	8
DRAMATISATION	15	103	6.3	2
FACTUAL	2	45	2.7	23
FANTASY	29	130	7.9	3
HISTORICAL	14	82	5.0	5
SCIENCE FICTION	37	161	9.8	3
SUPERHERO	20	108	6.6	4

Table 4.19

Table 4.19, above, lists for each creative type the number of films featuring scenes in which spoken references to sex between characters of opposite gender occurs, the number and percentage share of such scenes occurring, and the median number of scenes per film. Contemporary fiction accounts for more than half of such scenes. The highest median was for factual films, but these constitute less than 3% of all such scenes identified. Table 4.20, below, lists for each genre the number of films featuring scenes in which spoken references to sexual activity between characters of opposite gender occurs, the number and percentage share of such scenes, and the median number of such scenes per film. Comedies account for almost half of such scenes and have the second highest median.

GENRE	FILMS	SCENES	% SHARE	MEDIAN
ACTION/ADVENTURE	83	311	19	3
COMEDY	58	808	49.3	12
DOCUMENTARY	1	20	1.2	20
DRAMA	29	247	15.1	6
HORROR	6	18	1.1	3
MUSICAL	3	12	0.7	3
SCI-FI / FANTASY	29	126	7.7	3
THRILLER	12	77	4.7	3
WAR	3	8	0.5	2
WESTERN	3	11	0.7	4

Table 4.20

### *Character Relationships*

How were the characters speaking about sex related to one another? Appendix B lists and defines the 32 initial categories of relationship identified. Seven groups emerged based on the closeness and circumstances of the relationship: close personal, family, friends and acquaintances, work, strangers, alone and narration. Close personal refers to relationships in which sexual activity occurs or where the characters appear open to it occurring. These relationships include characters who have recently met, are dating, engaged, married, separated, divorced or reunited. Family relationships refer to relations through blood or marriage (excluding spouse), so it includes siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, and cousins. Friends and acquaintances includes characters who know one another but are not likely to be open to sexual activity. Work refers to relationships that occur in the workplace (colleagues) or where one character is carrying out duties as part of his or her profession. Strangers refers to characters who do not know one another. The results of this analysis indicate that popular films feature a significant discourse on sex outside close personal relationships. This constitutes a major finding into cinematic sexual representation that merits further analysis.

Table 4.21, below, displays for each relationship group the number and percentage share of scenes in which spoken sexual references occur. References occurring between characters in a working relationship constitute almost a third. References between friends and acquaintances and those by characters in close personal relationships account for around a quarter each. References between family members account for 7.8%. These results establish that most spoken references to sexual themes or topics occur outside close personal relationships with references occurring between colleagues or professionals, friends and acquaintances, and non-spousal family members accounting for almost 70%. This establishes that spoken references to sexual themes constitute a significant discourse outside close personal relationships, and the nature of this discourse requires

analysis. This analysis proceeds through the constant comparative analysis associated with grounded theory as well as the theoretical coding. This marks the shift from considering the quantitative aspects of this findings to the more qualitative analysis that these quantitative insights invite. The identification of processes that operate in this discourse on sex outside of close personal relationships forms the subject of the next section. What forms do spoken references to sexual activity in film take?

RELATIONSHIP	SCENES	%
ALONE	14	0.7
NARRATION	36	1.9
CLOSE PERSONAL	448	24.0
FAMILY	146	7.8
FRIENDS & ACQUAINTANCES	513	27.5
STRANGERS	97	5.2
WORK	613	32.8

Table 4.21

### *Dialogue Categories & Groups*

Spoken references to sex take a variety of forms. As noted in the literature review, Pardun (2002) emphasised that “to get to the point of coitus, other things typically must happen first” and that we must ask “how are those ‘other things’ before coitus portrayed in film?” These “other things” include characters admiring or complimenting another characters’ appearance or attractiveness, flirting with one another, propositioning or even offering a reward for the performance of a sexual act. Appendix C lists and defines the 72 initial categories of spoken reference identified. These categories arise from an analysis of the conditions in which the statement is spoken and a formulation of a description in terms of a verb or action to capture the essential process operating around the sexual references.

Table 4.22, below, displays each category, the number of scenes in which the category occurs, and the percentage share of scenes accounted for by these scenes. Only one type (asking) accounted for more than 10%. Four further types (admiring, disclosing, propositioning and insulting) accounted for more than 5%. Two defining concepts emerged from grouping the 72 categories: discipline and disclosure. Discipline occurs where characters express approval or disapproval of another character’s behaviour or intend to influence how others think or behave in relation to sexual matters. Disclosure occurs where characters disclose information about what how they think or feel about sexual matters or what they have done. The substantive analysis in this project involves analysing the discourse on sexual identity and practices as processes of discipline and disclosure.

CATEGORY	#	%	CATEGORY	#	%	CATEGORY	#	%
ASK	186	10.0	DISCUSS	20	1.1	TATTLE	5	0.3
ADMIRE	180	9.6	REQUEST	20	1.1	APPRECIATE	4	0.2
DISCLOSE	166	8.9	EXCLAIM	14	0.7	DECLARE	4	0.2
PROPOSITION	107	5.7	TAUNT	13	0.7	JEER	4	0.2
INSULT	95	5.1	FLIRT	13	0.7	PERMIT	4	0.2
INSINUATE	81	4.3	ASSERT	12	0.6	REMONSTRATE	4	0.2
CONFESS	67	3.6	THREATEN	12	0.6	DESCRIBE	3	0.2
ADVISE	63	3.4	DIRTY TALK	12	0.6	LIE	3	0.2
SCORN	58	3.1	EXPLAIN	11	0.6	REPROACH	3	0.2
JOKE	50	2.7	REMARK	11	0.6	TEACH	2	0.1
BRAG	49	2.6	WARN	10	0.5	PERFORM	2	0.1
DISAPPROVE	48	2.6	PROMISE	9	0.5	FANTASIZE	2	0.1
RESIST	44	2.4	REMINISCE	8	0.4	FORGET	2	0.1
INSTRUCT	43	2.3	DISPARAGE	8	0.4	SWOON	2	0.1
SUGGEST	41	2.2	REASSURE	8	0.4	APPROVE	1	0.1
METAPHOR	41	2.2	LYRICS	8	0.4	BOND	1	0.1
PRAISE	40	2.1	DREAD	7	0.4	ENVY	1	0.1
COMPLAIN	37	2.0	REPORT	7	0.4	TOLERATE	1	0.1
COMPLIMENT	35	1.9	ERR	6	0.3	DOUBT	1	0.1
REBUKE	34	1.8	APOLOGIZE	6	0.3	ACCUSE	1	0.1
DESIRE	30	1.6	PREFER	5	0.3	INVITE	1	0.1
ENCOURAGE	29	1.6	REGRET	5	0.3	PERSUADE	1	0.1
INFORM	27	1.4	CONFRONT	5	0.3	RESTRAIN	1	0.1
DENY	27	1.4	HARASS	5	0.3	ROLE PLAY	1	0.1

Table 4.22

Spoken references to sex occur in circumstances in which the reference implicitly refers to sexual themes or subjects. These implicit references are among the “other things” that Pardun (2002) emphasises are part of events that occur before coitus happens. However, this section deals with explicit references to sexual acts, the kinds of behaviour that constitute the graphic displays (per Leone 2002), the depiction of which form the subject matter of the next section. There were 1,143 scenes featuring spoken explicit references to sexual behaviour, initially coded with 75 categories of sexual behaviour. Appendix D lists the definitions of each category. Table 4.23, below, lists each category of behaviour, the number of scenes in which it occurs, and the percentage share of the 1,143 scenes for which it accounts.



# Chapter 4: Findings

BEHAVIOUR	#	%	BEHAVIOUR	#	%	BEHAVIOUR	#	%
ABORTION	2	0.2	FONDLING	10	0.9	PORNOGRAPHY	32	2.8
ANAL STIMULATION	2	0.2	FOOD	1	0.1	PREGNANCY	2	0.2
ANILINGUS	1	0.1	FOOT FETISH	1	0.1	PROSTITUTION	75	6.6
AROUSAL	3	0.3	FOREPLAY	1	0.1	RAPE	15	1.3
BDSM	22	1.9	GROPING	22	1.9	RAPE (ANAL)	12	1.0
BESTIALITY	1	0.1	GROUP SEX	1	0.1	REPRODUCTION	35	3.1
CELIBACY	1	0.1	HARASSMENT	7	0.6	ROLE PLAY	1	0.1
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE	11	1.0	HORNINESS	1	0.1	SAFE SEX	3	0.3
COCK BLOCKING	5	0.4	HUGGING	1	0.1	SEDUCTION	3	0.3
CONTRACEPTION	5	0.4	IMPOTENCE	3	0.3	SEX TALK	1	0.1
CUDDLING	1	0.1	INCEST	7	0.6	SEX TAPE	2	0.2
CUNNILINGUS	11	1.0	INFERTILITY	1	0.1	SEXTING	8	0.7
DANCING	3	0.3	INFIDELITY	57	5.0	SEXUAL ASSAULT	5	0.4
DIGITAL PENETRATION	13	1.1	INTERCOURSE	1	0.1	SEXUAL ENHANCEMENT	5	0.4
DIRTY TALK	3	0.3	INTERCOURSE (ANAL)	28	2.4	SPANKING	1	0.1
DISROBING	9	0.8	INTERCOURSE (VAGINAL)	277	24.2	STI	10	0.9
DRY HUMMING	3	0.3	INTERRACIAL INTERCOURSE	2	0.2	STRIPPING	50	4.4
EJACULATION	6	0.5	KISSING	126	11.0	THREESOME	12	1.0
ERECTION	28	2.4	LUBRICATION	2	0.2	TORTURE	1	0.1
EXPOSURE	9	0.8	MASSAGE	1	0.1	TOUCHING	1	0.1
FAMILY PLANNING	1	0.1	MASTURBATION	57	5.0	VASECTOMY	1	0.1
FELLATIO	84	7.3	NUDITY	4	0.3	VIRGINITY	8	0.7
FERTILITY	1	0.1	ORGASM	2	0.2	VOYEURISM	11	1.0
FETISH	1	0.1	ORGY	1	0.1	WATER SPORTS	1	0.1
FLIRTING	5	0.4	POLE DANCING	2	0.2	WET DREAM	1	0.1

Table 4.23

Twelve groups emerged from arranging categories by theme. Table 4.24, below, lists for each of the twelve groups identified the number of scenes that occur and the percentage share of scenes occurring. It shows that explicit references to intercourse account for more than a quarter of these. References to foreplay, taken together, account for 35%, with just slightly more references to non-genital foreplay. References to commercial sex and pornography account for 15% of explicit references. These findings indicate the extent to which characters speak directly about the kind of behaviours that are also depicted, and analysis of sexual behaviour in film must consider both how characters speak about them as well as how filmmakers depict them, particularly within the context of the broader processes of discipline and disclosure.

GROUP	#	%	GROUP	#	%
INTERCOURSE	318	28	FAMILY PLANNING & REPRODUCTION	48	4
FOREPLAY (NON-GENITAL)	201	18	FETISH	30	3
FOREPLAY (ANAL/GENITAL)	196	17	SEXUAL HEALTH	21	2
COMMERCIAL SEX & PORNOGRAPHY	169	15	DESIRE	16	1
RELATIONSHIPS	62	5	GROUP SEX	14	1
SEXUAL CRIME	59	5	ABSTINENCE & VIRGINITY	9	1

Table 4.24

### *The Discursive Framework*

This section established that spoken references are prevalent within film, with at least one scene occurring in 91% of films studied. Only 9% of films featured no such scenes. Spoken references to sexual themes occur most prevalently in films rated R, but they occur more frequently in films rated G than in films rated PG. They also occur more frequently in comedies, which account for more than half of such scenes. This indicates that references may frequently be humorous, light-hearted and intended to cause amusement. Around 70% of them occur in films of a more realistic or naturalistic creative type, that is, contemporary and historical fiction, dramatisations and factual films, implying that sexual discourse reflects contemporary cultural mores and attitudes to sexual topics. What discourse is taking place?

The findings outlined here establish that the discourse primarily centres on heterosexual practices. Exclusion emerges as the primary mode of representation with regard to non-heterosexual identity and practices, but there is some discourse. Who speaks? What do they say? The processes within which this discourse takes place are disciplinary and disclosive. Characters reveal their thoughts, feelings and attitudes to their intimate physical experiences. Though relating to intimate and private experiences, the discourse occurs primarily between characters who work together, are friends or family members other than spouses. The discourse involves characters approving or disapproving of other characters' behaviour, providing advice, instruction, warnings and threats, and using insults, taunts and jeering to express such (dis)approval. This sketch provides the discursive framework within which to consider the portrayal of sex.

### **Depictions**

This section reports findings on the depiction of sexual acts as identified in scenes per the methodology above. It commences with an overview of the number of scenes identified, the number of films in which these occurred, and related findings. It follows with a breakdown by MPAA classification, genre, and creative type. It then reports on findings related to sexual activity between humans and animals, and between humans by gender. The section after that reports on graphicness. It then details the sexual acts depicted, setting out which acts occur at each level of graphicness. The final section reports on the relationships between characters engaged in sexual acts depicted. This section concludes with an overview of the quantitative findings, setting up the

chapter that analyses and discusses these findings.

There were 1,224 scenes featuring the depiction of a sexual act. These occurred in 221 of the 250 films studied (88.4%). Only 29 films (11.6%) featured no such scenes. The number of such scenes per film ranged from one (in 33 films) to 33 (in *The Wolf of Wall Street*). The average number of scenes per film was five, and the median, thought to be more representative, was four. The median for all films provides a useful comparator when analysing films by type. These results provide the main comparators when it comes to assessing how the results here compare with those established in existing scholarship. Considering depictions in films grouped by MPAA classification, creative type and genre provides a more detailed picture of how popular films represent sex.

### ***MPAA Classification***

Table 4.25, below, lists for each MPAA classification the number and percentage share of films featuring scenes in which depictions of sexual acts occur, the number and percentage share of such scenes, and the median number of such scenes per film. Films rated PG-13 accounted for the largest share of such scenes. Films rated R, although accounting for less than a quarter of films studied, account for over 40% of scenes featuring the depiction of a sexual act. Films rated R also have the highest median. The median for films rated G is higher than that for films rated PG, but scenes occurring in G-rated films constitute only 2.5% of such scenes, whereas films rated PG account for 13%. Portrayals of physical intimacy occur in films rated G.

<b>MPAA</b>	<b>FILMS</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SCENES</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>MEDIAN</b>
G	8	3.2	30	2.5	4
PG	48	19.2	163	13.3	3
PG-13	105	42.0	529	43.2	4
R	60	24.0	502	41.0	6

*Table 4.25*

How do the results on portrayals compare with those on spoken references? R-rated films accounted for the largest share of and highest median for spoken sexual references, but films rated PG-13 account for the largest share of depictions of sex acts. The median for spoken sexual references is twice as high for R-rated films than the median for depiction of acts. The median for both spoken references and acts shown for films rated G and PG are the same, while the median for spoken references is slightly higher for films rated PG-13. This establishes that, generally, there are more spoken references to sexual themes and topics than are depictions. This raises questions about concentrating solely on visual portrayals of physical intimacy, highlighting the need to explore the discourse.

### ***Genre***

Table 4.26, below, displays for each genre the number of films studied featuring depictions of sexual acts, the percentage share of films studied accounted for by these films, the number and

percentage share of such scenes, and the median number of scenes per film. It shows that comedies account for a little under 40% of scenes even though they account for just over one-fifth of films studied. Action/adventure films account for almost a quarter of such scenes while accounting for more than 30% of films studied. While drama films account for under 12% of films studied, they account for just over a fifth of scenes featuring depictions of sexual acts. The median is highest for comedies and musicals, though the latter account for less than 2% of scenes.

GENRE	FILMS	%	SCENES	%	MEDIAN
ACTION/ADVENTURE	78	31.2	285	23.3	3
COMEDY	57	22.8	464	37.9	7
DOCUMENTARY	1	0.4	5	0.4	5
DRAMA	29	11.6	247	20.2	6
HORROR	7	2.8	26	2.1	3
MUSICAL	3	1.2	17	1.4	7
SCI-FI / FANTASY	30	12.0	97	7.9	3
THRILLER	12	4.8	72	5.9	3
WAR	2	0.8	5	0.4	3
WESTERN	2	0.8	6	0.5	3

Table 4.26

These results indicate that the portrayal of sexual acts occurs in films of all genres, though more pervasively in comedies, action/adventure films, dramas and musicals. Depictions regularly occur in humorous or light-hearted circumstances intended to cause amusement, but there are more serious or sincere occurrences than there are spoken sexual references. Comedies account for a greater share of spoken references to sex than depictions of sexual acts (51.4% versus 37.8%), but they account for the greatest share of each. This constitutes a significant finding as existing scholarship, especially with the focus on transgression in film studies, tends to focus on serious art cinema, with *Shortbus* (Mitchell 2006) constituting a notable exception (Williams 2006, 2008). Whether the nature of representation differs across genres constitutes an interesting line of inquiry.

### *Creative Type*

Table 4.27, below, lists for each creative type the number of films studied featuring scenes in which depictions of sexual acts occur, the percentage share of films studied accounted for by such films, the number of such scenes identified, the percentage share of such scenes, and the median number of such scenes per film. Contemporary fiction accounts for almost half of the scenes in which the depiction of sexual acts occur even though these films account for just over a quarter of films studied. The median number of scenes per film was highest for contemporary fiction. The more realistic or naturalistic creative types (contemporary, dramatisation, factual and historical) account for just under two-thirds of scenes, which indicates that the majority of

depictions occur recognizable social situations (Nichols 1981).

CREATIVE TYPE	FILMS	%	SCENES	%	MEDIAN
CHILDREN'S	34	13.7	103	8.4	3
CONTEMPORARY	72	28.8	602	49.2	6
DRAMATISATION	15	6.0	90	7.4	2
FACTUAL	2	0.8	12	1.0	6
FANTASY	30	12.0	145	11.8	4
HISTORICAL	11	4.4	58	4.7	4
SCIENCE FICTION	39	15.6	133	10.9	3
SUPERHERO	18	7.2	81	6.6	4

Table 4.27

How do the findings related to depictions of sexual acts with those on spoken references to sex in films of different creative types? Contemporary fiction accounts for just under half of depictions and more than half of sexual references. Factual films and historical fiction account for the next largest shares of both. Sexual acts and references occur with greater frequency in realistic or naturalistic worlds that lack the fantastical or unrealistic elements that characterize fantasy, children's and science fiction. The greatest difference in median is that between sexual references and acts occurring in factual films. The median for references is almost four times greater. The differences are low for dramatisations, fantasy, contemporary and historical fiction. There is no difference in median for superhero films, children's and science fiction.

### ***Sexuality & Gender***

This section reports on findings on the nature of the sexuality and gender of participants in sexual acts depicted. It proceeds in a similar manner to that in the previous section on spoken sexual references, commencing with depictions of sexual activity between human characters and animals, then sexual activity between adults and children, non-heterosexual conduct, and finally heterosexual acts. It sets out for each category of sexual behaviour the number of scenes identified and the relevant figures for films of each MPAA classification, creative type and genre. It compares these figures with those set out in relation to spoken references. These results establish the exceeding prevalence of heterosexual acts across all categories of film, and confirms that exclusion constitutes the primary mode of representation for non-heterosexual sexual practices.

### **Bestiality**

Six scenes (0.5% of those identified) feature the depiction of sexual activity between human characters and animals. These occur in five films, two in one film rated R, one each in two films rated PG-13, and one each in two films rated PG. No depictions or references to bestiality occur in films rated G. Five scenes occur in comedies and one in action/adventure. There were almost double the number of scenes featuring spoken references (eleven as against six depictions), but

they account for a similar proportion (0.5% and 0.6%), respectively. Bestiality occurs rarely in popular film, and, where it occurs, it appears humorously. This contrasts with the emphasis on its transgressive potential in horror (Krzywinska 2006). Its minimal occurrence justifies exclusion from an analysis of cinematic sexual representation.

### **Sexual Activity Between Adult Humans and Minors**

Only one scene features the depiction of possible sexual activity between an adult human and a minor. This occurs in *Into the Woods*, a musical fantasy based on several fairy tales in which the Wolf sniffs around little Red Riding Hood. The Wolf desires to eat her, and the lyrics he sings during the scene reflect his appreciation of Red Riding Hood's "flesh, pink and plump... tender and fresh... delicious". However, the lyrics also include a reference to "scrumptious carnality", inflecting the Wolf's desire for Red Riding Hood with paedophilic lust and a possible desire to rape. This leering constitutes the only depiction of paedophilia. The MPAA rated *Into the Woods* PG. This scene accounts for some of the thematic elements and "suggestive material" cited in its reasoning.

How does this solitary depiction compare with spoken references to such sexual activity between adults and minors? Nineteen scenes in sixteen films features spoken references, with most occurring in films rated R and in comedies. This indicates that in recent popular films characters spoke or alluded to sexual activity between adults and minors far more than the depiction occurred. The higher incidence of spoken references to such sexual activity in dramas and thrillers indicates a more serious treatment than there is of other taboo behaviour (i.e. bestiality). However, like sexual activity between humans and animals, references to and depictions of paedophilia is rare in popular film, constituting 1% of scenes identified. Almost all (99%) scenes featuring references to or depictions of sex relate to conduct between adult characters.

### **Sexual Activity Other than Heterosexual**

There were 66 scenes featuring the depiction of sexual activity other than between characters of the opposite gender. These include depictions of sexual activity between male characters, between female characters, and those involving characters who may be bisexual or transgender. These 66 scenes account for 5.4% of scenes featuring the depiction of any sexual activity and they occur in 36 films (14% of those studied). The median number of scenes per film for the films in which such scenes occur was four. There are far fewer depictions of such sexual activity than there are spoken references to it (66 scenes in 36 films as against 217 references in 78 films). Exclusion as the primary mode of representation for non-heterosexual practices is more evident when it comes to depictions.

#### *MPAA Classification*

Table 4.28, below, lists for each MPAA classification the number of films featuring scenes in

which the depiction of sexual activity that is not heterosexual occurs, the percentage share of films studied, the number and percentage share of such scenes, and the median number of scenes per film. Films rated R account more than three-quarters of such scenes and two-thirds of the films featuring such scenes. Films rated PG-13 account for almost one-fifth of such scenes and more than a quarter of films in such scenes occur. Such scenes do not occur in films rated G.

<b>MPAA</b>	<b>FILMS</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SCENES</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>MEDIAN</b>
PG	3	8	3	5	1
PG-13	10	28	12	18	1
R	23	64	51	77	2

Table 4.28

### *Creative Type*

Table 4.29, below, lists for each creative type the number and percentage share of films featuring scenes depicting non-heterosexual activity, the number and percentage share of such scenes occurring, and the median number of scenes occurring. Contemporary fiction accounts for almost three-quarters of such scenes and two-thirds of the films in which such scenes occur. Dramatisations, factual and historical fiction, together with contemporary fiction, account for more than 90% of scenes. This indicates that they occur in “recognisable social situations” (Nichols 1981). The qualitative analysis must assess how these portrayals signify as indicators of contemporary mores.

<b>CREATIVE TYPE</b>	<b>FILMS</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SCENES</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>MEDIAN</b>
CHILDREN'S	1	3	1	2	1
CONTEMPORARY	23	64	48	73	2
DRAMATISATION	3	8	5	8	2
FACTUAL	1	3	2	3	2
FANTASY	3	8	4	6	1
HISTORICAL	3	8	3	5	1
SCIENCE FICTION	2	6	3	5	2

Table 4.29

### *Genre*

Table 4.30, below, lists for each genre the number and percentage share of films featuring scenes in which depictions of sexual activity that is not heterosexual occurs, the number and percentage share of such scenes occurring, and the median number of scenes per film. No scenes occurred in documentary, horror, musical or war films. Comedies account for almost 70% of both the number of scenes occurring and the number of films in which such scenes occur. The prevalence of both

depictions of and spoken references to non-heterosexual practices indicates that the treatment of such conduct tends to be humorous and intended to cause amusement. This again emphasises the need for the analysis to examine qualitatively how the representation of non-heterosexual identities and practices signify within broader representational patterns.

GENRE	FILMS	%	SCENES	%	MEDIAN
ACTION/ADVENTURE	3	8	3	5	1
COMEDY	25	69	45	68	2
DRAMA	3	8	9	14	2
SCI-FI / FANTASY	1	3	2	3	2
THRILLER	3	8	6	9	2
WESTERN	1	3	1	2	1

Table 4.30

### Gender

Table 4.31, below, lists for four non-heterosexual relations the number of films and percentage share of films studied in which scenes featuring the depiction of sexual activity occurs, the number of such scenes occurring, and the percentage share of scenes featuring any sexual activity. Depictions of sexual acts between males constitute the largest proportion. Sexual acts between females occur in a smaller share of films, just 4%, but they account for a similar share of acts as scenes depicting sexual acts involving characters who may be bisexual or trans. Sexual activity between males accounts for the largest share of both depictions and spoken references (9% and 7%, respectively), while lesbian, bisexual and trans sexualities account for a similar share (about 1%). The important question is how these signify.

SEXUAL ACTIVITY	FILMS	%	SCENES	%
BETWEEN MALES	21	9	34	3
BETWEEN FEMALES	10	4	12	1
INVOLVING BISEXUAL	4	1.6	6	1
INVOLVING TRANS	4	1.6	5	0.4

Table 4.31

### Sexuality Activity Between Heterosexuals

There were 1,152 scenes featuring depictions of sexual acts between heterosexual characters, accounting for 94.1% of scenes featuring the depiction of any sexual acts. These occur in 219 films (87.6% of films studied). The number of scenes per film ranges from one (in 33 films) to 32 in *The Wolf of Wall Street*. The average number of scenes per film for the films in which such scenes occurred was five, and the median was four. Depictions of sexual acts involving only



heterosexual characters account for a greater share of such scenes compared to spoken references (94% as against 88%), though they occur in slightly fewer films (219 as against 225). The median number of scenes per film featuring heterosexual depictions or references in which they occur is the same.

#### *MPAA Classification*

<b>MPAA</b>	<b>FILMS</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SCENES</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>MEDIAN</b>
G	8	3.2	30	2.6	4
PG	47	18.8	158	13.7	3
PG-13	105	42.0	515	44.7	4
R	59	23.6	449	39.0	5

*Table 4.32*

Table 4.32, above, lists for each MPAA classification, the number and percentage share of films studied in which scenes featuring the depiction of sexual conduct between heterosexual characters, the number of percentage share of such scenes, and the median number of scenes per film. Films rated PG-13 account for the greatest share. Films rated R account for a smaller share of films studied but 39% of such scenes. The median number of scenes per film is only slightly higher for R-rated films. G-rated films have the same median as films rated PG-13. Depictions are fairly consistent across films of all MPAA classifications. Films rated PG-13 account for the greatest share of scenes featuring depictions (44%), whereas R-rated films account for the greatest share of scenes featuring spoken references.

#### *Creative Type*

<b>CREATIVE TYPE</b>	<b>FILMS</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SCENES</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>MEDIAN</b>
CHILDREN'S	33	13.2	101	8.8	3
CONTEMPORARY	72	28.8	550	47.7	7
DRAMATISATION	14	5.6	86	7.5	3
FACTUAL	2	0.8	10	0.9	5
FANTASY	30	12.0	139	12.1	4
HISTORICAL	11	4.4	55	4.8	3
SCI-FI	39	15.6	130	11.3	2
SUPERHERO	18	7.2	81	7.0	4

*Table 4.33*

Table 4.33, above, lists for each creative type the number and percentage share of films studied featuring scenes in which depictions of heterosexual activity occur, the number and percentage share of such scenes occurring, and the median number of scenes per film. Such scenes occur in films of all creative type. Contemporary fiction accounts for almost half (48%) of such scenes

even though they account for just a quarter of films studied. The share of films studied accounted for by children's fiction exceeds its share of scenes. More realistic modes of storytelling (contemporary, dramatisation, factual and historical) account for 60% of scenes featuring depictions of sexual acts. Representations of heterosexual practices occur most frequently in these modes, which again implies they occur in "recognisable social situations" (Nichols 1981).

### *Genre*

Table 4.34, below, lists for each genre the number and percentage share of films studied featuring scenes in which depictions of heterosexual acts occur, the number and percentage share of such scenes occurring, and the median number of scenes per film. Comedies again account for the greatest share of scenes (36%). Far more scenes (486) feature spoken references than scenes featuring depictions, and comedies account for 398, or 82%, of these. The median number of scenes featuring depictions of and/or spoken references to heterosexual acts was four. The median number of scenes featuring spoken references in comedies was twice as high than the median number of scenes featuring depictions. These results indicate that humorous or light-hearted treatment intended to cause amusement may prevail as a cinematic representational practice.

GENRE	FILMS	%	SCENES	%	MEDIAN
ACTION/ADVENTURE	78	31.2	281	24.4	3
COMEDY	56	22.4	410	35.6	6
DOCUMENTARY	1	0.4	5	0.4	5
DRAMA	29	11.6	242	21.0	6
HORROR	7	2.8	26	2.3	3
MUSICAL	3	1.2	17	1.5	7
SCI-FI / FANTASY	30	12.0	95	8.2	3
THRILLER	11	4.4	66	5.7	3
WAR	2	0.8	5	0.4	3
WESTERN	2	0.8	5	0.4	3

*Table 4.34*

### *Acts Depicted*

The report of findings now moves onto a more detailed account of the kinds of sexual acts depicted in films. This section sets out the most important quantitative findings in the study. The distinction between levels of graphicness (per Leone 2002) offers great insight into the nature of depictions of physical intimacy and sexual activity in recent popular film. Table 4.35, below, displays for each level of graphicness (per Leone 2002) the number and percentage share of scenes featuring the depiction of sexual acts. It shows that somewhat graphic depictions account for more than half and nongraphic depictions account for almost a third. Nongraphic and somewhat graphic depictions, taken together, account for 86.4% of depictions. What kinds of acts of physical intimacy occur at each level of graphicness?

<b>GRAPHICNESS</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
NONGRAPHIC	392	32.1
SOMEWHAT GRAPHIC	666	54.3
GRAPHIC	76	6.2
VERY GRAPHIC	58	4.7
MOST GRAPHIC	32	2.6

Table 4.34

There were initially 63 categories of sexual acts depicted. Appendix D lists the definitions for each of these categories. Table 4.37, below, lists for each category of sexual act identified the number and percentage share of scenes in which it occurs, and the number of scenes it occurs at each level of graphicness (per Leone 2002). Kissing accounted for 696 or 57% of scenes. It is most common act in all but the more graphic portrayals. Nongraphic kissing may be on the cheek, forehead, hands or other parts of the body, excluding genitals or female breasts. Somewhat graphic kissing is on the lips where characters are fully clothed. Kissing occurs at the very graphic level on the lips where one or more characters appears naked or partially undressed.

<b>GROUP</b>	<b>SCENES</b>	<b>%</b>
FOREPLAY (NON-GENITAL)	806	66
FLIRTING	197	16
INTERCOURSE	83	7
FOREPLAY (GENITAL)	44	4
COMMERCIAL SEX	32	3
SEXUAL CRIME	18	1
MASTURBATION	14	1
VOYEURISM	12	1
FETISHISM	9	1
DISCIPLINE	5	0
PLAYING	4	0

Table 4.36

Eleven groups emerged from sorting the 63 categories of sexual acts. Table 4.36, above, lists the number and percentage share of scenes for each group. Non-genital foreplay (including kissing, groping, disrobing, etc) accounted for two-thirds of scenes. Flirting (including gazing, dancing, touching, etc) constituted the second largest group (16%). The fifty scenes featuring the depiction sexual intercourse constitute only 4% of scenes in which the depiction of sexual acts occur. Indications through visual cues that sexual intercourse has taken place constitute less than 2% of scenes identified. The most prevalent form of sexual act, by far, is kissing on the lips, which occurs in 543 scenes (44% of those identified). The analysis of sexual representation in popular film must proceed in this context, justifying a focus on kissing.

Chapter 4: Findings

ACT DEPICTED	%	TOTAL	NON-GRAPHIC	SOMEWHAT GRAPHIC	GRAPHIC	VERY GRAPHIC	MOST GRAPHIC
ANAL PENETRATION	0.1	1	1	0	0	0	0
ANAL RAPE	0.2	2	0	0	0	0	2
AROUSAL (ERECTION)	0.5	6	2	4	0	0	0
AROUSAL (NIPPLES)	0.1	1	1	0	0	0	0
BDSM	0.4	5	0	1	3	1	0
CASTRATION	0.2	2	1	0	0	1	0
COVERING UP	0.5	6	5	1	0	0	0
CUDDLING	0.5	6	6	0	0	0	0
CUNNILINGUS	0.6	7	0	0	3	4	0
DANCING	2.8	34	28	6	0	0	0
DEMONSTRATING	0.1	1	1	0	0	0	0
DISROBING	2.0	24	10	14	0	0	0
DISTRACTION	0.1	1	1	0	0	0	0
DRUG USE	0.2	3	1	1	1	0	0
DRY HUMMING	0.1	1	0	0	1	0	0
EJACULATION	0.1	1	0	1	0	0	0
EXPOSURE	1.9	23	2	17	0	4	0
FELLATIO	2.1	26	9	6	1	9	0
FETISH (FOOD)	0.1	1	0	0	1	0	0
FETISH (FOOT)	0.1	1	0	0	1	0	0
FLIRTING	3.6	44	44	0	0	0	0
FOREPLAY	0.6	7	0	4	3	0	0
GAZING	4.2	52	52	0	0	0	0
GESTURE	0.9	11	10	0	1	0	0
GRINDING	0.1	1	0	1	0	0	0
GROPING	2.3	28	4	7	17	0	0
HARASSMENT	0.2	2	2	0	0	0	0
HUGGING	1.1	14	14	0	0	0	0
INTERCOURSE (ANAL)	0.2	3	0	0	0	2	1
INTERCOURSE (VAGINAL)	6.0	73	1	22	0	28	22
KISSING	56.9	696	114	543	38	1	0
LEERING	0.1	1	1	0	0	0	0
LICKING	0.1	1	1	0	0	0	0
MASSAGE	0.2	3	2	1	0	0	0
MASTURBATION (FEMALE)	0.6	7	1	0	0	3	3
MASTURBATION (MALE)	0.6	7	1	1	0	4	1
MESSING	0.3	4	4	0	0	0	0
NUDGING	0.1	1	1	0	0	0	0
PEEPING	0.3	4	4	0	0	0	0
PETTING	0.4	5	4	1	0	0	0
PILLOW TALK	0.2	3	3	0	0	0	0
POSING	0.4	5	5	0	0	0	0
RAPE	0.2	2	0	2	0	0	0
RESIST	0.2	2	2	0	0	0	0
ROLE PLAY	0.1	1	1	0	0	0	0
SEX TOY USE	0.1	1	0	1	0	0	0
SEXTING	0.2	2	2	0	0	0	0
SEXUAL ASSAULT	0.5	6	4	2	0	0	0
SPANKING	0.1	1	0	0	1	0	0
SPIT ROASTING	0.1	1	1	0	0	0	0
STRADDLING	0.3	4	2	2	0	0	0
STRIPPING	2.5	30	4	25	1	0	0
SWOONING	0.2	3	3	0	0	0	0
TAUNTING	0.2	2	2	0	0	0	0
THREESOME	0.2	2	0	0	0	0	2
THRUSTING	0.2	3	2	1	0	0	0
TORTURE	0.1	1	1	0	0	0	0
TOUCHING	1.9	23	23	0	0	0	0
VAGINAL DIGITAL PENETRATION	0.2	2	0	1	0	1	0
VOYEURISM	0.7	8	8	0	0	0	0

Table 4.37

*Character Relationships*

RELATIONSHIP	SCENES	%	NON-GRAPHIC	SOMEWHAT GRAPHIC	GRAPHIC	VERY GRAPHIC	MOST GRAPHIC
ACQUAINTANCES	37	3.0	16	10	3	6	2
ALONE	18	1.5	10	4	0	1	3
CASUAL	55	4.5	11	33	8	0	3
COLLEAGUES	78	6.4	32	27	10	5	4
DATING	209	17.1	38	144	14	8	5
ENGAGED	15	1.2	1	13	1	0	0
FAMILY	7	0.6	4	3	0	0	0
FRIENDS	53	4.3	35	17	1	0	0
GRAPHIC	8	0.7	0	7	1	0	0
MARRIED	259	21.2	29	203	7	15	5
MEDICAL	2	0.2	1	1	0	0	0
NEIGHBOURS	9	0.7	5	3	0	1	0
PROFESSIONAL	151	12.3	54	59	18	14	6
RECENTLY MET	194	15.8	86	96	10	2	0
RENEWED	33	2.7	9	22	0	0	2
STRANGERS	88	7.2	61	17	3	5	1
UNSPECIFIED	8	0.7	1	6	0	1	0

Table 4.38

The final aspect of depictions of sexual intimacy reported here is the relationship between the characters involved. Seventeen categories of relationship emerged. Table 4.38, above, lists the number of scenes in which the relationship occurs, the percentage share of scenes of identified ( $n = 1,224$ ), and the number of scenes at each level of graphicness (per Leone 2002). Appendix B lists a definition for each category of relationship. Most of these categories arose in relation to spoken references, but a new category emerged, graphic, in which the figures are drawings or animations. Six groupings from these categories of relationship emerged based on the nature of the relationship, its context and the likelihood for sex to occur. Table 4.39, below, lists the number and percentage share of scenes for each.

Sexual acts between characters who are married to one another account for the largest single cohort (259 scenes, or 21.2%). Relationships open or likely to lead heterosexual marriage account for the next largest cohorts (209 scenes or 17.1% for characters dating one another, and 194 scenes or 15.8% for characters who have recently met). Encounters between characters who have recently met, are dating or married account for 22%, 10% and 7% of nongraphic depictions,

respectively. Scenes depicting acts between characters who are married, dating or recently met account for 31%, 22% and 14% of somewhat graphic acts (67% of all such acts). Dating, recently met and married account for 18%, 13% and 9% of graphic depictions, respectively (40%), and 14%, 3% and 26% of very graphic depictions (43%).

GROUP	NUMBER	%
PERSONAL	772	63.1
WORK	231	18.9
FRIENDS	99	8.1
STRANGERS	88	7.2
ALONE	18	1.5
OTHER	16	1.3

Table 4.39

### **Conclusion**

This chapter reported findings on the depiction of sexual acts. It established that depictions of sexual acts occurred in 1,224 scenes in 221 films, or 88% of films studied. The median number of scenes per film was four. Scenes featuring the depiction of sexual acts occur in films of all MPAA classifications. Just under 40% of scenes depicting sexual acts occur in comedies, which implies that a significant proportion occur in light-hearted circumstances intended to cause amusement. More than 60% of scenes occur in contemporary and historical fiction, factual films and dramatisations, i.e. storytelling modes set in cinematic worlds that are more realistic or naturalistic, lacking the fantastic elements that characterize children's and science fiction, fantasy and superhero films, and likely to constitute "recognisable social situations" (Nichols 1981).

Almost all depictions of sexual activity is heterosexual (94%), and scenes featuring depictions of heterosexual acts occur in 88% of films studied. Scenes featuring sexual activity other than heterosexual account for only 5% of scenes identified and occur in just 14% of films studied. The most common act depicted is kissing, which accounts for more than half of those identified. These depictions generally occur in contemporary fiction films or other types of film likely to feature "recognisable social situations". These findings constitute the quantitative results which must be interpreted within appropriate theoretical frameworks. This interpretation constitutes the first element of the analysis that follows. The second, more substantive element involves analysing how the depictions of physical intimacy identified signify, especially within the emerging processes of discipline and disclosure. This analysis elucidates the representation of sex in film in more significant ways than currently appreciated in studies within the effects paradigm that prevail within the discourse on sexualisation. The findings reported here present a quantitative overview of general trends and patterns identifiable related to sexual identities and practices in recent popular film. The qualitative analysis provides more detailed consideration of particular films.

## CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

This chapter analyses and discusses the findings from the study. The first section comprises the quantitative element, interpreting the results by comparing the results to existing studies on sexual content in popular film within the public health paradigm (Gill 2012). These findings address the perception of an increased occurrence and graphicness of sexual content in popular film. It then moves onto analysing the insights that arise in relation to the discourse on pornification from conservative and feminist anti-pornography perspectives before outlining how the findings relate to liberal perspectives and the standard narrative. Finally, the chapter features a reflexive commentary on the quantitative approach in light of Foucauldian feminist positions on sexualisation. It outlines how this study's quantitative findings provide an empirical basis for the qualitative analysis that follows.

### Sexualisation & Psychology/Public Health Research

This study identified 2,645 scenes in which sexual themes or imagery occur in the 250 films studied. Only nine films (4%) featured no such scenes. These result appears to support the proposition that sexual content is prevalent in popular films. Ward (2003:359) concludes from her review of five studies on sexual content in popular films (Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Greenberg et al 1993; Bufkin & Eschholz 2000; Dempsey & Reichert 2000; Pardun 2002) that “this content is quite substantial”. Wright (2009:190), conducting a similar review, makes a similar assertion: “... popular films contain frequent references to and depictions of sexual activity”. The next question that arises relates to whether this substantial sexual content identified represents an increase in terms of frequency of occurrence and graphicness.

STUDY	FILMS	SCENES	1+	MEAN
ABRAMSON & MECHANIC 1983	15	12	NA	0.8
GREENBERG ET AL 1993	16	280	16 (100%)	17.5
BUFKIN & ESCHHOLZ 2000	50	30	20 (40%)	0.6
DEMPSEY & REICHERT 2000	25	105	23 (92%)	4.2
PARDUN 2002	15	309	NA	20.6
GUNASEKERA ET AL 2005	83	53	28 (34%)	0.6
NALKUR ET AL 2010	855	NA	NA (85%)	NA
MORAN 2020	250	2,645	241 (96%)	10.6

Table 6.1

According to Ward, “Sexual references and imagery are quite prevalent and have been increasing in number and explicitness since the 1970s” (Ward 2003:359). Wright (2009) reaches a similar conclusion. It is possible to assess this claim by comparing the results of this study to data available from existing scholarship. Analysis proceeds by comparing two indicators: the number of films featuring at least one scene, and the mean (or average) number of scenes per film. Table 6.1,

above, displays for this study and each of those identified in reviews of the sexualisation literature (Ward 2003; Wright 2009) the number of films studied and scenes identified, the number and percentage share of films featuring at least one sex scene, and the mean number of scenes per film.

The percentage share of films in which at least one sex scene occurs varies greatly between studies, from 34-40% on the low side, to 92-100% on the high side. The findings in this study, which studied the most recent cohort of films, resulted in the second highest percentage. This again appears to support the proposition concerning the increasing frequency of sexual themes and imagery in popular film. However, differing definitions of sex may explain the divergence. Gunasekera et al (2005:465), for example, restricted their definition to “any episode in which an overtly physical sexual encounter either took place or was implied which could potentially result in an unwanted pregnancy or the transmission of an STD”. This restrictive definition explains the low number of scenes identified.

A more “liberal” definition, described as such by the researchers, includes “not only graphically portrayed sex, but also sexual intercourse that was implied by characters retreating behind closed doors with the obvious intention of having sex, or viewers seeing the characters in bed or dressing after the act” (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000:1328-1329). This definition led to the identification of at least one scene in 40% of the 50 top-grossing films of 1996. Dempsey and Reichert (2000), following the coding used by Greenberg et al (1993), categorised depictions into one of eight categories (prostitution, rape, homosexuality, married intercourse, unmarried intercourse, petting, long kiss, or other). Researchers, using this coding scheme, found a higher percentage of films studied featuring at least one sex scene (100% and 92%).

The percentage share of films featuring at least one sex scene is a limited indicator. Another comparator is the mean (average) number of scenes per film. This indicates, on average, how many sex scenes occur in a sample of films studied. The occurrence of 2,645 scenes in the 250 films studied results in a mean of 11 scenes per film. This is lower than a sample of films from the 1980s (Greenberg et al 1993) and 1995 (Pardun 2002), but it is much higher than samples from the top video rentals of 1998 (Dempsey & Reichert 2000) and 1959, 1969 and 1979 (Abramson & Mechanic 1983). Again, its usefulness as indicator of the prevalence of sexual content in films depends on how researchers define sex.

The analysis of sexual content generally involves identifying depictions of sexual acts, or implied occurrences of sexual behaviour through visual cues (what counts as somewhat graphic per Leone 2002). Greenberg et al (2003) distinguished between verbal and visual acts, identifying a mean occurrence of scenes featuring visual acts of 6.25. The average number of scenes featuring the depiction of sexual acts in a sample of 25 video rentals in 1998 was 4.2 (Dempsey & Reichert 2000). The number of scenes identified in this study that were at least somewhat graphic (per



Leone 2002) was 819, resulting in an average of 3.3 scenes per film. The average number of scenes per film that depict at least somewhat sexual behaviour appears to be declining since the 1980s.

Is there a similar trend of decline in relation to spoken references to sex? Dempsey and Reichert (2000) appear only to have followed Greenberg et al (1993) in coding for the visual depictions of sex. Thus their analysis makes no reference to “verbal acts”, which comprises explicit references to sexual activity in dialogue (Greenberg et al 1993). Pardun (2002) included dialogue because understanding sexual behaviour requires analysing conduct that leads to sex. The other studies (Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Bufkin & Eschholz 2000; Dempsey & Reichert 2000; Gunasekera et al 2005; Nalkur et al 2010) focused only on depictions, so it is only possible to compare the results of this study in terms of spoken references with two others (Greenberg et al 1993; Pardun 2002).

MPAA classification of films studied is significant in this comparison. This study identified 1,838 scenes featuring spoken references to sex, giving a mean frequency of occurrence of seven scenes per film. The 62 films rated R featured 833 relevant scenes, giving an average of fourteen scenes per film. Clearly, the average is double that for films rated R than that for all films. The 188 films rated G, PG or PG-13 in this study featured 955 scenes featuring spoken references related to sex, giving an average of five scenes per film. The average scenes per film for those of each MPAA classification (G, PG and PG-13) were five, three, and six, respectively, i.e. the films rated G had an average higher than films rated PG.

How do these results compare to other studies? Greenberg et al (1993) studied only R-rated films from the early 1980s and identified 180 scenes featuring “verbal acts”, giving an average of 11 scenes per film. Pardun (2002) studied 15 films from 1995 that were popular with teenagers, only one of which was rated R, all others being rated G, PG or PG-13 (the non-restrictive ratings). Pardun (2002) identified one-third of scenes (103) featuring only talking rather than action, giving a mean occurrence of seven. Comparison with this study’s findings establishes that the average number of scenes featuring spoken references to sex in films rated R has increased since the 1980s, but it has declined in films rated G, PG or PG-13. So, what is the significance?

These insights are significant in several respects. Less important is confirmation that the amount of sexual content in films varies by MPAA classification (Wright 2009:189). The comparisons here challenge the perception of an increased occurrence of sexual themes and imagery in popular film (Rothman et al 1993; Bufkin & Eschholz 2000; Pardun 2002). The trend revealed here is that the mean number of scenes per film that feature depictions of sexual activity is declining since the 1980s and that the average number of scenes per film featuring spoken references to sex in films with non-restrictive ratings (those rated G, PG or PG-13) is also declining since the 1990s. Thus, although sexual content in popular films appears to be prevalent, it may actually be in

decline.

Is this decline apparent across popular film genres? The approach to analysing sexual content across genre is difficult, as studies tend to treat popular films as an homogenous undifferentiated mass. Only Bufkin and Eschholz (2000) distinguish between genres, but only four kinds (action, comedy, drama and other). They found that the genre in which the most films featured at least one sex scene was drama (69%), followed by comedy (50%). Only 14% of action films featured at least one sex scene. Findings from this study, in the limited sense that comparison can be conducted, reflect this pattern. Comedies account for a greater share of scenes identified (45%) than films studied (23%), and the median number of scenes per film is highest for comedies and dramas.

Other studies do not distinguish between production method and creative type, yet using these distinctions provides an important insight. The results in this study establish that fully digitally animated films draw average audiences of just under 13 million, compared to an average audience size of 1.7 million for live-action films. Fully animated films account for 3% of films on release but 13% of admissions. Gunasekera et al (2005) excluded animated films from their sample because, they assert, “audiences are less likely to identify with their characters”. The results in this study show that the median number of scenes per film for animated films is the same as that for all films. This, together with their immense popularity, indicates that such an exclusion should not occur.

To summarise so far, this study has found that sexual content appears to be prevalent in popular film, with only 4% of films featuring no scenes featuring sexual themes or imagery. The vast majority of these scenes (69%) feature nongraphic content. The trends established in relation to the frequency of occurrence of sex scenes and graphicness, contrary to expectations raised by the repeated perception discourses on sexualisation (Ward 2003; Wright 2009; Papadopoulos 2010), are actually of decline. Using a larger sample than those in previous studies, the findings from this study indicate that sexual content in popular film is declining in frequency of occurrence and in graphicness. The analysis now proceeds to consider the next major pattern identified: the preference for unmarried sex over married.

Wright (2009:190) identifies “the privileging of unmarried sex over married sex” as a significant pattern in popular films. Dempsey and Reichert (2000) found that depictions of sexual behaviour were more frequent (85% v 15%) and more graphic for unmarried partners. Pardun (2002) also reported that depictions of marital sex were the least common and compelling, i.e. not involving intercourse. Greenberg et al (1993) found that only 3% of scenes featured the depiction of sexual acts between married couples. Others report the primary depiction as involving partners who have only recently met (Bufkin & 2000; Gunasekera et al 2005). Abramson and Mechanic (1983) identified this pattern in films popular in 1959 and 1969, with Wright suggesting, as a result, that

it is not a recent phenomenon.

How do the quantitative findings in this study relate to this “privileging of unmarried sex over married sex”? Two sets of findings are relevant, those relating to the relationships between characters involved in spoken references to sexual activity, and those relating to the relationships involved in depictions of sexual activity. Scenes involving the depiction of sexual activity between characters who are married to one another account for 21% of all scenes featuring the depiction of any sexual activity. Only five scenes (16%) featuring the most graphic depictions of sex feature characters who are married to one another. Most scenes featuring the depiction of sexual activity between characters who are married to another are somewhat graphic (per Leone 2002), accounting for 203 out 259 scenes (78%).

These results appear to reflect the pattern that Ward (2003) and Wright (2009) identified from their reviews and to support the proposition that the depiction of marital sex in popular films is infrequent and “relatively mild” compared to the frequency and quality of depictions of sex between unmarried characters. Like the scenes identified by Dempsey and Reichert (2000), the most common form of depiction of sexual act between married couples is kissing, and scenes featuring the most graphic portrayals of sexual acts feature characters who are not married. Abramson and Mechanic (1983) suggested that this pattern in sexual representation inadvertently reinforces a notion that sex is “merely a way of initiating a relationship, rather than a way of sustaining a relationship” (Abramson & Mechanic 1983:202).

The findings on the relationships between characters engaged in explicit spoken references to sex or that count as sexual activity (e.g. flirting) become highly significant. Almost a quarter of these references occur between characters in close personal relationships, i.e. those who are dating, engaged, or married. However, nearly a third of these scenes features characters who work together or interact due to the kind of work that one of them does, and more than a quarter features characters who are friends or acquaintances. Like the depictions of sexual conduct, the discourse on sex mainly occurs between unmarried partners. The qualitative analysis that follows later in this chapter examines this discourse on sex outside close personal relationships, especially in how romance, marriage and procreation feature therein.

Making interpretations and positing explanations based on the interpretation of the frequencies with which certain observable visual phenomena are noted to occur is problematic. The purpose of the analysis thus far is, using methods similar to those employed in existing scholarship, to provide an empirical base from which to situate a more detailed qualitative analysis of sexual content. The analysis provides key insights that disrupt the current understandings of cultural sexualisation as it applies to popular film. This study confirms that the amount of sexual content in popular films varies according to MPAA classification, and this variation applies also to trends in the occurrence and graphicness of sexual content. The frequency with which graphic depictions

occur appears to be declining over time for all films.

Public discourses on sexualisation engender expectations for researchers within the psychology and public health paradigms (Gill 2012) that sexual content will be prevalent, resulting in expressions of surprise at the relatively low levels they identify. Researchers found that 60% of 50 films studied featured no sex scenes, reporting that “this was somewhat surprising given the presumption of obligatory sex scenes” (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000:1330, citing Rothman et al 1993). Another researcher reported that “very few incidents contained any kind of direct reference to sexual intercourse,” and that “in light of other writers’ comments about the amount of sex in contemporary movies, this was somewhat unexpected” (Pardun 2002:217). The insight from this study further confirms the disparity between expectations and evidence in the discourse on sexualisation.

### **The Pornification Thesis**

What implications has this disparity for our understanding of pornification? Conservative, feminist and liberal commentators identify pornification as a central process within cultural sexualisation. Its proponents share the expectation and assumption that “American society is saturated with sexual materials” (Kammeyer 2008:17). Smith (2010) and others outline the difficulties with the concept of “pornification”. Here it refers to the idea that the increased occurrence of sexual themes in western culture, and the apparent proliferation of sexually graphic imagery facilitated by digital technology and the Internet, led to “pornography” becoming the prevailing cultural trend (“porn chic”) that defines contemporary western sexual representation. This study addresses issues that arise in critiques of pornification from conservative, feminist and liberal perspectives, as they relate to film. What are these issues?

Conservative critiques of “pornification” arise from concern with the decline of traditional Judaeo-Catholic public morality, decency and family values (Long 2012:61). Its proponents regard sexual representations that deviate from heterosexual marital norms as harmful in the threat they pose to traditional views on marriage, fidelity and modesty, and as distasteful in terms of sexual graphicness, lewdness and prurience (Paul 2005; Hatch 2012). Ingraham (2007:170) complains that “images and dialogue once reserved for seedy XXX theaters are making their way into traditional American cinema”. Such content risks pornography addiction, increased dissatisfaction with marital relations, and increased promiscuity and infidelity (Linz & Malamuth 1993:7; Zillmann & Bryant 1988). The qualitative analysis must then investigate how traditional family values and morals feature in sexual content in popular films.

The analysis must also consider feminist critiques of pornification, which diverge between those (Dines 2010; Long 2012; Lynch 2012) who oppose a perceived increasing influence of pornography because it objectifies women and perverts young people’s ideas about sex, sexuality and gender roles, and those who appreciate that practices such as pole dancing and erotica allow

women to exercise sexual agency (Kipnis 1996; Penley 1997; Smith 2007). Smith (2010:105) criticizes the former approach because the deployment of term “pornification” obscures patterns, processes and trajectories “in order to make discursive assertions of effects and consequences which must be acknowledged as ‘obvious’”. Smith suggests that those who use the term “do so precisely so that they can avoid any of the particularities of sexually explicit media” (ibid 106).

The insights gleaned from this analysis lay bare the particularities of sexual content in popular films. Though they differ in how they conceive the effects of exposure to pornified content in popular films, conservative and feminist anti-pornography critics agree on how pornification manifests in movies. This occurs through cameo appearances by well-known performers from “the pornography industry”, through film characters’ unquestioned use and enjoyment of pornography, and through product placement. These manifestations represent an aspect of how “the all-pornography, all-the-time mentality is everywhere in today’s pornified culture” (Paul 2005:5) and how “today porn is being celebrated everywhere” (Dines 2010:25). Claims such as these generated an important research question for this project: how do processes of pornification as outlined by its advocates manifest in popular film?

This study found that 42 scenes (1.6% of those identified as containing any sexual content) feature references to pornography. The quantitative method here is important especially in respect of Dines’ argument. Dines (2010:81) adopts an approach founded in cultivation theory, claiming that we must pay heed to the “cumulative effect” of the patterns that exist in “the system of images, which together create a particular way of looking at the world”. The cumulative effect of cameo appearances, product placement, and the unquestioned use of pornography in popular films constitutes a significant way that, according to Dines, pornography is “hijacking our sexuality”. However, the findings here establish that such content is limited. The significance of the results becomes clear in relation to pornification as “moral panic”.

Barker and Gill (2012:27) describe the popular concern about pornification as “moral panic”. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) set out five elements that define a moral panic: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. The study cannot establish that “pornification” constitutes a moral panic according to these criteria because it studies only a single aspect of the wide-ranging “pornification thesis”, “porn chic” as an allegedly defining trend in contemporary popular film. The findings on the limited extent to which pornography features in popular films provide evidence that the criterion of disproportionality has been met for considering pornification as a “moral panic”. These findings suggest that fears expressed (Paul 2005; Dines 2010) about “the pornographic” threatening to dominate modes of (sexual) representation in contemporary popular film are ill-founded.

This analysis constitutes a minor aspect of an inquiry into pornification. Its operationalisation does not address overarching concerns, in conservative thinking, on how sexual representation

treats traditional family values, or, in feminist thinking, how gender inequality features therein. Characteristics of pornographic depictions of sex, such as an absence of intimacy or sense of connection, misogyny and violence against women, may manifest in mainstream representations (Dines 2010: 68, 96). Lynch (2012), drawing from an analysis of various cultural practices, outlined several features of pornification: emphasis on the white heterosexual male gaze; sexual objectification and subjectification of women; sexual conduct as powerful; misogyny; a tendency towards extremism; and the blurring of private and public. The quantitative aspect of this study can address both rape and sexual violence.

The representation of rape in popular films constitutes one of the ways in which misogyny and violence against women may manifest, though “pornification” may not be an adequate explanation for this manifestation. Older studies (Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Greenberg et al 1993) coded for the presence of rape but found no depictions. One of the major studies on sex in mainstream movies (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000) focused on portrayals of rape. The sample comprised the 50 top-grossing films in the USA in 1996. They identified thirty sex scenes, five (17%) of which were rape, suggesting its overrepresentation in mainstream movies. Moving from the absence of rape in films from before the 1990s to this level of representation suggests a sudden upsurge in depictions of rape.

How has the occurrence of rape scenes changed since the 1990s? Only two such scenes occurred, accounting for 0.2% of scenes featuring the depiction of any sexual activity. These scenes are somewhat graphic (per Leone 2002). Bufkin and Eschholz (2000) found that the perpetrator of rape in the scenes they examined were “sadistic, disturbed, lower-class individuals”, a representational practice they regard as unidimensional and potentially fostering the perpetuation of the real problem of rape “by ignoring the reality of most real life rapes”. The perpetrators of the rapes identified in this study were a white landowner in 1920s America (*The Butler*) and soldiers pillaging a town in Ancient Greece (*300: Rise of an Empire*). No representations of rape set occurred in contemporary fiction or dramatisations.

The number of rape scenes identified in this study emerge from a larger sample that covers a wider timespan than that in the earlier study (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000). The somewhat graphic depictions of rape account for 0.3% of all scenes at the same level of graphicness and 0.2% of scenes at any level of graphicness. These findings contradict the proposition that mainstream movies overrepresent rape. Furthermore, sexual crime emerged as an analytical group from the analysis of sex acts depicted, which includes aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault and harassment. Sixteen such scenes occurred, with two at the most graphic level and one at the graphic level (per Leone 2002). These scenes account for 1% of all scenes featuring the depiction of any sexual act.

The characteristic of pornification that Lynch (2012) identifies as “upping the ante” or tending

towards extremism predicts that popular films should feature frequent depictions of sexual violence against women, and that these should be graphic in nature. This study did not code for scenes featuring the depiction of non-sexual violence against female characters. However, the findings reported here are not supportive of a proposition that this characteristic, a tendency towards extremism, is evident in popular film. Using sexual violence as an indicator of violence against women and misogyny is problematic when one considers that the most graphic scenes of sexual violence feature a female character perpetrating revenge on a male character who previously sexually assaulted her. This complication again points to problems with quantitative methods.

Pornification proves a difficult concept to operationalize and to assess its manifestation in popular films by quantitative methods. These difficulties, which arise from problems related to the disputed meaning of “pornification” and what it may entail (Paasonen et al 2007; Smith 2010), limit the insights that this study can offer. Nevertheless, the findings here establish that the manifestation of pornification in terms of the unquestioned use of pornographic materials is not a defining characteristic of sexual representation. The frequency in the depiction and graphicness of rape scenes and scenes featuring the depiction of sexual crimes also appears not to support the charge that a tendency towards more extremism prevails. This analysis considered pornification from conservative and feminist anti-pornography perspectives. The next section considers liberal views.

### **The Standard Narrative**

Whereas conservatives view sex as an impulse that must be controlled and contained within a heteronormative procreative relationship, liberals view the sex impulse “as good and natural, something to be liberated” (Long 2012:62). Gill (2012:485) suggests that McNair (1996, 2002, 2013) most fully articulates the liberal position. For McNair, the conservative fear that pornification threatens “male heterosexual hegemony and the stability of the nuclear family” (2013:4) and the feminist anti-pornography argument that pornification reinforces patriarchy and heterosexist hegemony are both incorrect, and if both cannot be correct, “then perhaps neither is?” (McNair 2013:4). He argues instead that developments such as the emergence of the Internet and digital technology have “fanned the growth of a less regulated, more commercialized, and more pluralistic sexual culture” (McNair 2002:11).

The significance of this study’s quantitative results in relation to the standard narrative matches that for McNair’s liberal perspective on pornification and sexualisation. The principle that unites these commentaries is freedom. The demise of legal constraints, such as court rulings or legislation prohibiting certain content and industrial regulatory practices, fosters freedom for filmmakers to make sexually graphic and/or diverse films. The expiry of constraints occurs in response to commercial factors and changing sociocultural attitudes to sexual matters. McNair (1996, 2002, 2013), Pennington (2007) and Forshaw (2015) favour this narrative. The Sexual

Revolution of the 1960s functions as the turning point, with the corresponding collapse of Hollywood's studio system, the demise of the Production Code, and its replacement with the current (if modified) age-based classification system.

McNair points to diversity in sexual representation that occurs as a result of this liberalisation and commercial competition. Commentators on the film industry, such as Anderson (2004, 2006), Epstein (2017) and Thompson (2017), characterise as a "democratisation" the proliferation of content in cinemas, on television and through streaming platforms such as Netflix, but they acknowledge that, despite this undoubted proliferation, audiences concentrate on a small number of titles. The analysis of data here confirms this. More than 6,000 titles on domestic release, home entertainment formats and six major Western markets featured in the analysis, but only 250 accounted for more than half of revenues. Despite the available choice, homogenisation, as a result of Hollywood's dominance, appears to be the dominant pattern of distribution and consumption.

McNair sets out a model that explains how capitalism constitutes the "optimal mode of production for the generation... of sexual equality and progress" (McNair 2013:7). His model refers to "a cycle of liberalisation" in which subcultural transgression provokes critical commentary and analysis, which leads to mainstream commentary and analysis, and cultural celebration, pastiche and parody. These in turn produce resolution, tolerance and acceptance, which leads to the incorporation of transgression, fostering new subcultural transgressions (McNair 2013:8). McNair (2002:61) conceives "pornographication" as encompassing the incorporation of pornography into mainstream cultural products through depictions in non-pornographic contexts, pastiche or parody. This study's findings make it difficult to accept McNair's assertions. Further difficulties arise in relation to the liberalisation of regulatory regimes and commercial realities in film distribution.

The concentration of audiences on a relatively small number of titles reflects Hollywood's dominance, which McNair neglects in his model. He asserts that "our media system can no longer be characterised as an oppressive ideological apparatus relentlessly supportive of patriarchal and heterosexist values" (McNair 2002:205). However, a diverse range of sexual practices and sexualities represented by films like *Nymph()*maniac (von Trier 2014) and "new-wave queer cinema" (Walters 2012) circulate through marginalised channels of art cinema and film festivals. McNair, Williams (2014) and others overstate the "mainstreaming" of such content. Popular films require analysis in terms of the incorporation of transgression that McNair's cycle of liberalisation entails and whether his claim about "patriarchal and heterosexist values" is correct. The analysis must consider criticisms of McNair's approach.

Feminist critics, working outside the anti-pornography perspective, criticize McNair's approach. This study substantiates these criticisms in two respects. Firstly, Hollywood's dominance



marginalizes the art films and niche cinema that may represent the diverse sexual identities and practices that characterise “striptease culture”. McNair’s view of “striptease culture” as a capitalist response to “popular demand for access to and participation in sexual discourse” (McNair 2002:87) and as a progressive force for the “articulation and dissemination of diverse sexual identities and radical sexual politics” (McNair 2002:206) entails “a rather too direct relation between radicalism, demand, capitalism, and media output” (Attwood 2006:82). Commercial pressures, distributing output that must attract family audiences, and political pressures, avoiding the ire of conservative lobby groups (Kammeyer 2008), restricts Hollywood’s ability to incorporate transgression.

Hollywood’s output remains subject to the operation of an age-based classification system, and findings from this study confirm the commercial implications of this. Major cinema chains (e.g. AMC and Regal) refuse to screen unrated films or films rated NC-17. These films, taken together, achieved just 1% of ticket sales. Films rated NC-17, such as *Shame* (McQueen 2011) and *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (Kechiche 2013), the kinds of films that McNair celebrates, achieve excellent commercial success as art films. *Shame* remains the highest grossing film rated NC-17 of the decade, but it achieved less than half a million ticket sales. The regulation of content necessitated by commercial and political pressures effectively excludes, rather than incorporates, and this works to necessitate subcultural transgression in art cinema.

The findings from this study thus provide empirical evidence that supports Attwood’s contention that McNair poses a too direct relation between radicalism, demand, capitalism and media output. The liberal perspective entails a conception of sex as subject matter that must be freed from legal restrictions and prohibitions. A Foucauldian feminist critique of this perspective (Gill 2012) challenges this perspective. One major topic that reveals the necessity of pursuing this Foucauldian inquiry into liberal perspective on pornographication is the representation of sexual identities and practices that are not heterosexual. The next section of this analysis analyses and discusses the quantitative findings from this study on the representation of non-heterosexual sex. The Foucauldian feminist position critiques this kind of quantitative research, necessitating reflective commentary on this approach.

The frequency of depictions of non-heterosexual sex in films is low. Three visual acts and three verbal acts occurred in 16 films from the 1980s (3.3% of 180 instances), with no more than two scenes in one film (Greenberg et al 1993:51-52). Ten per cent of 105 instances of sexual behaviour occurred between homosexuals in 25 films from 1998 (Dempsey & Reichert 2000). Two depictions of sexual activity between male characters occurred in the top 50 films of 1996, both involving rape (Bufkin & Eschholz 2000). Gunasekera et al (2005) identified one out of 53 episodes featuring homosexual (oral) sex (1.8%). Given that the US Supreme Court decriminalised in 2003, these low levels are not surprising, but how do contemporary films reflect changing sociocultural attitudes?

This study identified 57 scenes featuring the depiction of non-heterosexual sexual activity, accounting for 4.7% of scenes featuring the depiction of any sexual activity, and 215 scenes featuring spoken references to non-heterosexual sexual activity, accounting for 12% of scenes featuring any spoken references to sex. Most of these depictions (60%) and spoken references (73%) involve sexual activity between males. These results match the low occurrence of non-heterosexual practices evident from films since the 1980s. Dempsey and Reichert (2000) contrast the relative lack of depictions of sexual activity between heterosexual married couples with the 10% share coded as homosexual, which reflects the percentages of homosexual in the general population (citing Kinsey et al 1948). This logic indicates that these findings establish an underrepresentation of non-heterosexual sex.

The quantitative findings reported here and in other studies refer to depictions of sex acts, not to characters' sexual identity. GLAAD produce annual reports, the "studio responsibility index", that set out the number of films featuring gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender characters. The percentage share of films featuring such characters was 14% in 2012, 16.7% in 2013, and 17.5% in both 2014 and 2015. This trend indicates an increasing occurrence in popular films of characters who identify as other than heterosexual. An overwhelming majority of gay male characters persists (e.g. 77% in 2015). The question arises as to whether in popular films the discourse around non-heterosexual practices, and the depictions of such activity, reflect the apparent inclusivity that GLAAD's findings indicate. This requires qualitative analysis.

### **The Foucauldian Perspective**

This qualitative analysis occurs within a Foucauldian framework, informed by a particular strand of feminist criticism within the sexualisation and pornification debates. This critique, which emerges especially through the work of Gill (2003, 2009, 201A, 2014), goes beyond questioning the link between capitalism and radicalism. The circulation of films such as *Shame*, *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and the body of work that Walters (2012) describes as "new-wave queer cinema" may reflect a broadening of sexual repertoires, identities and practices circulating through western culture, accessible to all, but Attwood (2006:82) warns that "a simple celebration of these developments ignores the ways in which they also make our sexual practices and identities more available for regulation". Paasonen et al (2007:12) criticize McNair for framing questions in terms of increased sexual self-expression and democratisation of desire because this tends to erase "from view the codes and norms that such expressions tend to confine to". These critiques raise questions about the regulation of sexual practices and identities in popular films, and the identification of the codes and norms about sexual expressions that exist.

The qualitative analysis explores this regulation of sexual practices and identities, and the operation of codes and norms. This entails a shift away from pornification. The quantitative findings in this study establish that the prevalence of sexual content occurs at nongraphic and somewhat graphic levels (per Leone 2002). The conservative concern with the threat that

pornification poses to traditional values requires analysis of the values and norms related to sex at these levels. The quantitative results also established the relative absence of specifically pornographic content, both in terms of sexually graphic depictions of non-simulated sex, depictions of pornographic production and consumption, and spoken references to pornography, thus weakening the feminist anti-pornography critique of pornification as they perceive its application to films. Hollywood's dominance, the commercial realities of film distribution, and the regulation of material through an age-based classification system, complicate the liberal perspective. The analysis in the light of this Foucauldian feminist critique of sexualisation must be qualitative in nature.

This section analysed and discussed the quantitative results from the study, contextualising these findings within current debates on sexualisation and pornification. Although sexual content appears to be prevalent in popular film, with at least one scene occurring in 241 films, such content, contrary to expectations engendered by these discourses, is not increasing in frequency or graphicness. The analysis exposed limitations of quantitative methods, but, despite these difficulties, the findings present an empirical basis for the qualitative analysis that follows. The fact that certain visually identifiable content recurs is not meaningful itself; it is necessary to unpack the processes that connect these phenomena. The analysis articulates how the regulation of sex occurs through the exclusion, repression and repudiation of non-heterosexual sex, the privileging of heterosexuality through representational practices and the processes of discipline and disclosure that subsist through popular film's sexual discourse.

The analysis which follows features extensive reference to two films that emerged as representative in many respects, *No Strings Attached* (Reitman 2011) and *American Sniper* (Eastwood 2014). The latter, as will become clear, matches the structure of the superhero action/adventure films, which the survey of film distribution established as the most popular genre, achieving ticket sales disproportionate to the number of films on release. *No Strings Attached* typifies many aspects of the occurrence of sexual content in contemporary fiction and comedies. These two films, in different ways, reflect the regulation of sexual identity and practice through the exclusion, repression and repudiation of non-heterosexual sex, the privileging of heterosexuality through representational practices, and the construction and maintenance of heteronormative norms through processes of discipline and disclosure. The analysis commences with the exclusion, repression and repudiation of non-heterosexual practices and identities.

### ***No Strings Attached in the Closet***

This section analyses the representation of homosexual identities and practices in recent popular film. It commences with an analysis of *No Strings Attached*, a film that appears to represent "the mainstreaming of gayness" (McNair 2002) with its openly gay and lesbian characters. It contextualizes this apparent openness within the otherwise heteronormative matrix of the film before setting out the broader discursive context in which representations of homosexuality occur.

The focus shifts in this context from a concern with the representation of queer identities to the signification of homosexual practices between heterosexual characters. This signification then relates more to the policing (and self-policing) of heterosexual gender identities. Popular films generally exclude sexual content involving homosexual identities and practices, and the analysis here shows that the secondary representational strategy after exclusion is its repudiation. This occurs within the privileging of heterosexuality that characterizes the heteronormative representation that defines sexual content in recent popular film and forms the subject of the next section.

*No Strings Attached* (Reitman 2011) emerges as one of two key films for understanding the representation of sex in recent popular film. Its central relationship features Adam, a television production assistant, seeking to establish a monogamous relationship with Emma, a childhood sweetheart now working as a nurse and interested only in a casual relationship. The film features a range of queer characters, that is, characters openly identified as lesbian or gay: a male couple parenting a child, Emma's gay housemate Guy, and two of Adam's female co-workers who act on mutual sexual attraction. This range of characters indicates that *No Strings Attached* might represent "the mainstreaming of gayness" (McNair 2002) that exemplifies the standard narrative on sexuality. This apparent openness occurs within a context in which the privileging of heteronormative values such as lifelong heterosexual monogamy prevail. How does this openness operate within this heteronormative matrix? What representational practices does *No Strings Attached* typify? And what processes are at play?

The first issue relates to the representation of a gay character, Guy, who appears in three scenes. Guy first appears joining Patrice and Shira in having fun with Adam's inability to remember what happened the previous night when he wakes up in Emma's apartment and her flatmates imply that Adam may have had a sexual encounter with them. Guy enters with Adam's socks, saying that he left them in his room. Adam asks whether he left his trousers with Guy, who informs him that he was not wearing any when they met. Patrice then asks Guy and Shira to stop teasing him. When Adam leaves the room, holding a small towel to cover himself, Patrice applauds the sight of Adam's bare buttocks, and Guy asserts, "I'm definitely gay." The apparent openness to including gay characters free to vocalise their desire in a milieu of youthful attitudes to casual sexual encounters contrasts with Guy's role in the remainder of the film.

Guy's second appearance occurs during a montage in which Emma and Adam meet in various places for their casual sexual encounters, one of which occurs in Emma's bedroom. Guy appears outside her bedroom, knocking on the door, saying, "I can't focus on my porn with all this real sex going on around me!" This brief scene sets up a noteworthy dichotomy between the "real sex" that occurs between Emma and Adam, a heterosexual encounter, and Guy's solitary encounter with pornography, presumably involving his masturbation while watching images of naked males or other forms of gay pornography. The use of the word "real" connotes Guy's understanding that

his sexual practice is somehow less authentic than that of Emma and Adam. Homosexual practices do not constitute “real sex”. The absence of any depictions of Guy’s sexual practice or even explicit articulations as to what he might be engaged in leaves his homosexual practice hidden, elusive and in the dark, defined as inauthentic.

Guy’s third scene returns homosexual practice literally to the closet during the closing montage as the credits run. He appears in his scrubs at the hospital where he works, beckoning an unseen man, reassuring him that “it’s okay”. He enters an unseen room off the corridor. Sam, Emma’s former fiancé, appears, looking uncertain, then follows Guy into the room, presumably for a homosexual encounter. This encounter contrasts with the final image before the end credits roll, in which Adam and Emma appear in bed together, wearing pyjamas and sleeping. The sequence juxtaposes their heteronormative domesticity with Guy and Sam’s encounter, which remains hidden, secreted and transgressive in its occurrence within an enclave in public space. It contrasts with the more prominent representations of heterosexual encounters throughout the film and popular films more generally. It signals an incorporation of transgression but maintains it as such. This pattern of representation typifies portrayals of sexual activity between male characters in the films studied (e.g. implied and actual restroom encounters in *Get Hard*, *Ted* and *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*).

The heteronormative values of lifelong monogamy and commitment to childrearing also appear in relation to a homosexual couple parenting their now adult child. Patrice recognises Eli, Adam’s best friend, because, she tells him, his parents (two fathers) helped her move some boxes in her sophomore year at college. Eli’s parents never appear on screen, but reference to them results in Eli’s assertion that he’s “super straight” or Eli expressing relief that, unlike Adam’s father, his parents are not likely to pursue his ex-girlfriends. The inclusion of gay parents is problematic in relation to the new “homonormativity”, the respectable form that homosexuality takes in popular culture, and specifically how it manifests in Eli’s disclosures, revealing his own insecurities through a need to assert his heterosexuality and the competition that a heterosexual father might pose. The gay parents, who never appear on-screen, appear discursively in opposition to their heterosexual son or heterosexual fathers. They feature only by reference to Eli’s masculine insecurities.

The final non-heterosexual coupling that occurs in *No Strings Attached*, that of Joy and Lisa, Adam’s colleagues, also plays on masculine insecurities, this time Adam’s. Adam brings the pair drinks after they have come to his place after a work Christmas party. Lisa and Joy appear on a sofa, kissing one another, having revealed drunkenly at the party that they love one another. Adam attempts to join in, but Joy’s hand pushes his face away, prompting him to comment, “You guys are doing a really good job; I’ll just be over here if you need me.” Although this scene features an apparently non-judgemental presentation of a new lesbian romance, Adam’s presence frames the lesbianism as a problem for his male heterosexuality and yet another obstacle in his quest for

romance. Homosexuality, this time between females, again emerges in a context where it is defined against heteronormativity. Lisa and Joy's relationship remains marginalised and disappears for the remainder of the film.

The marginalisation of homosexual practices is clear from the quantitative findings. Less than 10% of films studied feature the depiction of sexual activity between male characters, and the 36 scenes that feature such activity account for only 3% of all scenes featuring any. Spoken references to sexual activity between males occur in just over a quarter of films studied, but this discourse occurs primarily between male characters who would not identify as gay, homosexual or queer. Guy's utterance and reassurance in *No Strings Attached* are rare. Spoken references to sexual activity between females occurs in only 21 films, accounting for less than 2% of scenes featuring references to any sexual activity. Depictions of such sexual activity occur in only nine films. The findings indicate that the discourse on homosexual practices in popular films occur principally between characters who would not identify as LGBTQ, and the analysis that follows, which explores homosexual conduct as a signifier, is significant in this regard.

This analysis is significant as it provides an insight that counters the standard narrative and liberal perspective on "the mainstreaming of gayness" entailed in "the democratisation of desire" (McNair 2002). McNair asserts that "homosexuality had come to signify style, elegance and desirability rather than badness, madness or sadness" (McNair 2002:129). It also looks at the extent to which the "incorporation of transgression" within McNair's cycle of liberalisation (McNair 2013) as it relates to homosexual practices occurs within this discourse. The analysis reveals the operation of disciplinary processes in which characters repudiate homosexual practices, not as a means to police and repress homosexual identities, condemning openly gay characters for their sexual orientation, but, rather, the policing of heteronormative gender identities. The prevailing discourse on homosexual practices in popular films consist of a regulatory regime in which heterosexual characters seek to assert their own alliance with hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity and demean those that do not conform with these heteronormative identities.

The primary disciplinary process through which this performance of hegemonic masculinity occurs is insulting, especially where the insults frequently involve a male instructing another male to perform fellatio or alleging that another male engages in such behaviour. Examples occur in *21 Jump Street* when Jenko apprehends a suspect ("You have the right to suck my dick") and, later, when Mr Walters, a schoolteacher, insults the principal after he breaks up a fight ("Principal Dadier sucks dicks!"), and in *Neighbors* when Teddy and Mac brawl with one another, and Teddy forces a dildo into Mac's mouth ("Suck my dick, yeah, suck it, suck my dick"). *The Wolf of Wall Street* features two such insults. Jordan Belfort offers "twenty-five grand to the first cocksucker to nail a bullseye" when offering cash in a contest that involves tossing dwarves (persons of short stature), and, later, Jerry Fogel insults Mark Hanna when Hanna introduces Jordan Belfort to

Fogel (“Why don’t you blow me, Hanna?”).

The purpose behind these insults is to cause offence. To give effect to these insults and the offence intended, characters rely on the insinuation that the insulted character occupies a weaker position in terms of power. Exercising power through invoking these insults frequently accompanies displays of authority, as in the case of Belfort in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, or physical strength, such as when Teddy overpowers Mac, or after Jenko, a policeman, has apprehended a suspect. Insulting in this manner constitutes a performative aspect of hegemonic masculinity characterised by the exercise of physical strength and power. There is no likelihood of the performance of the sexual act threatened or invoked, but there is an intention to cause offence. Characters intend the reference to sexual activity between males to signify as offensive and demeaning. This discourse coheres both within specific films and across several films, and is the dominant mode of signification in popular film for sexual activity between males.

*Straight Outta Compton* acknowledges the performative aspect of this mode of signification. Eazy-E, Dr Dre and Jerry listen to Ice Cube’s new album after he has left the group and attempts to go solo. Ice Cube’s explicit lyrics insult his former band members, referring to them as “getting fucked out your green by a white boy with no Vaseline” and “Eazy’s dick is smelling like MC Ren’s shit”. A woman smirks, and MC Ren just stares ahead blankly as Ice Cube continues his musical tirade against his ex-business partners. Jerry, the group’s manager, eventually stops the record. “That shit kind funny,” says Yella, attempting to diffuse the tense atmosphere. His comment demonstrates an awareness that Ice Cube’s lyrics are working in a performative manner and reflect the humorousness apparent in other such cinematic insults. The tension evident in the other group members’ reactions relates to their anxiety about the public denigration of their masculinity should Ice Cube’s record prove successful.

The corollary of the performance of strength and masculinity in insulting others is the anxiety male characters continually express in relation to being associated with homosexual conduct. This manifests most prominently in a discourse on anxiety around male sexual assault or rape in prison, most obviously in *Get Hard*, but also in explicit references in many other films (Justin’s fear of getting “ass-raped in a Pakistani prison” in *Zero Dark Thirty*; Madea’s warning to George dropping soap in jail in *Madea’s Witness Protection*; Kurt and Nick’s discussions of who is most likely to be raped in prison in *Horrible Bosses*; Eric’s similar concern in *21 Jump Street*). The theme also occurs in less explicit ways. In *Guardians of the Galaxy*, a monstrous inmate threatens Peter with slathering him up in jelly and “going to town”. In *Puss in Boots*, Humpty-Dumpy exclaims, “Do you know what they do to eggs in San Ricardo? I tell you, my friend, it ain’t over-easy.”

The issue is not that male characters express fears about the criminal violation of bodily integrity, nor is it the persistent linking of sexual activity between males with violence and the absence of

consent. Rather, it is the fragile state of heterosexual masculinity in which physically weaker male characters fear that this marks them as homosexual. The anxiety leads again to the signification of sexual activity between male characters as something that they dislike and fear, not due the likelihood that sexual assaults or rapes will actually happen, but rather owing to the fact that they may occupy positions of (physical) weakness which reduces their ability to meet expectations. The expression of fear around sexual assault and rape in prison and elsewhere correlates with the unstable nature of hegemonic masculinity that needs constant (re-)affirmation and definition against “the other”, being homosexuality. This insecurity manifests in the discourse in which male homosexual practices and identities signify as offending against hegemonic masculinity.

Female characters also engage this process, insulting male characters by referring to sexual activity between males, especially when intending to give offence to a character they seek to belittle. In *Tammy*, Keith, Tammy’s manager, asks how she thinks he got to be where he is now, to which she replies: “Sucking dick and kissing ass?” In *Pitch Perfect 2*, Gail insults John, her rival commentating partner, by saying, “I thought you were going to say gay”, when he refers to be calling called a lot of things (“simple, raw, vulnerable, exposed”) on being moved by a singing performance. In *Horrible Bosses*, Dr Harris insults Dale, her employee, saying, “You’re starting to sound like a little faggot”, when he resists her sexual advances and workplace harassment. Dr Harris attacks Dales heterosexual masculinity for his failure to perform. The signifying practice of homosexuality as offending against hegemonic masculinity is not limited to discourse between male characters. This indicates its coherency and dominance.

The unstable nature of hegemonic masculinity, where it requires constant affirmation, evident through the signification of sexual activity between males as offensive and feared, also manifests through the disciplinary process of denial. This occurs in specific denials when male characters are charged, seriously or otherwise, with engaging in particular behaviour. Examples include Schmidt in *21 Jump Street* (“We’re not finger-popping each other’s assholes”) and Eazy-E in *Straight Outta Compton* (“I ain’t no faggot), with similar denials occurring in *Captain America: The First Avenger*, *The Green Hornet*, *Ted* and *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*. In *42*, Branco, a baseball player, invites Jackie Robinson to take a shower with him after asking Robinson why he does not shower until everybody else is finished. Branco realises the homoerotic subtext to his invitation and reassures Robinson that that is not what he meant. In *Fifty Shades of Grey*, Ana, when interviewing Christian Grey, asks whether Grey is gay, and he denies that he is.

Emphatic denials of homosexual identity also occur when characters mistake two men as being a couple. Prudence assumes Jack and Greg in *Little Fockers* are a couple, though Jack assures Prudence that he would happily choose Greg as his life partner if he were homosexual. This contrasts with an offensive joke in *This Is 40* when Desi assumes Jason and Ronnie are a gay couple as they approach her in a swimming pool. Desi mentions Ronnie’s moustache, prompting Desi to ask what makes a gay man’s moustache different from a straight man’s, to which Jason



remarks, “The smell.” This latter denial again discursively constructs homosexuality as offensive. The apparent openness to accepting homosexual couples, which notably comes from female characters, indicates the possible incorporation of transgression apparent in *No Strings Attached*, but continuing occurrence of homosexuality as that which must be denied persists and heterosexuality asserted in its place, as we have seen too with Eli in *No Strings Attached*.

Eli’s need to assert that he is “super straight”, and several other characters’ expression of fear being tainted with homosexuality and a similar need to assert their heterosexuality creates a point of anxiety and weakness that male and female characters exploit in dissing their adversaries through the disciplinary process of insinuation. Examples include Simmons in *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* implying that Dutch, his PA, is gay when he fails to frisk Carly, and Django in *Django Unchained* shooting Billy Crash after remarking on how Billy had fondled Django when last they met. Insinuations by Charlie about his brother in *The Butler* and Dan Reid about Cavendish in *The Lone Ranger* relate to the anxiety about assault in prison. Insinuations operate in a manner similar to the insults discussed earlier, occurring where a character asserts his power over another. The insinuation process relies for its effectiveness on the signification of homosexual practices and identities as the opposite of hegemonic masculinity.

This signification practice gains coherency and dominance from the fact that it is not limited to male characters exploiting other male characters’ anxiety in this process of insinuation. Female characters play on this anxiety, particular in bar settings where potential partners may actually be gay. In *Black Swan*, Lily jokes about two men at a bar being “gay lovers”, though she asserts that one of them is not gay when hearing that he has never been to the ballet. Lily attempts to minimise the potential for rejection by asserting the men are homosexual and resorts to stereotypes when the insinuation is rejected. In *Tammy*, Pearl, Tammy’s grandmother, assuages Tammy’s feelings by insinuating that two men who reject her advances might be gay. Tammy asserts that she is “cool with your lifestyle choice” and encourages them to “gay it up”. The men’s sexuality remains undefined as the action moves on. Again a female character expresses an apparent acceptance of homosexual identity.

The analysis so far focuses on the signification of male homosexual identity as offensive and that which must be feared and denied. References to sexual activity between females occur much less frequently, but similar signifying practices occur. Expressions of fear of sexual assault in prison by female characters occur in *Identity Thief* when Diana complains to Sandy and Trish about “dykes... still really getting up into my sweet junk, but I don’t let them” and in *The Other Woman* when Kate exclaims at the thought of going to prison (“I will be the bottom!”). Elizabeth’s dismissal of Amy’s suggestion in *Bad Teacher* that they might become friends comes with an offensive retort: “I don’t know what you heard but I don’t need muff pie.” Thus the discourse between heterosexual female characters around same-sex practices and identity resembles in its limited occurrence the way that male homosexuality signifies in a more prevalent discourse. The

signifying practice gains in coherency and dominance.

This outline provides the discursive context in which the limited number of depictions of homosexual practices occur. It is important to bear in mind that the primary representational practice in popular film relating to sexual activity between members of the same sex is exclusion. The second most significant practice is repudiation of such sexual activity. The discursive context is clearly one that does not meet with McNair's characterisation of "the mainstreaming of gayness", the "democratisation of desire" nor the signification of "style, elegance and desire". Sexual activity between members of the same sex signifies something that characters view as offensive and demeaning, something to fear being associated with in any way. It is generally not associated with persons identifying as gay, homosexual or queer; rather, it functions as something associated with heterosexual characters who occupy positions of weakness. It functions as a signifier within regulatory practices or disciplinary processes in which the policing of hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity occur.

Exclusion constitutes the primary representational practice in relation to portraying sexual activity between members of the same gender. Only twelve scenes feature the depiction of sexual acts between females, accounting for less than 1% of all scenes featuring any depictions. These occur in nine films (less than 4% of those studied). Thirty-six scenes feature the depiction of sexual acts between males, accounting for less than 3% of all scenes featuring any depictions. These occur in 23 films (less than 10% of those studied). The majority of these depictions feature portrayals of sexual acts between characters who would not identify as gay, lesbian, homosexual or queer. The occurrence of such depictions again is not representative of "the mainstreaming of gayness". Analysis reveals that such depictions also contribute to the signification of homosexual practices with the prevailing mode of depictions involving circumstances of deviancy or disgust. Humorous or comic treatment contributes to the signification of homosexuality as aberrant, unexpected, unintentional or unwanted.

Depictions of sexual activity between males occurs in deviant circumstances. In *The Wolf of Wall Street*, Naomi and Jordan Belfort later express their disgust on discovering that their butler hosted an orgy with several other men, engaging in acts of fellatio and anal intercourse in their living room. In *Get Hard* James wretches during his struggle to perform fellatio on a homosexual man in the restrooms of a restaurant. *Neighbors* features the "elephant walk" hazing ritual in which naked college-aged male students form a circle with their hands in between the legs of the man in front, holding his penis. Other depictions that occur are accidental, such as Jenko repeatedly touching Schmidt's penis in *22 Jump Street* when attempting to retrieve a grenade from his shorts as they both hang from a helicopter, and Kurt in *Horrible Bosses* looking visibly uncomfortable when he realises that he has been admiring a man's buttocks when trying out some binoculars in a store.

McNair (2002) contrasts the “mainstreaming of gayness” and the signification of homosexuality as stylish, elegant and desirable with past practices that associated homosexuality with “madness, badness or sadness”. However, depictions of sexual activity between females in recent popular film explicitly link such conduct with mental health issues. These depictions include Nina’s encounters with Lily in *Black Swan*, which feature kissing, masturbation and cunnilingus and Lisbeth’s encounter with Miriam Wu in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Neither film articulates the conditions from which Nina or Lisbeth suffer. Their sexual encounters with other females function as a signifier of Lisbeth’s trauma and Asperger’s-type condition and Nina’s psychotic breakdown that arises from her suffering with a kind of anxiety disorder. Cynthia Rose, in the *Pitch Perfect* films, is the only openly lesbian character who appears in scenes featuring the depiction of sexual activity, but her advances are unprompted, unwanted and resisted. Lesbianism, like gay male homosexuality, signifies as mad, bad and sad.

*No Strings Attached* features an apparent acceptance of homosexuality with references to gay parenting, an openly gay supporting character, and minor lesbian characters. This apparent openness may represent the “mainstreaming of gayness” entailed in the “democratisation of desire” and the signification of homosexuality as stylish, elegant and desirable (McNair 2002). However, *No Strings Attached* shows how this apparent openness reflects the difficulties that the “incorporation of transgression” entails. This content exists within a matrix that privileges heteronormative values through asymmetrical dichotomies, the devaluation of practices other than heterosexual as inauthentic and consigning homosexuality back to the closet. The discursive context in which references to sexual activity between members of the same gender generally occurs involves heterosexual characters expressing disapproval through insults, insinuations and denials. Eli’s repeated need to affirm his heterosexuality reflects the anxiety around masculinity that founds the disciplinary processes operating within this discursive context. This exclusion and repudiation of homosexuality constitutes a corollary of the privileging of heterosexuality.

### ***American Sniper*, the Privileging of Heterosexuality & the Double Plot Structure**

The identification of a recurring narrative structure that prevails in Hollywood’s output is not new, but writing on it focuses on “classic Hollywood narration” by reference to Hollywood’s output during the “Golden Age” of the studio system and the operation of the Production Code (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson 1985). Luhr (1990) outlines how classic Hollywood narration focuses on a single protagonist or a small group of individuals who must accomplish clearly defined goals by the film’s conclusion. Luhr identifies two spheres in which these goals tend to exist: “One sphere is private, generally a heterosexual romance; the second is a public—a career advance, the obliteration of an enemy, a mission, a discovery, and the like” (Luhr 1990:7-8). Turner (1999:92) similarly identifies as characteristic of “most mainstream Hollywood productions” “a double plot structure which links a heterosexual romance with another sphere of action”. Importantly, Turner, writing at the end of the twentieth century, understands this to

prevail within then-contemporary cinema.

The films studied here reflect the continuing prevalence of this double plot structure in which heterosexual romantic relationships are key. This structure privileges heterosexuality in a way that insists upon heteronormative values of lifelong monogamous commitment and openness to procreation and childrearing. The extent to which this occurs varies between films, ranging from a “strong” emphasis in films where the link between the establishment, maintenance and defence of a heterosexual marital relationship open to procreation is overt to a “weak” emphasis where the film focuses more on the public sphere, the action in which the obliteration of an enemy, a mission, a discovery or the like takes precedence, and the romantic or sexual content occurs in perfunctory opening or closing scenes. *American Sniper* (Eastwood 2014) represents the strong emphasis, while superhero films represent the weaker variant. Both centre on a male protagonist who takes on the role of “the protector”, the defender of the family and nation against external threats.

The double plot structure that privileges heterosexual romance also entails restricted gender roles for the male protagonist, who acts as a defender and protector of the family, and his wife or girlfriend, who acts as mother and remains at home to look after the children. These traditional gender roles entail specific characteristics or traits that constitute the hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity mentioned previously in the analysis and discussion of the exclusion and repudiation of homosexual identities and practices. The nature of these gender identities becomes clearer as the inquiry into the disciplinary processes at play in the representation of sexual practices continues. For now, the focus is on analysing how the privileging of heterosexuality that occurs within the double plot structure relates to portrayals of sexual acts that occur within it. This analysis commences with a detailed look at *American Sniper* (Eastwood 2014), the film that exemplifies this classic narrative structure, before going on to look at other films.

The establishment, maintenance and defence of a heterosexual marriage open to procreation constitutes a central goal within the double plot structure. The privileging of heteronormative values such as lifelong commitment and childrearing occurs through the recurrence of this narrative structure across many films, in how this structure shapes the portrayal of sexual acts, and in the operation of processes of disclosure and discipline. All aspects are evident in *American Sniper*. While the film is not primarily about sex, it typifies how sexual content occurs in popular films. It features sixteen scenes in which sexual themes or imagery occur. Seven scenes feature depictions, six at the somewhat graphic level and one at the graphic level (per Leone 2002). Fourteen scenes feature spoken references, nine of which feature only this content. The sexual activity referred to includes vaginal intercourse, digital anal penetration, incest, masturbation, fellatio, “dirty talk”, groping, reproduction, pornography, and disrobing. These references occur in patterns and processes that privilege heterosexuality.

Focusing on this privileging emphasizes the importance of a sequence generally absent from film reviews (e.g. Scott 2014; Turan 2014, Kermode 2015), which mention another flashback in which Kyle recalls his father identifying three kinds of people, sheep, wolves and sheepdogs. The other early sequence features Kyle returning from the rodeo with Jeff, his brother, who taunts Kyle about what he should do with the buckle he has won. Kyle jokes about seeing if it will put Sarah, his girlfriend, “in the mood”. Jeff taunts Kyle about Sarah’s high school reputation (“Sarah Sucks-a-Lotta”) before Kyle playfully reprimands him. Kyle arrives home to find Sarah pulling up her trousers, as does a bare-chested man in the background. Kyle forces out the man, punching him in the face. Sarah attempts to explain her infidelity—“I do this to get attention; don’t you get that?”—and insults Kyle as she leaves: “You’re just a lousy ranch hand and you’re a shitty fucking lay!”

Whereas the sequence with Kyle’s father cited in film reviews establishes that Kyle must fulfil the role of protector, the less critically noted scenes involving Jeff, his brother, and Sarah, his girlfriend, establish the “lack” in relation to Kyle’s personal life. The disciplinary processes establishing this lack reflect the construction of hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity that heteronormativity entails. The brothers’ banter in the car foreshadows the camaraderie that occurs later between Kyle and his military colleagues on duty in Iraq. Such taunting, mocking one another’s sexual or romantic partners, may not indicate beliefs genuinely held, but the scenes that follow confirm Sarah’s promiscuity. Jeff’s taunts rile Kyle because a truth underlies them. This disparagement of Sarah’s character indicates her unsuitability as Kyle’s lifelong partner, her infidelity disqualifying her from the idealised femininity that Taya, who will become his wife, embodies. The sequence sets up the contrast between Taya’s faithfulness and Sarah’s promiscuity that revolves in favour of the former.

The process of insulting, in which Sarah comments on Kyle’s sexual performance, reflects an aspect of the ongoing discourse around hegemonic masculinity where female characters value their male partners as much, if not more, for adequate sexual performance and an ability to please their sex partners than their character or appearance. The credibility of Sarah’s comments is dubious, but her insult points to a need for Kyle to become more attentive to his romantic partner. Sarah’s insults call into question Kyle’s masculinity when he recognises the malaise in his life with his failure to fulfil his father’s expectations as a protector and as a man. The following sequences, which cut between Kyle’s military recruitment and training, his witnessing of television reports on the bombing of US embassies in east Africa and 9/11, and scenes from his developing relationship with Taya, constantly link his role as protector for the country with his role as boyfriend, husband and father to his children.

The privileging of heteronormative values of marriage and procreation occurs through a specific linking of sexual acts within Kyle’s marriage to procreation and growing their family, but it also reveals a sexual aspect of idealised femininity. The graphic scene in the film (per Leone 2002)

depicts Kyle sitting at a table in the living room of their house. Taya, his pregnant wife, approaches and asks him what he would like to do. He wants to relax. She sits opposite him. The camera cuts to a wide shot, showing the pair's legs under the table. Taya stretches out her leg, and we see, in close-up, her foot near his crotch. "What are you doing?" he says. "Putting my foot on you," she replies. "Well, you know that's the way to my heart," he comments. Taya approaches Kyle, sits on his lap, they kiss on the lips and hug. Cut to Taya's exposed pregnant belly while she undergoes a scan in hospital.

This sequence explicitly links Kyle and Taya's sexual conduct to reproduction, but it differs significantly from the portrayal of marital sex conduct that Dempsey and Reichert (2000) identified in their study because it features a flirtation outside of the bedroom, expressly linking sexual behaviour with romance and love. The sequence also highlights the added dimension of "sexiness" entailed in contemporary idealised femininity. Taya's appearance in black bra and underpants, as she approaches Kyle, sexualizes the domestic wife and mother figure and reflects the fulfilment of her obligation to be beautiful, desirable and open to sexual experimentation. This aspect of idealised femininity reflects the Foucauldian feminist concern with the construction of a constantly sexual feminine subjectivity. Whereas Dempsey and Reichert (2000) found that depictions of marital sex were banal and rarely went beyond passionate kissing, the portrayal in *American Sniper*, while hardly risqué, is more exciting. The narrative structure privileging heterosexuality involves an idealised femininity that encompasses domesticity *and* sex appeal.

Two films closely resemble *American Sniper* in the overt linking of soldiers' personal lives with their domestic roles as husbands and fathers. *Lone Survivor* (Berg 2013) fictionalizes the experiences of Marcus Luttrell, the only surviving member of a four-man Navy SEAL reconnaissance and surveillance team tasked with tracking down a Taliban leader in Afghanistan. *Lone Survivor* features a montage showing images and footage of the SEAL team members involved in Operation Red Wings. Photographs appear featuring the soldiers separately in their military outfits and with their wives on their wedding day or with their children, or, in the case of Matthew Axelson, a video in which he kisses his bride after their first dance. This sequence appears before the final credits roll, and it functions in a similar manner to the poignant final scene in *American Sniper*, both emphasizing that wars abroad cause great loss for families back home in the name of the nation, country and its heteronormative institutions.

*Act of Valor* similarly emphasises the defence of marriage and family, telling a fictional tale about Navy SEALs preventing terrorist suicide bombers from attacking the USA. The US Navy initiated the film's production as part of its recruitment campaigns. The film features serving NAVY Seals in the main roles, using their equipment, with several sequences shot during actual training sessions (Anderson 2012). Early sequences feature Dave and Rorke bidding farewell to their wives. Rorke, in voice-over, speaks about the necessity to make sure that things are right with the family so that all their focus is on the mission once they depart. Dave speaks to his unborn child

in his wife's womb, and his wife says that she would like "to be able to look into your eyes when our first child is born". These farewell scenes feature somewhat graphic depictions of kissing (per Leone 2002) as soldiers bid farewell to their wives who remain at home to give birth.

*American Sniper*, *Act of Valor* and *Lone Survivor* represent the privileging of heterosexual romance within the double plot structure in its "strong" variation. The "weak" variation is evident in superhero films. This weakness arises from the "awkward dichotomy" in selling such films to the public, where the producers must be careful that the sexual content does not exclude a juvenile audience (Forshaw 2015:182). Forshaw (2015) comments on the contemporary commercial significance of superhero films, which "virtually rule at the box office", and their celebration of the human physique, especially the male form, "repeatedly showcased in their obligatory tight-fitting costumes" (ibid). Dialogue in films such as *Man of Steel* and *Thor* features female characters "murmuring" their approval of the male superheroes. The privileging of heteronormative values occurs through a double plot structure involving the superhero defeating an antagonist who also threatens the security of the superhero's romantic relationship (Superman and Lois Lane, Tony Stark/Iron Man and Pepper Potts, Thor and Jane).

The heteronormative values of lifelong monogamy and commitment to procreation manifest most explicitly in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. Laura, pregnant, asks for her husband Clint's reassurance about the support he feels from the Avengers team, saying "Things are changing for us. In a few months' time, you and me are gonna be outnumbered. I need to be sure." They kiss briefly on the lips, Clint kisses Laura's forehead, and they hug one another. This kissing scene resembles the farewell montage in *Act of Valor* and specifically links the jeopardy that Ultron poses and that drives that the narrative forward to how it threatens the foundation of Clint's family. The jeopardy thus operates in a similar manner to that apparent in *American Sniper*, *Act of Valor* and *Lone Survivor*, sharing with *Act of Valor* the somewhat graphic depictions (per Leone 2002) of physical intimacy. This constitutes a major way in which the privileging of heteronormative values occurs in superhero action films.

Processes of discipline and disclosure that privilege heterosexuality in *American Sniper* also operate in superhero films. Scott (2014) views the "celebrations of the profane, aggressive humor and endless teasing that men in combat deploy to relieve the tension" as "some of the [film's] liveliest and most memorable scenes". These include a scene in which a soldier jokingly messes up comments about Kyle's ability in marksmanship by reference to fellatio. This continues the prevailing discourse between heterosexual male characters that repudiates homosexual conduct and its signification as demeaning. *Iron Man 3* features Slattery's subtle disclosure that his substance abuse led to him working as a male prostitute. Tony Stark's comments in several films displays the taunting of weaker characters and their apparent failure to meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity, using language that obliquely refers to erectile dysfunction (insulting Loki in *The Avengers* and Clint in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*) and insinuating homoerotic acts

(taunting Rhodes in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*).

The double plot structure privileges the heteronormative values of lifelong monogamy and procreation through the establishment of strong character types, the male protector and the female mother, the policing of hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity, and representational patterns of sexual conduct that specifically link such behaviour to reproduction. The male protector overcomes an external threat to establish, maintain and defend a nuclear family with defined traditional gender roles. Processes of discipline and disclosure also operate within this double plot structure to privilege heterosexuality: this constitutes a key insight in this study. The farewell scene, in which the male protector kisses his romantic partner before setting off on his quest, occurs in films such as *Captain Phillips* and *Planet of the Apes*. These constitute one of the ways in which representation of somewhat graphic scenes (per Leone 2002) function as a visual grammar that punctuate the double plot structure. The next section more fully articulates this visual grammar of cinematic osculation.

### **Kissing & the Visual Grammar of Heteronormative Privileging**

The quantitative analysis established that somewhat graphic depictions (per Leone 2002) account for more than half of scenes featuring the depiction of any sexual content and that kissing accounts for 57% of such depictions. There were 679 scenes, in 200 films (80% of those studied), featuring nongraphic, somewhat graphic or graphic depictions of kissing between characters of opposite gender. Frequency of occurrence is not an indicator of significance, so this section explores the significance of the depiction of kissing, the most commonly portrayed act of physical intimacy, as a representational practice in recent popular film. This analysis constitutes a significant development on an approach to cinematic osculation first initiated by Williams (2006, 2008), the premier scholar in filmic sexual representation, but it also marks an important departure, specifically as it reorients the understanding of osculation from its relation to “sex” to its signification within the privileging of heteronormative values. Williams’ use of grammatical terminology in understanding on-screen kissing proves useful.

Williams (2006, 2008) investigates depictions of kissing in classic Hollywood films, viewing them as “synecdoches for the whole sex act” (Williams 2006:294). Williams locates this signifying practice within “the long adolescence of American movies, before the breakdown of the Production Code and the inevitable effects of the sexual revolution made the kiss just one of many possible acts” (Williams 2006:334). Her approach to movie kisses thus reflects the standard narrative and the liberal perspective on sexual depictions in film, i.e. that the sexual revolution of the 1960s resulted in newfound freedom and the proliferation of a range of sexual practices in films. However, the empirical analysis here establishes that scenes featuring kissing remain the most commonly portrayed act of physical intimacy in recent popular film. The findings establish that a range of sexual practices appear, but these more graphic depictions account for 14% of those that occur. It is first necessary to analyse portrayals of kissing within recent popular films.



Williams (2006, 2008) focuses especially on depictions of kissing that stand in for sex and identifies this construction as the “ellipsis”. A typical scene features a couple starting to kiss in a bedroom, cutting to a shot in which one of the couple lights up a cigarette in bed. An example occurs in *Looper* (Johnson 2012) when Joe and Sara kiss passionately in her bedroom, cut to close-up of them kissing, fade to black, and fade into Sara lighting up tight close-up. Leone (2002) accounts for such scenes by allowing for scenes in which visual cues indicate that sexual intercourse has occurred though no sexual contact is shown. Williams outlines her goal as taxonomizing “the filmic mode of the kiss”, exploring its role as “textual punctuation mark”. Whereas Williams focuses especially on the ellipsis and linking kissing to sexual intercourse, the analysis explores the portrayal of kissing as a signifying practice within the double plot structure and its heteronormative values.

The analysis here departs from Williams in terms of its theoretical framework. Williams uses Sobchack’s “phenomenological approach” (Sobchack 1992, 2004) while considering a scene in *The Piano* (Campion 1993) and discussing how viewing on-screen human contact invokes our own sense of touch. Williams distinguishes this approach from both a feminist conception of “an objectifying male gaze that excludes the female pleasure in looking”, on the one hand, and “an ideologically centered Cartesian perspective that reduces what is seen to a mastered, distanced object” (Williams 2006:328). The analysis here is not concerned with positing theoretical spectatorship or referring to the researcher’s bodily experience of viewing kissing. Rather, it looks at the conditions in which kissing scenes occur by reference to recurring processes within narrative and character development. In Williams’ terms, it is concerned with how portrayals of kissing function as an exclamation point or other textual device that serves to emphasise and privilege heteronormative values such as lifelong monogamy and procreation.

The most common category of kissing scene relates directly to the double plot structure and establishment, maintenance and defence of heterosexual romance. The climactic kiss occurs near the film’s conclusion when the male protector-protagonist overcomes whatever obstacle obstructed him throughout the film, creating jeopardy, that is, putting something at stake for the character. The climactic kiss in all but two scenes (*The Lorax*, *Puss in Boots*) involves a somewhat graphic depiction (per Leone 2002), heroic figures “getting the girl” or an unlikely hero succeeding (Harry Potter, *Pixels*). A variation features married characters triumphing over threats such as monsters (*Godzilla*), war (*Django Unchained*), unruly neighbours (*Neighbors*), supernatural forces (*Insidious 2*) or abstractions (racism in *42*). The climactic kiss constitutes an exclamation point or full stop in emphasising the emotional exhilaration the hero shares with his romantic partner, in the removal of jeopardy that permits the establishment or restoration of a heterosexual relationship, implied as being long-term, committed, and open to procreation.

The interrupted kiss relates directly to the climactic kiss, occurring where an external obstacle or internal difficulty prevents a couple from completing a kiss, but where their kissing later in the

film symbolises the couple overcoming the obstacle, successfully protecting their relationship. Incomplete kisses feature no lip contact, so they rate as nongraphic (per Leone 2002). They occur at various stages in films and may occur repeatedly. The main characters in *Gnomeo & Juliet* repeatedly attempt to kiss but at different points a fence, a broken tree and Benny, Gnomeo's friend, interrupt before they finally kiss in the finale. This pairing of interrupted and climactic kisses occurs in *Goosebumps*, *Green Lantern*, *Hope Springs*, *The Lorax*, *No Strings Attached*, *Oz the Great and Powerful*, *Pitch Perfect*, *Pixels*, *Rio*, *Thor: The Dark World* and *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*. It works in a poetic or musical manner, as a kind of refrain or chorus that finds completion only at the film's conclusion.

The farewell kiss occurs when the main character kisses his romantic partner before setting out on a quest, signifying the couple's commitment to one another while facing jeopardy. The farewell scenes in *Act of Valor*, described above, and Kyle's scenes with *American Sniper* provide examples of this kiss, the latter a more graphic variety. The farewell kiss may occur near the film's beginning (as in *Contraband* and *World War Z*) or just before the climax (as in *The Martian* and *San Andreas*). It always involves a male leaving behind his female partner, the protector leaving behind the wife-mother figure. The anxiety that the protector may not return (from fighting terrorists, supervillains or aliens) contributes to the film's jeopardy and personalizes the mission. *Act of Valor* and *American Sniper* typify how such kissing scenes relate explicitly to marriage and reproduction. The farewell kiss signifies within the privileging of heterosexuality that the traditional institutions of heterosexual coupling, marriage and family require defending.

Depictions of kissing also frequently occur in scenes where heterosexual couples marry after the protagonist has triumphed. Such depictions constitute a variation of the climactic kiss that specifically links the heterosexual coupling to heteronormative marriage (*Cinderella*, *John Carter*, etc), renewal of wedding vows (*Hope Springs*) or marrying an age-appropriate partner (*Just Go with It*). Wedding kisses occurring near the film's beginning establish the nature of the relationship that plot developments put in jeopardy (*Breaking Dawn 1*, *The Hunger Games 3*). Kyle and Taya's wedding in *American Sniper* falls into this category. Scenes featuring kissing upon a female character accepting a proposal of marriage (engagement kisses) also specifically relate to heteronormative marriage (*The Best Man Holiday*, *Think Like a Man*). Scenes featuring couples kissing when celebrating the decision to have children (*Gone Girl*, *Ted 2*), wives disclosing their pregnancy to husbands (*Fast Five*, *Heaven Is for Real*), and the birth of a child (*The Other Woman*) specifically link kissing to procreation.

This analysis provides a brief outline on the way in which scenes featuring the depiction of kissing operate as a visual grammar or poetic device that punctuate and symbolise the establishment, maintenance and defence of heteronormative relationships. This mode of signification for osculation prevails over other modes due to its role in the double plot structure. It provides the necessary visual action within the private sphere (Luhr 1990) that complements the action in

public spheres. Scenes featuring kissing as a physically intimate act related to the initiation of sex or standing in for occurrence of sexual intercourse as Williams' ellipsis occur, but these also occur within the heteronormative framework where at least one character engaged in such conduct must choose within the double plot structure between a heteronormative relationship and casual sex. The privileging of heteronormative values through this mode of signification for kissing also occurs through the exclusion and repudiation of sexual activity as described in the previous section.

The privileging of heteronormative values of commitment to lifelong monogamy and procreation occurs through the exclusion and repudiation of sexual practices and identities that are signified as offensive or deviant through representational practices and processes of discipline and disclosure. This section establishes that the privileging of heteronormative values also occurs through the classic Hollywood double plot structure, which emphasises the establishment, maintenance and defence of heterosexual coupling. The analysis here updates the understanding of classical Hollywood narrative (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson 1985) as it applies to more recent popular film and specifically in relation to its heteronormative aspects. The analysis departs from Williams' focus on kissing a substitute for sex ("the ellipsis"), articulating in its place the signification of osculation as a visual grammar or poetic device that punctuates or accentuates heteronormative values. This aspect focused on depictions. The next stage requires consideration of how processes of discipline and disclosure privilege heteronormative values and construct hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity.

### **Heteronormative Exclusivity**

Nichols (1981) suggests that cinematic narratives attempt to resolve contradictions and, in doing so, provide models for action in the present: "Narrative may explain away real contradictions or explain how real contradictions might be overcome" (Nichols 1981:76). For Nichols, the imagined resolution of "real contradictions" founds the relation of cinematic narrative to ideology and social change (ibid). Narratives in recent popular film entail resolution of contradictions in relation to sexual topics. What contradictions are these? And how does the resolution of such contradictions occur in a narrative structure that privileges heterosexual romance? The exclusion and repudiation of sexual practices and identities other than heterosexual, together with the double plot structure and its privileging of heterosexual romance, establish how recent popular films are heterosexist (Seidman 1991; Warner 1991; Marchia & Sommer 2019). The resolution of contradictions through cinematic narrative, and the presentation of models for action that this entails, represent how discourses on sexual practice in recent popular films are heteronormative.

The primary contradiction in relation to sex that film narratives must resolve is the commitment to marriage and lifelong monogamy, on the one hand, and an interest in casual sexual encounters and infidelity, on the other. Previous scholarship identifies the prevalence of portrayals of sexual acts between unmarried characters. Dempsey and Reichert (2000) concluded from an analysis of

the top 25 film rentals of 1998 that portrayals of sexual acts among married characters were rarer and more mundane compared to depictions of characters having sex outside of marriage. The most common sexual act depicted between married partners was kissing, while sexual intercourse was more common among uncommitted partners. This quantitative approach, using content analysis, emphasises visual portrayals. The prevalence of depictions of sexual activity between nonmarried partners, and the more “progressive” nature of these portrayals, might indicate that popular films favour or promote casual sexual encounters over marital sex. Such an interpretation relies on frequency of occurrence as indicating significance.

The depictions of sexual activity in popular films acquire significance through the narrative contexts in which they occur. The double plot structure, and its privileging of heterosexuality as outlined above, constitutes an important context. Portrayals of sexual behaviour and the discourse on sex that occurs in films also acquire significance through the resolution of contradictions within this structure. The analysis here identifies mechanisms through which these resolutions as they relate to sex play out: processes of discipline and disclosure. The contradictions arise through the expression of differing attitudes to what constitutes appropriate or correct sexual conduct. Characters approve or disapprove of attitudes, values or beliefs about sex, and there may be a coherency that emerges both within and across films. Characters may propose specific modes of sexual behaviour, and how other characters react to these represents a form of resolution, if only temporary. Again, a coherent set of values or modes of behaviour may arise both within and across films.

The normative aspect of heteronormativity arises from the resolution of the contradiction between an obligation to be monogamous and the appeal of casual sex. Norms form in the discourses that occur around these. Characters express different attitudes as to what constitutes “good” sex, giving rise to a discursive aspect to the divergence between visual representations of sex according to marital status identified previously (Dempsey & Reichert 2000). Characters also express conflicting expectations of how male and female characters should behave in relation to sex. These expressions occur within the disciplinary processes identified in this analysis, which reveals a dynamic conception of hegemonic masculinity and a static conception of idealised femininity. Characters propose possible courses for action for themselves and others to follow, establishing and reflecting norms, but characters may not follow these norms. These patterns reflect the practical operation of norms, where people acknowledge their existence but may not follow them. *No Strings Attached* (Reitman 2011) provides a good example.

*No Strings Attached* (Reitman 2011) best represents the dichotomy between long-term monogamy and casual sex. Analysis of this film previously focused on Eli, best friend to Adam, the main character, Guy, Emma’s roommate, and Joy and Lisa, Adam’s colleagues. The plot centres on Adam’s relationship with Emma, a young woman who works as a doctor with whom Adam had a sexual encounter during their adolescence. After a one-night stand, when they meet at a party

years later, Emma wants only a casual relationship with Adam in which they meet only to have sex, but Adam falls in love with Emma. Critics (e.g. Edelstein 2011) identify that the premise then involves a reversal in gender roles, borne out by comparison to observations about a more typical masculine avoidance of intimacy and a feminine pursuit of sexual pleasure rather than love (Giddens 1992). The disciplinary processes identified here are apparent in how Adam then responds to commentary and advice from his friends.

The disciplinary processes at play in constructing lifelong monogamy and the principle of exclusivity as heteronormative arise through Adam's interactions with Eli and Wallace, his friends. Eli advises Adam to accept Emma's proposition that they engage in casual sexual encounters with other women, suggesting that he's "living every man's dream", that he will regret this later in his life, referring to the drabness of the marital sex he is likely to be having with his wife ten years on. Later, Wallace also engages in a disciplinary process, this time inquiring into Adam's choices by asking why Adam is not having sex with Lucy, another colleague, and advising him to "man up". The discourse on casual sex occurs between male characters of the same age, suggesting that it is something they will regret not having when they are older, and advising one another to take advantage of opportunities while they arise. However, neither friend convinces Adam to abandon "winning" over Emma.

Three aspects of Eli's advice to Adam are noteworthy. Firstly, Eli's advice to Adam refers to an expectation concerning male interest in the pursuit of a purely sexual relationship, the avoidance of emotional connection with sexual partners, and an openness to having sexual encounters with other women. Eli's advice provides a possible goal for Adam, not only to pursue, but to feel that he has achieved. His advice acknowledges that a certain norm exists and Adam is fulfilling it. The disciplinary processes of advising or persuading, in which Eli attempts to convince Adam to take a certain attitude to Emma's approach to their relationship, raises the contradiction that Adam must resolve through deciding how to deal with the lack of exclusivity in their relationship that Emma prefers. Though Eli's advice reflects how characters attempt to influence others by setting out how they ought to behave, positing a norm, it does not mean that they will think or behave this way.

The second aspect of Eli's advice is his reference to the perceived drabness of marital sex. This reflects the apparent disparity identified by scholars (Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Dempsey & Reichert 2000) in the more prevalent and more passionate portrayals in popular film of sexual activity between characters who are not married. Eli refers to another possible norm of heteronormative marriage, that sex inevitably becomes more mundane. Dempsey and Reichert (2000) emphasize that scholarship consistently finds that this is otherwise in real life (citing Kinsey et al 1953; Laumann et al 1994). Eli's characterisation of marital sex contributes to popular film's distorting representation of marital sex. His reference may also allude to the changing nature of sex, where sexual practice constitutes a significant aspect of personal

fulfilment. The norm that arises then is a pressure for a character to find sexual satisfaction and personal fulfilment with a single person, which is what Adam finds in his developing relationship with Emma.

The third aspect of Eli's advice to Emma is its performativity. Eli's assertions concerning his heterosexuality against the background of his gay parents featured earlier in this analysis. This constant re-affirmation of his sexuality indicates Eli's anxiety about his masculinity. Eli's advice to Adam then might reflect a need on his part to identify, in the presence of Adam and Wallace, his friends, what he perceives as an aspect of hegemonic masculinity to which he feels need to be seen and, more importantly, heard to subscribe. Eli's view on hegemonic masculinity encompasses a traditional masculine attitude to sexual practice that entails the avoidance of intimacy (per Giddens 1992) and a preference for multiple partners. Eli's view from this perspective again suggests that this is a normative view of what attitudes to sexual practice men his age should take. Eli's expression functions as normative in setting out a norm that he would like to follow and that Adam should follow also.

Wallace, in *No Strings Attached*, engages in similar processes of discipline and disclosure that represent the playing out of contradictory attitudes to the principle of exclusivity and its resolution in favour of traditional monogamy. Wallace differs from Eli, lacking Eli's insecurities. He does not take offence when Eli points out to Adam that Wallace was crying when seeing Adam's television show, saying that it reminded him of his prom when he got a "hand job" on the dancefloor. Wallace's engagement with Adam is more rhetorical than inquisitive when he asks Adam why he has not pursued Lucy, his colleague. An expectation that Adam should avail of any potential sex with a woman underlies Wallace's rhetoric. Wallace's demand for Adam to "man up" reflects the language of hegemonic masculinity, implying the existence of a standard that masculinity requires male characters to reach, one which involves engaging in sexual practices with multiple female partners, a standard that both Eli and Wallace advocate.

Eli and Wallace, Adam's friends, propose models of action for him to follow. The proposed action includes engaging in sexual encounters with as many female partners as possible. This defies traditional marriage and lifelong monogamy. The fulfilment that casual encounters as sexual practice provide derives from the range of pleasures that these can offer. Wallace mentions a "hand job" on a dancefloor. Such encounters also provide material for braggadocio like Wallace's, which constitutes another aspect of hegemonic masculine performativity. Adam does not explicitly argue, reject or discuss his friends' proposed model of action. Rather, he pursues a different path. Adam and his friends represent the dynamic character of hegemonic masculinity. It is dynamic because Adam moves from the kind of masculinity advocated by Eli and Wallace to the more mature masculinity that entails and derives fulfilment from commitment to a single partner. This progression represents for male characters the resolution of the contradiction between monogamy and openness to multiple partners.

The main plot in *No Strings Attached* focuses on a single character's progression through this resolution. Similar disciplinary and disclosive processes operate in a multinarrative film that charts the progression of several male characters through this dynamic. *Think Like a Man* (Story 2012) features several scenes in which a group of male friends discuss their developing relationships with prospective female partners. Cedric (Kevin Hart) narrates four storylines in which the female characters follow advice from a self-help book that advises women to "act like a lady, think like a man". This film plays with the contradiction between commitment to one partner, favoured by the female characters, and an interest in sex but avoiding intimacy from the male characters. The film features scenes in which the male characters engage in braggadocio and taunting similar to that of Wallace in *No Strings Attached* and Kyle's military colleagues in *American Sniper*, but Zeke, Cedric, Michael, Dominic and Jeremy all follow Adam's romantic path.

Films such as *No Strings Attached* and *Think Like a Man* foreground the contradiction between monogamy and casual sex, always resolving in favour of a commitment to one partner by the film's conclusion, whether for the single or multiple male protagonists. The playing out of this contradiction entails disclosive and disciplinary processes in which male characters inquire into their friends' personal lives and offer advice. These processes construct a performative masculinity that values sexual encounters with multiple partners, reflecting the apparent overvaluation and emphasis of depictions of such scenes identified by both this study and others (Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Dempsey & Reichert 2000). The occurrence of inquiry, advice and taunting, together with such visual portrayals, occur in a discursive and narrative context that always resolves in favour of commitment to a single female partner. The contradiction does not feature in other films, such as *American Sniper* and *Lone Survivor*, which nevertheless feature similar processes constructing this dynamic hegemonic masculinity.

The contradiction between favouring monogamy and being open to multiple sexual partners also plays out through disclosive and disciplinary processes in relation to adultery, a term that generally refers to "sexual relations outside a marriage" (Krzywinska 2006:118). Krzywinska remarks on the possible outmodedness of the term when "it is perhaps more common now to speak of cheating on a partner, or, more formally, having an extra-marital affair" (ibid). Krzywinska locates this outmodedness within a contemporary liberal perspective and an acknowledgement of increasing divorce rates and lower marriage rates. The language of adultery may be old-fashioned, but it encompasses the sanctity of traditional marriage and, as seen in *No Strings Attached*, contemporary attitudes to the sense of fulfilment that Adam pursues in a sexual relationship with a partner that excludes an openness to sexual encounters with others outside their relationship. Exclusivity emerges as a fundamental norm the operation of disclosive and disciplinary processes in the sexual discourse of recent popular films.

To what extent does adultery or infidelity feature in recent mainstream movies? The films studied

featured 156 scenes with spoken references related to adulterous conduct. These occur in 49 films or about one-fifth of those studied. The average number of scenes per film was three with a range from one scene (in 23 films) to 21 in one. Eighteen films feature more than three. The number of scenes identified that feature references to adultery accounted for 9% of all scenes identified. It is not possible to compare these results with the major studies identified in the literature review. Adultery may not feature at all (Gunasekaran et al 2005), or there is distinction between only married or not married with extramarital couplings classed either as “unmarried” (Dempsey & Reichert 2000) or left unexplained (Abramson & Mechanic 1983). Bufkin and Eschholz (2000) identified 13% of depictions as involving extramarital relations; they did not consider spoken references. What is the significance of this?

Existing quantitative studies focus on the frequency of occurrence of sex scenes involving extramarital relations rather than considering the narrative and discursive contexts in which these occur. The prevalence of sex scenes involving unmarried partners, taken together with the frequency with which depictions feature extramarital relations, may lead to an interpretation that sexual depictions in popular films delight in the transgression of traditional values and distort the reality that most married couples are happy with their sex lives (Dempsey & Reichert 2000, citing Kinsey et al 1953; Laumann et al 1994). The analysis here differs from these quantitative studies again by considering the discourse on adultery that occurs in popular films. This discourse takes place within the double plot structure that privileges heteronormativity and through the disciplinary and disclosive processes, which affect the representation of non-heterosexual identities and practices and the favouring of commitment to monogamy over casual sex, contributing to heteronormative attitudes to sex, hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity.

Whereas quantitative studies (e.g. Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Dempsey & Reichert 2000) emphasise the frequency with which depictions of adulterous conduct occur, Krzywinska (2006) employed psychoanalytic concepts in her consideration of narrative patterns in a disparate range of films, including *The Piano* (Campion 1993), *Unfaithful* (Lyne 2002) and *Zandalee* (Pillsbury 1991). She identifies various narrative patterns in these “adultery films”, including “the meeting”, when a married protagonist meets another potential partner, the “elation, furtiveness and riskiness” of “the affair”, before the couple faces a choice or crisis, and the end where “adultery leads directly to death” (Krzywinska 2006:134), an aspect that she relates back to the punishment necessary under the Production Code. Krzywinska focuses on films where the protagonist embarks on an affair and which present the protagonist’s experience “in such a way to enable the viewer to identify with the dilemmas and emotions”. None of the films identified in this study follow this pattern, perhaps requiring an alternative explanation.

Krzywinska focuses on films in which the protagonist pursues an adulterous affair. She considers, among others, *Frenchman’s Creek* (Leisen 1944), *The Piano* (Campion 1993), an acclaimed New Zealand art film distributed in the USA by Miramax, *Zandalee* (Pillsbury 1991), released direct



to video in the USA, and *The Good Girl* (Arteta 2002), an independent film. In other words, her analysis does not address typical Hollywood cinematic fare, and her focus on film plots in which the protagonist embarks on adulterous affair may account for this. Such plots do not occur in Hollywood blockbusters. This study identifies that the discourse on adultery in recent mainstream movies occurs through characters commenting on the behaviour of secondary or minor characters. Where adultery features prominently within the plot, as in *Crazy, Stupid, Love* (Ficarra & Requa 2011), *The Descendants* (Payne 2011) and *War Room* (Kendrick 2015), the focus is not on the character who initiated the affair, but on the experience of their spouse.

The discourse on adultery in recent popular films occurs through disclosive and disciplinary processes. A prominent pattern of disclosure relates not to the discovery of an adulterous affair, but to the emotional harm that discovery entails. Two films stand out. Cal, in *Crazy, Stupid, Love*, learns from Emily, his wife, that she has been having an affair. Cal later appears distraught at a bar, complaining loudly to anyone who will listen about becoming a cuckold. Alex, in *The Descendants*, articulates more fully her feelings on discovering her mother's infidelity and disclosing this to Matt, her father. Seeing Elizabeth, her mother, cheat with another man made her feel sick and disgusted. Matt asks Alex to elaborate, and she details precisely where she saw her mother walk into a house with another man who had his hand on her buttocks. Alex reports this detail as "gross". The disclosure on adultery occurs alongside expressions of emotional distress it causes cheated partners and families.

Whereas Krzywinska (2006) explores how film characters might enjoy or benefit from the transgression of adultery, the construction of adultery in recent popular film as transgressive occurs through more disciplinary processes involving monitoring and surveillance. Elizabeth's disclosure to Clara in *War Room* (Kendrick 2015) about her suspicions regarding Elizabeth's husband Tony's flirtations with other members of their Christian community indicate that Elizabeth is observing, recording and reporting Tony's conduct and potential to commit adultery. Dave, in *Horrible Bosses*, asks several male characters whether Rhonda, his wife, has been flirting with them. Jack, in *Little Fockers*, interrogates Greg, his son-in-law about his fidelity to Pam, Greg's wife. Barney reports Lacy's promiscuous reputation to Lee in *The Expendables 2*. *The Other Woman* (Cassavetes 2014) sees Kate enlist the help of Carly and Amber to monitor Kate's philandering husband, using binoculars and other surveillance equipment. The policing of fidelity then occurs through a combination of surveillance techniques and processes of questioning and disclosure.

The disclosures relating to adultery that occur in recent popular film do not address the motivation for characters who pursue such encounters. However, Krzywinska (2006) touches upon a possible motivation that is discernible from these disclosures when she refers to Francesca's brief affair in *The Bridges of Madison County* (Eastwood 1995) as suggesting "that marriage has a constraining effect on people and produces desires that cannot be fulfilled within the practical context of

everyday life” (Krzywinska 2006:135). Francesca’s secret passion with Robert Kincaid sustained her in the roles of wife and mother. Numerous incidents refer to the difficulties characters encounter in sustaining the fulfilment they derive from marital sex. In *Bridesmaids* (Feig 2011), Rita jokes that she needs the hen weekend in Las Vegas so that she “can fantasise forever so that I am able to have sex with my husband”. Pat, in *Silver Linings Book* (Russell 2012), discloses to his therapist the excitement he felt on anticipating sex with his wife in the shower, only to find her there with another man. This revelation indicates that his wife sought a passionate encounter outside their marriage. Alex’s disclosure to Matt in *The Descendants* also indicates the pressures of everyday life affecting the quality of marital sex when she refers to Matt’s busy professional life distracting him from the attention he ought to have been paying to Elizabeth, his wife. Mullins, in *The Heat*, reprimands the John for his disparaging description of his wife’s post-natal genitalia. Roz, *Little Fockers*, advises married couples to role play adultery as a strategy to keep their sex lives interesting, to enjoy the frisson of transgression while remaining faithful. This frisson, however, is temporary, and the appeal of adultery fades. Gloria, in *The Butler*, tires of her affair with Howard: “What I need is my husband and not to be laying up here in the gutter with you.” Fulfilment from marital sex emerges as a concern.

This concern about fulfilment from marital sex plays out in narratives that restore the equilibrium within heterosexual marriages. Phil and Alice, in *Parental Guidance*, take up role-playing when taking a break from looking after their children, with Phil pretending to be a British rock star and Alice his groupie. In *This Is 40*, Pete and Debbie, experiencing various middle-aged anxieties about their appearance and sexual performance, take a short break at a hotel to use marijuana and watch pornography. *Hope Springs* (Frankel 2012) features ongoing disclosures of an older couple, Arnold and Kay, to a marriage counsellor, who encourages them to engage in risqué practices such as performing a sex act in a cinema. Films such as *Parental Guidance*, *Hope Springs* and *This Is 40*, in resolving the problem of keeping married sex interesting, passionate or fulfilling, posit models of action (Nichols 1981) that involve expanding the couple’s sexual practices and communicating openly and honestly with one another about sex.

Analysing the disclosive and disciplinary processes operating in the discourse on adultery in recent popular film also provide insights into the construction of hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity. Male characters favour the sex appeal of younger females. In *Pixels*, Matty’s disclosure of his father’s infidelity specifies “his 19-year-old Pilates instructor”. Early middle-aged wives comment on their husbands’ behaviour when they see them admiring a younger woman. Barb, in *This Is 40*, asks Debbie about how comfortable she is with Desi being around her husband. Barb disparages her husband and Pete’s ogling Desi as making them “look like paedophiles”. These insulting remarks conceal an internal anxiety that manifests elsewhere in the film with Debbie’s concern about her appearance, breast size and sex appeal. The anxiety manifests in *The Help* when Aibileen remarks on Celia’s arrival at a charity event in a revealing

red dress: “Women better hold onto their husbands tonight.” Such disclosures reveal the preoccupation with youthful feminine sex appeal.

The discourse on adultery also reveals another performative aspect of hegemonic masculinity. Male characters taunt one another by asserting that they will have sex with other male characters’ partners or wives. Leo, in *The Vow*, advises Jeremy that Paige, his ex-wife, an amnesiac who misremembers her relationship with Leo after a car crash, will outgrow him again. Jeremy sarcastically thanks Leo for this advice, telling him that he “will mull it over while I’m in bed with your wife”. Rex, in *Ted*, taunts John, saying “I’m going to have sex with your girlfriend.” A corollary to this is the assertion that such encounters are fleeting, such as when Sam, in *No Strings Attached*, rebukes Adam: “I’m the guy she marries, Adam; you’re the guy she fucked a couple of times in the handicapped bathroom.” Such conduct constitutes a performative aspect of hegemonic masculinity where males assert their dominance and sexual prowess by threatening to taint their rival’s relationship with adultery.

Dempsey and Reichert (2000) were concerned with the distortion that the prevalence of depictions of sexual acts between unmarried partners in popular film constituted. The quantitative results here are similar, in that depictions of sexual portrayals frequently feature characters who are not married. However, the narrative and discursive contexts in which these portrayals occur work to establish models of action that maintain heteronormative values of long-term monogamy. While Krzywinska (2006) explores the coding of adultery as transgressive in independent and art cinema, recent popular films work to maintain the exclusivity and the fulfilment possible within marital relationships by incorporating practices coded culturally as transgressive (role-playing, using pornography, performing sex acts in public places). The discourse on sexual exclusivity, that operates through disclosive and disciplinary processes, also contributes to the construction of a dynamic hegemonic masculinity, in which male characters mature from an expected promiscuity to responsible husbands and fathers, and a static idealised femininity that insists on youthful sex appeal.

### **Parental Guidance**

The regulation of sexual practice and identity through disciplinary and disclosive processes in recent popular films occurs most obviously through the interactions of parental characters with their children. While adults friends, colleagues and peers may seek to influence one another, as with Adam and his friends in *No Strings Attached*, characters are not obliged to follow their advice. The expectation that characters who are children will follow their parents’ advice is stronger, and parental figures frequently offer instruction and advice. This continues through their children’s lives, though the expectation that they follow their parents’ instructions and advice weakens as they get older. The construction of heteronormative values, hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity that occurs through the operation of these disciplinary and disclosive processes differs greatly according to gender. This is especially so with regard to how paternal

characters interact with their sons and daughters. The two key films—*American Sniper* and *No Strings Attached*—provide a good introduction to this.

The analysis thus far makes it clear that conception of hegemonic masculinity apparent in recent popular films is a dynamic process that involves male characters growing from an immature interest in casual sexual encounters to the paternal figure committed to his marriage and family. *American Sniper* features Chris Kyle's development along this trajectory as its main subplot. As noted, several critics emphasised the early scene in which his father sets out three kinds of people (sheep, wolves, and sheepdogs), which sets out the role of protector that Kyle must fulfil. This aspect represents a non-sexual aspect of hegemonic masculinity that nevertheless has implications for the signification of sexual practice and the legitimization of certain sexual identities in popular cinema. The process through which Kyle's father educates his sons on the roles that they ought to fulfil in their lives echoes a recurring and coherent dynamic across films in which paternal characters instruct their sons in the performance of hegemonic masculinity.

Father characters concern themselves with whether their sons are deriving personal fulfilment from their sex lives. This manifests in a disclosive process in which fathers question their sons about their sexual conduct. This is not an interrogation where fathers compel their sons to answer or to follow advice proffered, but it reflects a Foucauldian understanding of sex as determinative of identity and personal fulfilment (Foucault 1976; Giddens 1989). Examples occur in *No Strings Attached* where Alvin, Adam's father, asks whether Adam, his adult son, is currently having sex with anyone. Alvin's inquiry reflects his apparent understanding that a happy life entails regular sex. Later, while in hospital, Alvin advises his son, making banal comments about how we choose with whom we fall in love. Alvin's scenes reflect a process that occurs more meaningfully across a wide range of recent popular films. They also demonstrate that a process that commences with adolescent male characters and their fathers continues into their adulthood.

A coherent process in which fathers inform, educate and monitor their sons' developing sexual identities and practices emerges from analysis of the discourse between such characters. Aspects of this process are not apparent in all facets in each film, but those that are build up its coherency. This process of fathers training their sons in the ways of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity commences with teaching, or promising to instruct, prepubescent or adolescent sons about "the birds and the bees", the "facts of life", basic information about human reproduction. This occurs in *Kung Fu Panda 2*, for example, when Po, a panda, asks Mr Ping, his adoptive father, a goose, about where he came from, and Mr Ping reluctantly explains. In *Mr Popper's Penguins*, Popper promises to explain reproduction to Billy, his son, after Billy hears Popper express pride about Jane, his daughter ("I made that"). This aspect of the process reflects parents acting as a source of information about sex.

The second stage of this process constitutes training in the ways of attracting female attention and

securing dates. This occurs between fathers and sons in early adolescence. In *Grown Ups 2*, Lenny tells Greg, his son, that he ought to adopt a three-phase strategy in asking out a girl that he likes at school, to make her smile, to compliment her on her smile, and to her ask out immediately so as not to allow time to pass before she realises that he's "fugly" (short for "fucking ugly"). Lenny acknowledges that he and his sons are not the best-looking men but he advises Greg that this should not restrict Greg in his approach to girls. A similar process occurs in *Journey 2* when Hank advises Sean, his son, to be open and sensitive. Fathers express pride and happiness on seeing their sons succeed in securing dates or kissing female partners (e.g. Flint's father in *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*).

Fatherly supervision extends to a questioning of the sense of fulfilment that their sons might derive from the pleasures derives from casual sexual encounters associated with the immature pleasures vaunted by characters such as Eli and Wallace in *No Strings Attached*. Father figures explicitly use the language of "fulfilment" in this questioning. James Reid, in *The Green Hornet* (Gondry 2011), on finding his adult son after a night of debauchery, asks, "this is what you want from your life? This gives you a sense of fulfilment?" Max, in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, questions Jordan, who indulges in all kinds of sexual practices, about his infidelity and his responsibility at home. Fatherly supervision of their sons' commitment to heteronormative sexual practices in special cases extends to their sexual reproduction ("reprosexuality", Warner 1991). Donald, in *Interstellar* (Nolan 2014), reminds Cooper, his son, about his duty to repopulate the world, while Noah in Noah (Aronofsky 2014) reassures Ham about his post-Antediluvian responsibility.

The disclosive and disciplinary processes occurring in the interactions between father characters and their sons contributes to the valorisation of heteronormative values such as lifelong monogamy and reproduction. The interactions contribute to the dynamic nature of hegemonic masculinity where fathers supervise and monitor their sons' behaviour to ensure that they progress to the more mature role of devoted husband and father. Paternal expressions of favour when their sons achieve success in the development of a heteronormative relationship occur in the absence of any such expressions of support for alternative sexual identities. In fact, *The Descendants* features a scene in which a father figure openly expresses disgust that his son might be gay. While other characters in this scene may not share this view, this repudiation of homosexuality constitutes the only dialogue in which a father refers to his son's potential homosexuality. Paternal characters trains encouraging certain kinds of sexual practice for their son; they are more restrictive with their daughters.

The discourse on sexual practice between fathers and daughters more frequently involves pre-pubescent and adolescent daughters. Fathers express fear about their young daughters' awareness of sex. In *Despicable Me 2*, Gru appears terrified when Agnes, the youngest of his three adopted daughters, says that she knows what makes him a man, his facial expression demonstrating that he worries about what she might say, but she just identifies that it is his bald head. The fear of

engaging in sexual discourse with daughters manifests also in a refusal to explain matters such as what pornography is (Pete saying to Charlotte that her sister said “corn” rather than “porn” in *This Is 40*), preventing access to pornographic material (Matt stopping Scottie from looking at adult films in a hotel room in *The Descendants*), and ending other sexualised conduct (Matt asking Scottie to stop filling her swimsuit with sand to make her “beach boobs”). These examples represent fathers’ discomfort with daughters’ burgeoning sexuality.

Fathers with early and middle adolescent daughters are even more controlling. They frustrate and delay their adolescent daughters from dating. Such frustration and delay occurs through orders to their daughters not to commence dating at all, though this emerges from a sarcastic comment that echoes the anxiety outlined above. In *Ice Age: Continental Drift*, Peaches ask her father when can she might be permitted to “hang out with boys”, and Manny replies, “When I’m dead, plus three days just to make sure I’m dead.” In *The Croods*, Grug attempts to physically prevent Eep, his daughter, from hunching up closer to Guy under an umbrella during a storm, but lighting strikes him. These animated films play in a comic manner with the anxiety more apparent in those live-action films outlined above. Fathers’ discomfort with seeing their daughters engage in mild physical intimacy with their boyfriends is also evident in live-action films such as *Contagion*, *The Descendants* and *Transformers: Age of Extinction*.

Paternal regulation of daughters’ sexuality occurs especially through disciplinary processes that occur in relation to clothing. The interactions between Cade and Tessa, his daughter, in *Transformers: Age of Extinction* demonstrate the disciplinary processes in full. Cade chides Lucas, his friend, for remarking on how “hot” Tessa appears in her shorts, which Cade thinks are too short. Later, Cade requests that Tessa purchase “long pants nice, loose-fitting ones”. In *Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2*, Blart similarly requests Maya, his daughter, to wear a less revealing bathing suit. Neither Tessa nor Maya submit to their fathers’ requests. This dynamic again represents the creation of a norm that may be disregarded. Cade, in *Transformers*, does not pursue a romantic relationship, but, once the villain is defeated, Tessa and Shane’s kiss serves as the film’s climactic kiss that symbolises the restoration of equilibrium, Shane having proven his valour and earning Cade’s approval. Their relationship functions similarly to Kyle and Taya’s marriage in *American Sniper*.

The role of the protector typified by Kyle in *American Sniper* extends also to paternal protection of daughters from weak male characters who fail to progress to the more mature version of hegemonic masculinity. Fathers feel a need to protect their daughters from potentially unfaithful male partners. Expressing disapproval of such partners constitutes another means of policing fidelity, as outlined in more detail above. This occurs in films such as *Crazy, Stupid, Love*, where Cal comments to Hannah, his daughter, on Jacob, her boyfriend, that “this guy is a lowlife; he is a womanizer”. Jack, in *Little Fockers*, goes further in asking Greg, his son-in-law, directly about his fidelity to Jack’s daughter, enlisting Greg’s children to in his efforts to spy on Greg, carrying

out surveillance in a similar manner to Kate, Carly and Amber in *The Other Woman*. This constitutes a comic exaggeration of such policing but it requires audiences to at least acknowledge and recognise norms at play.

Whereas the interactions between fathers and sons frequently insist explicitly on aspects of heteronormativity such as monogamy and reproduction, such exchanges between fathers and daughters are less frequent. They occur in fantasy films where they might appear to be traditional or outmoded decrees by old-fashioned father figures. In *Dark Shadows*, Barnabas Collins comes back from 1760 and, on seeing Vicky, a descendant, remarks that she “must put those birthing hips to good use lest your womb should shrivel up and die”. In *Jack the Giant Slayer*, a retelling of the fairy tale “Jack and the Beanstalk”, King Brahmwell issues an edict to Isabelle, his daughter, that she belongs in the safety of the palace and must marry Lord Roderick. The attitudes taken by Cade, in *Transformers*, and Paul Blart, in *Mall Cop 2*, echo these traditional paternalistic decrees, and their daughters ignore them. This dynamic is more about paternal expectations for their daughters and the hegemonic fatherly performance as protector.

The parental policing of hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity by parental characters thus represents a significant example of the operation of the processes of discipline and disclosure that subsist within the discourse on physical intimacy and sex that occurs within popular film. This ongoing parental monitoring and supervision of conduct, reporting and disclosing of histories and desires, ties in a similar policing of sexual conduct by characters who are friends, acquaintances, and colleagues, as outlined above in relation to the principle of exclusivity. The emergence of the categories of discipline and disclosure as the prevailing modes through which sexual discourse takes place reveals how popular films represent the regulation of sexual practices and identities (Attwood 2006:82). This constitutes the major theoretical insight that emerges in this study, articulating the mechanism through which heteronormativity pervades cinematic representations of physical intimacy, together with the exclusion and repudiation of non-heterosexual identities and practices and the visual grammar of heteronormative kissing. The concluding chapter draws together these various components to emphasise the importance of these insights as they relate to debates on sexualisation and pornification, especially the ideological dimension, on which this study constitutes an important contribution.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study of the representation of sex in the 250 most popular films on domestic release between 2011 and 2015 had three aims. The first was to conduct a comprehensive survey of available data to establish a more accurate understanding of popular or mainstream cinema. The second was to use a broad definition of “sex” as referring to acts and relations involving physical intimacy to establish the extent to which depictions and references to this occurred in a sample representative of popular cinema. The third was to conduct a qualitative analysis of the sexual content identified to generate a substantive theory that accounts for this content. This chapter concludes the project, summarising the principal findings and outlining their significance for contemporary discourse on sexual representation in Western culture.

The survey of box-office data and the best-selling titles in the home entertainment market confirms the dominance of the Hollywood studios. The Big Six (now the Big Five since Disney took over Fox) accounted for only a fifth of films on domestic release, but these achieved more than 80% of ticket sales. More than 2,500 independent films on release account for only 2% of ticket sales. The significance of these findings is the establishment of an empirical basis for reconsidering claims that sexually graphic transgressive films have entered the mainstream (Williams 2001, 2008, 2014; Coleman 2016). Lewis (2009) highlighted that “these films are little seen, but much talked about”. The results of the survey here support his observation. These results also have significance for McNair’s “cycle of liberalisation”.

The “aesthetic embrace” (Frey 2016) of “hardcore art cinema” (Williams 2001) leads to a proliferation of scholarly works in single texts (Krzywinska 2006; Williams 2008), collections (Coleman 2016; Gwynne 2016) and the journal literature, as well as extensive journalistic commentary (exemplified by at least 17 articles in *The Guardian* on von Trier’s *Nymphomaniac* per Frey 2016). This appears to evidence McNair’s cycle at work, with critical commentary and analysis giving rise to more “populist” and journalistic discourse on these works. However, the central aesthetic concerns (how these works fit within the art/porn debate), and the complex theoretical approaches drawing on psychoanalytic concepts, perhaps accounts for the absence of this transgressive rhetoric from discourses on sexualisation and pornographication. This study indicate articulates several ways in which McNair’s cycle alters.

For McNair, the “democratisation of desire” (McNair 2002) coincides with what other commentators characterise as the democratisation of entertainment (Anderson 2006; Epstein 2017). The Internet and digital streaming open up potential niche markets that constitute “the long tail” (Anderson 2006), which refers to the conception of entertainment industries as a graph, with very audiences concentrating on blockbusters on the left that drops off suddenly and continues on seemingly endlessly to the right, representing the thousands of films, programmes and videos that attract much smaller audiences. The 2,500 independent films attracting 2% of ticket sales



substantiates the existing of a “long tail” with regard to the film exhibition in cinemas, but it shows that the “long tail”, despite the proliferation of choice, accounts for a marginal share of admissions.

The “long tail” embraces a diverse range of cultural products, including the conservative documentaries of filmmakers such as Dinesh D’Souza and Christian-themed religious dramas, as well as the small number of sexually graphic films of directors such as Catherine Breillat, Bruno Dumont, Gaspar Noé and Lars von Trier that a disproportionate share of scholarly attention (Lewis 2009) and journalistic commentary (Frey 2016). *Heaven Is for Real* (2013) and *War Room* (2015) reflect the commercial success and relatively larger audiences for Christian dramas. There is perhaps a stronger case to be made for the “Christianisation” of popular films rather than the “sexualisation”. The traditional family values that characterise such films are rather more evident than the incorporation of subcultural transgression for which McNair contends with his “cycle of liberalisation”.

The project’s second aim was to present a more accurate description of the extent to which sexual content occurs in popular film, and the nature of this content. This sample selected avoids the skewing that arises as a result of the purposive sampling approaches taken in other studies (Greenberg et al 1993; Gunasekara, Chapman & Campbell 2005), which select films based on the likelihood that they feature graphic portrayals. While sexual themes and imagery are prevalent, in that at least one scene of the 2,645 scenes identified occurred in 96% of films studied, with a median of seven scenes per film, this content is rarely graphic. Scenes featuring depictions of physical intimacy more “progressive” or “compelling” (Pardun 2002) than kissing on the lips constitute only 6% of scenes.

This study also provides insight into the nature of the sexual portrayals that occur. The most prevalent form was non-genital foreplay, accounting for 66%. Flirting accounted for a further 16%. Intercourse and genital foreplay, together, accounted for just 11%. These results are significant in relation to the discourse on pornification and claims by proponents of the “pornification thesis” that sexual graphicness prevails, that this entails a proliferation of scenes involving sexual violence and misogyny, and that representations of the use of pornography are prevalent (Paul 2005; Dines 2010; Lynch 2012). Two rape scenes occurred in this sample of 250 films that covers five years, and, though references to the use and production of pornography occur, they are comparatively rare. “Porn chic” is not the prevailing trend in film.

Instead, this study identifies key patterns in the cinematic representation of physical intimacy. The most significant of these is the overwhelming prevalence of scenes featuring spoken references to, or depictions of, sexual conduct at the nongraphic and somewhat graphic levels (per Leone 2002). These indicates that the preoccupation with identifying sexually graphic portrayals in film that characterises studies within the effects paradigm (Greenberg et al 1993; Gunasekera,

Chapman & Campbell 2005; Nalkur, Jamieson & Romer 2010) misrepresents the extent and nature to which portrayals of physical intimacy in film. These studies also discount the importance of the narrative and discursive contexts in which such portrayals occur. This study develops our understanding of recent cinematic sexual representation by elaborating on the processes operating within these narrative and discursive contexts.

Another key pattern that emerges within this study concerns the relationship between the characters who engage in the discourse on sex and physical intimacy. It identified that less than a quarter of scenes featuring such references occurred in close relationships, that is, between characters who are married, engaged, dating, separated or divorced from one another. The majority occurred between characters who work with another or where one of them is engaged in their professional occupation or who are friends or acquaintances. The nature of this discourse entails a revelation of characters' sexual histories, fantasies or desires, what they have done or would like to do, or an attempt to influence another's attitudes in relation to matters of physical intimacy. These constitute the twin processes of discipline and disclosure.

The discovery of these processes of discipline and disclosure arises from the identification of how characters relate to one another, what patterns of behaviour recur, in what circumstances these occur, and the outcome, rather than from other kinds of discourse analysis that might emphasise lexical choice. Other key patterns identified in this study include the prevalence of the discourse on sex and physical intimacy in popular film within contemporary fiction and dramatisations, that is, films of a kind that depict recognisable social situations. These recognisable social situation occur in workplace situations, the seeking of and dispensing of friendly advice, or the expressing of concern at risky or inappropriate behaviour. These processes entail the surveillance, supervision and regulation of sexual conduct, not from a central authority, but dispersed throughout.

The identification of these processes arose from the categorisation of the kinds of spoken references that occur. Disciplinary processes encompasses those in which characters express their approval or disapproval of another's appearance or behaviour or where a character attempts to influence another character's sexual conduct. Disclosure entails the revelation, admission or confession of a character's attitudes, beliefs, desires or sexual history. They operate such that characters appear to be aware that they may have to account for their behaviour to a friend, a family member, a sexual partner, or someone else, and modify their behaviour accordingly. This discursive context thus entails a degree of surveillance, supervision and regulation, a context that facilitates the construction and maintenance of norms of sexual conduct and standards in relation to physical intimacy.

The operation of processes of discipline and disclosure constructs the signification of sexual identities and practices that are not heterosexual as offensive, objectionable and demeaning. This

construction leads to a signification of “gayness” that differs from the “mainstreaming of gayness” that McNair (2002, 2013) identifies as evidence of a “democratisation of desire”. In fact, the most prominent modes of representation with regard to homosexuality continue to be exclusion, repression and repudiation. Only 31% of films featured spoken references to sexual activity between members of the same gender, and only 14% of films featured portrayals of such conduct. While exclusion remains the primary mode of representation with regard to queer sexuality, this study reveals that the discourse on sexual practices that are not heterosexual occurs primarily between heterosexual characters.

The prevailing discourse on non-heterosexual identity and practices entails processes of discipline, where characters insult one another by association with homosexual conduct, express fear of homosexual assault, and deny homosexual tendencies. This constitutes a significant finding. It highlights the need to consider how characters refer to sexual identity and practices, and how such constructions form coherent patterns that prevail across the popular film. It provides an insight that is absent from GLAAD reports (the Studio Responsibility Index), which focus on the representation of queer sexuality through the inclusion of characters who might identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or otherwise queer. This study shows that, rather than indicating tolerance, acceptance or celebration in the “mainstreaming of gayness”, the representation of homosexuality in popular film entails exclusion and repudiation.

The findings from this study are significant then because they provide evidence that substantiates that a dominant heterosexual code operates with its hierarchy, normalisation, and exclusion, which constitutes one aspect of heteronormativity that Marchia and Sommer (2019:276) distil from their interpretation of Seidman (1991) and Warner (1991). The identification of the processes of disclosure and discipline, together with the prominent modes of representation in popular film of queer sexualities, identities and practices, i.e. exclusion and repudiation, uncover mechanisms through which heteronormativity operates as a pervasive system that the “standard narrative” of liberation downplays or obscures (McNair 2002, 2013; Pennington 2007; Forshaw 2015) with its overemphasis of texts that circulate through marginalised channels of distribution. The discourse of repudiation between heterosexual characters is of particular importance in this regard.

Marchia and Sommer (2019:276) also identify the privileging of heterosexuality as a key aspect of heteronormativity, according to Seidman (1991) and Warner (1991). Griffin (2007) also identifies the reinforcement of heterosexuality through cultural and social practices. The findings from this study are significant within these contexts because they detect specifically how this reinforcement occurs through the representation of sex and physical intimacy in popular film. The two primary representational practices that emerged in this regard are, one, the valorisation of heterosexual romance through the double plot structure and, two, the punctuation of these plots through the visual grammar of kissing scenes. This develops existing ideas about Hollywood

narrative (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson 1985; Luhr 1990; Turner 1999) and kissing (Williams 2006, 2008) as it applies to sexual representation.

This study develops the valorisation of heterosexual romance through the double structure by identifying the strong and weak depictions of physical intimacy and sexual acts. The strength and weakness relates to the graphicness of the depictions that occur. The key insight is the identification of this plot structure as a recurring context in which portrayals of intimacy occur across films of all genres and MPAA classifications. The significance of this arises from the concern expressed in several studies within the effects paradigm (Abramson & Mechanic 1983; Greenberg et al 1993; Dempsey & Reichert 2000) that portrayals of physical intimacy tend to entail encounters between characters who are not married to one another. This study identified a similar imbalance, with 21% of depictions featuring characters married to one another.

Several aspects counteract this apparent imbalance. Firstly, just under two-thirds (63%) of scenes depicting acts of physical intimacy feature characters who are either married or engaged or the relationship is open to the possibility of forming a long-term exclusive. Second, the discursive context in which such portrayals occur favours heteronormative standards of long-term commitment and monogamy. The favouring of such standards arises through the disciplinary and disclosive processes, where friends and family members disclose aspects of their sexual history and desires to one another, ask questions and proffer advice, and help one another come to decide in favour of commitment and exclusivity. Adam's position in *No Strings Attached* typifies the process through which repeated casual sexual encounters with Emma, with paternal advice, ultimately leads to their exclusive commitment.

The signification of kissing also counteracts this apparent imbalance. Kissing constitutes the most prevalent form of intimate act depicted in recent popular film, but it does not feature as frequently as the "ellipsis" (Williams 2006, 2008), where passionate kissing and editing patterns imply that sexual intercourse takes place. Instead, portrayals of kissing work as a kind of visual grammar that punctuates the establish, maintenance and defence of heterosexual relationships open to long-term commitment. This constitutes the fullest description and account of kissing scenes that occurs in popular film, a form of physical intimacy invested with enormous significance through the repetition of portrayal at key moments of jeopardy and relieving of tension that further enhances the primary importance of the central heterosexual relationship. What is the significance of this?

The valorisation of heterosexuality through processes of discipline and disclosure, the double plot structure, and the visual grammar of kissing, together with the exclusion, repression and repudiation of sexual identities and practices that are not heterosexual, constitutes an account of sexual representation that contradicts the liberal perspective typified by McNair (1996, 2002, 2013), who asserts that "our media system can no longer be characterised as an oppressive

ideological apparatus relentlessly supportive of patriarchal and heterosexist values” (McNair 2002:205). By contrast, the findings from establish a coherent form of representation both within and across the films studied. The privileging of heterosexuality constitutes a “a dominant or preferred meaning which is sufficiently powerful to organize other, subordinate meanings” (Abercrombie 1990:204). The findings meet Abercrombie’s criteria of coherence and textual dominance.

Herz and Johansson (2015) draw a distinction between three aspects of ideology (Ricoeur 1986): the legitimization of the existing order, distorting information to present the existing order as ideal, and the integrative function. While the analysis here confirms that popular films are heteronormative, that and this may be a coherent and textually dominant ideology, the analysis also goes beyond this by exposing the mechanisms or processes through which this popular films construct heteronormativity. This construction occurs by legitimating heteronormative identities (a dynamic hegemonic masculinity and idealised femininity) and practices (long-term exclusive commitment open to procreation) through the processes of discipline and disclosure identified, the resolution in favour of heteronormative standards in the double plot structure, and the visual grammar of kissing. The study articulates how heteronormative legitimization occurs.

The study reveals the distortion that occurs through the processes of discipline and disclosure and the representational practices identified. The distortion is most evident in relation to the prevalence of discourse on homosexual behaviour occurring between heterosexual characters. This skews the signification of such identities and practices in the offensive and demeaning manner outlined. It also occurs through the construction of a sexualised feminine subject, where female characters remain valued for their sex appeal, with paternal characters protecting their daughters from this overvaluation and wives and maternal figures feeling the pressure to maintain their attractiveness and show interest in diverse sexual pleasures to maintain their marriages. The construction of hegemonic masculinity is dynamic in the sense that it entails progression for entitlement to promiscuity to the protector role.

The processes of discipline and disclosure, together with the prevailing practices of representing physical intimacy, which emerged in this study gain a coherence and textual dominance through the repetition across films of difference genres and MPAA classification, and which work to legitimate heteronormative values, distorting their prevalence and the representation of other sexual identities and practices outside of these. These elements work together to produce a “system of images, which together create a particular way of looking at the world” (Dines 2010:81). The “cumulative effect” that Dines writes off through a “system of images” may be correct. The emphasis on the “pornographic” and its influence on popular culture may be wrong, especially as it applies to popular film, but this study establishes an existing coherent system of images.

McNair (2002) refers to popular film no longer constituting an “oppressive ideological apparatus relentlessly supportive of patriarchal and heterosexist values”. The system of images identified in this study appears to contradict McNair’s assertion. However, this must be qualified by reference to third the question of social dominance (Abercrombie 1990). The former occurs where “a text expresses an ideology which is otherwise dominant in society “ (Abercrombie 1990:204). This study does not establish that the heteronormative values expressed in films constitute the ideology otherwise dominant in society. This study does not assume that the identified models of action in recognisable social situations constitute evidence of effects upon audiences. Its contribution is a clear articulation of a set of coherent processes and representational practices that establish the heteronormative textual dominance.

This textual focus of this study therefore leaves open the question of whether this constitutes an oppressive ideology. It is limited in what it can say about how audiences engage with the films studied. However, one of the key findings – the prevailing discourse on homosexual identities practices between (primarily) male heterosexual characters – indicates that films do not represent the “mainstreaming of gayness” (McNair 2002, 2013), but instead may go to normalise homophobia, where expressions occur between “lads” or banter between friends. The similar acceptance of young male promiscuity, entitlement to use pornography, and expectations of serial sexual counters also goes towards problematic constructions of masculinity, especially in the era of #MeToo and #TimesUp. The study reveals the processes and representational practices that represent an ongoing regulation of sex.

This study of sexual themes in the 250 most popular films on release between 2011 and 2015, which account for more than 70% of ticket sales, revealed the prevalence of less graphic sexual themes and imagery. The findings emphasise the need for shifting away from an overemphasis with sexual graphicness and the cultural influence of “the pornographic” in favour of understanding the broader ways that sex signifies in popular film, answering calls to explore this question (Attwood 2006). It exposed the cumulative effect of processes of discipline and disclosure and representational practices, such as the double plot structure and the visual grammar of kissing, in privileging heteronormativity. It found that exclusion constitutes the primary mode of representation for non-heteronormative identities and practices, and that repudiation constituted the secondary mode.

This study focuses specifically on films distributed by the Hollywood conglomerates which are popular throughout the western world. However, it offers little insight into films produced in national contexts, and samples could be drawn by reference to films funded through bodies such as the Irish Film Board in Ireland or domestically produced in films popular in nations with strong home markets (France, Italy, Spain) to assess that extent to which sexual themes and imagery occur. This study provides provisional hypotheses for such projects, to investigate whether the processes of discipline and disclosure underpin sexual discourse in such films, and whether the

visual grammar of kissing extends beyond Hollywood films. Such an approach to sexual themes and imagery on television and streaming content (Netflix, Disney+, Apple TV+) could also be taken, and other interesting lines of inquiry arise, such as how the visual grammar of kissing might vary in the episodic nature of dramatic or comedic television series.

The final aspect of this study is the fact that a detailed and comprehensive survey of the kinds of films distributed, the extent to which they circulate and constitute “popular” or “mainstream” media, and the extent to which sexual themes and imagery at all levels of graphicness occur, provides a more accurate picture than purposive samples (Greenberg et al 1993; Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell 2005) and prevailing “common-sense” assertions about the frequency with which sexual content occurs in popular film (e.g. Paul 2005; Dines 2010) that empirical evidence studies repeatedly refute (recognised by Bufkin & Eschholz 2000 and Pardun 2002). Such “common-sense” leads to an inadequate recitation of studies (Wright 2009), blatant errors in reporting (Ward 2003 on Bufkin & Eschholz 2000), and selective citation of studies (Papadopoulos 2010) that conceal, or fail to reflect upon, the ideological implications in approaches to sexualisation or cultural representations of sexuality. The insights from this study expose the need for considering these implications.

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**Appendix A: List of Films Studied, Year of Release, MPAA Classification, Ticket Sales and Number of Scenes at each Level of Graphicness per Leone (2002)**

Title	Year	US Distributor	MPAA	Tickets (Ms)	Any	0	1	2	3	4
Act of Valor	2012	Relativity	R	8.8	4	2	2	-	-	-
The Adventures of Tintin	2011	Paramount	PG	9.9	2	2	-	-	-	-
Alvin and the Chipmunks 2	2011	Fox	G	16.9	5	5	-	-	-	-
The Amazing Spider-Man 2	2014	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	24.4	7	2	5	-	-	-
The Amazing Spider-Man	2012	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	33.7	7	4	3	-	-	-
American Hustle	2013	Sony/Columbia	R	18.5	27	12	12	2	1	-
American Sniper	2014	Warner Bros	R	43.1	16	9	6	1	-	-
Anchorman 2	2013	Paramount	PG-13	15.2	27	22	4	-	-	1
Annabelle	2014	New Line	R	10.1	2	-	2	-	-	-
Annie	2014	Sony/Columbia	PG	10.4	4	2	2	-	-	-
Ant-Man	2015	Buena Vista	PG-13	21.8	4	3	1	-	-	-
Argo	2012	Warner Bros	R	16.9	4	4	-	-	-	-
The Avengers	2012	Buena Vista	PG-13	76.8	3	2	1	-	-	-
Avengers Age of Ultron	2015	Buena Vista	PG-13	53.3	12	8	4	-	-	-
Bad Grandpa	2013	Paramount	R	12.2	30	27	3	-	-	-
Bad Teacher	2011	Sony/Columbia	R	12.4	31	22	8	1	-	-
Battle Los Angeles	2011	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	10.6	6	5	1	-	-	-
The Best Man Holiday	2013	Universal	R	8.4	31	15	13	1	2	-
Big Hero 6	2014	Buena Vista	PG	26.9	1	1	-	-	-	-
Black Swan	2010	Fox Searchlight	R	8.4	21	8	5	4	3	1
The Bourne Legacy	2012	Universal	PG-13	14.6	1	1	-	-	-	-
Brave	2012	Buena Vista	PG	29.2	4	3	1	-	-	-
Breaking Dawn Part 1	2011	Summit	PG-13	35.9	17	3	12	1	-	1
Breaking Dawn Part 2	2012	Lionsgate/Summit	PG-13	36.3	9	1	7	-	1	-
Bridesmaids	2011	Universal	R	21.0	25	15	7	2	-	1
Bridge of Spies	2015	Buena Vista	PG-13	8.1	0	-	-	-	-	-
The Butler	2013	Weinstein Co	PG-13	14.9	16	11	5	-	-	-
The Campaign	2012	Warner Bros	R	11.2	24	16	6	-	2	-
Captain America The First Avenger	2011	Paramount	PG-13	22.2	10	6	4	-	-	-
Captain America The Winter Soldier	2014	Buena Vista	PG-13	31.2	5	4	1	-	-	-
Captain Phillips	2013	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	12.8	1	-	1	-	-	-
Cars 2	2011	Buena Vista	G	23.8	4	4	-	-	-	-
Chronicle	2012	Fox	PG-13	8.2	12	11	1	-	-	-
Cinderella	2015	Buena Vista	PG	24.8	3	2	1	-	-	-
Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2	2013	Sony/Columbia	PG	15.3	1	-	1	-	-	-
The Conjuring	2013	New Line	R	17.5	6	2	4	-	-	-
Contagion	2011	Warner Bros	PG-13	9.5	5	5	-	-	-	-
Contraband	2012	Universal	R	8.4	7	3	4	-	-	-
Cowboys & Aliens	2011	Universal	PG-13	12.6	6	5	1	-	-	-
Crazy, Stupid, Love.	2011	Warner Bros	PG-13	10.6	42	33	7	1	1	-
Creed	2015	New Line	PG-13	11.4	8	3	5	-	-	-
The Croods	2013	Fox	PG	23.6	2	2	-	-	-	-
The Dark Knight Rises	2012	Warner Bros	PG-13	57.6	7	3	3	1	-	-
Dark Shadows	2012	Warner Bros	PG-13	9.8	14	5	9	-	-	-
Dawn of the Planet of the Apes	2014	Fox	PG-13	25.8	2	-	2	-	-	-
The Descendants	2011	Fox Searchlight	R	10.5	9	7	2	-	-	-
Despicable Me 2	2013	Universal	PG	46.9	12	10	2	-	-	-
Divergent	2014	Lionsgate/Summit	PG-13	19.0	8	6	1	1	-	-
Django Unchained	2012	Weinstein Co	R	20.4	8	5	2	-	1	-
Dolphin Tale	2011	Warner Bros	PG	9.1	0	-	-	-	-	-
Dumb and Dumber To	2014	Universal	PG-13	10.4	26	19	4	2	1	-
Edge of Tomorrow	2014	Warner Bros	PG-13	12.0	3	2	1	-	-	-
Elysium	2013	TriStar	R	11.9	6	5	1	-	-	-
Epic	2013	Fox	PG	12.8	4	3	1	-	-	-
The Equalizer	2014	Sony/Columbia	R	12.6	6	5	1	-	-	-
The Expendables 2	2012	Lionsgate	R	10.9	3	2	1	-	-	-
Fast & Furious 6	2013	Universal	PG-13	28.5	11	9	2	-	-	-

**Appendix A: List of Films Studied, Year of Release, MPAA Classification, Ticket Sales and  
Number of Scenes at each Level of Graphicness per Leone (2002)**

Fast Five	2011	Universal	PG-13	26.0	13	7	6	-	-	-
The Fault in Our Stars	2014	Fox	PG-13	15.0	12	3	7	1	1	-
Fifty Shades of Grey	2015	Universal	R	20.5	40	18	12	4	2	4
Flight	2012	Paramount	R	11.7	8	4	4	-	-	-
42	2013	Warner Bros	PG-13	11.3	7	3	4	-	-	-
Frozen	2013	Buena Vista	PG	48.8	4	2	2	-	-	-
Furious 7	2015	Universal	PG-13	41.0	19	13	6	-	-	-
Fury	2014	Sony/Columbia	R	10.3	7	4	3	-	-	-
GI Joe Retaliation	2013	Paramount	PG-13	15.4	3	3	-	-	-	-
Get Hard	2015	Warner Bros	R	11.1	28	17	7	2	2	-
The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	2011	Sony/Columbia	R	13.0	19	11	2	1	2	3
Gnomeo & Juliet	2011	Buena Vista	G	12.7	12	10	2	-	-	-
Godzilla	2014	Warner Bros	PG-13	24.1	4	-	4	-	-	-
Gone Girl	2014	Fox	R	20.2	44	30	8	3	2	1
A Good Day to Die Hard	2013	Fox	R	8.5	2	2	-	-	-	-
The Good Dinosaur	2015	Buena Vista	PG	12.7	0	-	-	-	-	-
Goosebumps	2015	Sony/Columbia	PG	9.1	7	4	3	-	-	-
Gravity	2013	Warner Bros	PG-13	32.9	5	5	-	-	-	-
The Great Gatsby	2013	Warner Bros	PG-13	17.3	14	5	8	-	-	1
The Green Hornet	2011	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	12.6	18	17	1	-	-	-
Green Lantern	2011	Warner Bros	PG-13	14.5	11	10	1	-	-	-
Grown Ups 2	2013	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	17.0	25	22	3	-	-	-
Guardians of the Galaxy	2014	Buena Vista	PG-13	41.2	12	12	-	-	-	-
The Hangover Part II	2011	Warner Bros	R	31.6	21	11	6	1	3	-
The Hangover Part III	2013	Warner Bros	R	13.4	16	13	3	-	-	-
Happy Feet Two	2011	Warner Bros	PG	8.2	6	6	-	-	-	-
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2	2011	Warner Bros	PG-13	48.0	3	-	3	-	-	-
The Heat	2013	Fox	R	19.0	18	17	1	-	-	-
Heaven Is for Real	2014	TriStar	PG	11.0	4	1	3	-	-	-
The Help	2011	Buena Vista	PG-13	21.4	9	6	3	-	-	-
Hercules	2014	Paramount	PG-13	9.0	8	6	2	-	-	-
The Hobbit The Battle of the Five Armies	2014	New Line	PG-13	30.9	0	-	-	-	-	-
The Hobbit The Desolation of Smaug	2013	New Line	PG-13	31.3	1	1	-	-	-	-
The Hobbit An Unexpected Journey	2012	New Line	PG-13	37.8	0	-	-	-	-	-
Home	2015	Fox	PG	21.8	0	-	-	-	-	-
Hop	2011	Universal	PG	13.4	3	3	-	-	-	-
Hope Springs	2012	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	8.2	29	20	4	2	3	-
Horrible Bosses	2011	New Line	R	14.8	33	23	4	4	1	1
Hotel Transylvania	2012	Sony/Columbia	PG	19.1	9	9	-	-	-	-
Hotel Transylvania 2	2015	Sony/Columbia	PG	20.4	8	7	1	-	-	-
How to Train Your Dragon 2	2014	Fox	PG	21.2	7	5	2	-	-	-
Hugo	2011	Paramount	PG	9.4	3	2	1	-	-	-
The Hunger Games	2012	Lionsgate	PG-13	51.5	7	6	1	-	-	-
The Hunger Games Catching Fire	2013	Lionsgate	PG-13	51.0	15	5	10	-	-	-
The Hunger Games Mockingjay Part 1	2014	Lionsgate	PG-13	40.7	1	-	1	-	-	-
The Hunger Games Mockingjay Part 2	2015	Lionsgate	PG-13	31.0	5	1	4	-	-	-
Ice Age Continental Drift	2012	Fox	PG	20.7	9	8	1	-	-	-
Identity Thief	2013	Universal	R	16.9	17	11	4	-	1	1
The Imitation Game	2014	Weinstein Co	PG-13	11.2	8	8	-	-	-	-
Immortals	2011	Relativity	R	10.7	11	10	-	-	-	1
Inside Out	2015	Buena Vista	PG	43.2	7	6	1	-	-	-
Insidious Chapter 2	2013	FilmDistrict	PG-13	10.7	1	-	1	-	-	-
Insurgent	2015	Lionsgate/Summit	PG-13	16.0	2	1	-	1	-	-
The Intern	2015	Warner Bros	PG-13	9.2	8	2	6	-	-	-
Interstellar	2014	Paramount	PG-13	22.7	3	2	1	-	-	-
Into the Woods	2014	Buena Vista	PG	15.6	7	1	6	-	-	-
Iron Man 3	2013	Buena Vista	PG-13	48.8	18	18	-	-	-	-
Jack and Jill	2011	Sony/Columbia	PG	9.5	12	11	-	1	-	-
Jack Reacher	2012	Paramount	PG-13	10.0	7	7	-	-	-	-



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Jack the Giant Slayer	2013	New Line	PG-13	8.2	3	2	1	-	-	-
John Carter	2012	Buena Vista	PG-13	9.2	8	5	3	-	-	-
Journey 2 The Mysterious Island	2012	New Line	PG	13.1	4	3	1	-	-	-
Jurassic World	2015	Universal	PG-13	79.1	8	7	1	-	-	-
Just Go with It	2011	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	13.1	37	30	7	-	-	-
Justin Bieber Never Say Never	2011	Paramount	G	9.3	28	28	-	-	-	-
The King's Speech	2010	Weinstein Co	R	15.0	8	6	2	-	-	-
Kingsman The Secret Service	2014	Fox	R	15.8	16	15	-	1	-	-
Kung Fu Panda 2	2011	DreamWorks	PG	20.5	2	2	-	-	-	-
The LEGO Movie	2014	Warner Bros	PG	32.4	5	5	-	-	-	-
Let's Be Cops	2014	Fox	R	10.2	23	15	7	1	-	-
Life of Pi	2012	Fox	PG	15.6	2	2	-	-	-	-
Limitless	2011	Relativity	PG-13	10.1	8	3	5	-	-	-
Lincoln	2012	Buena Vista	PG-13	22.7	2	1	1	-	-	-
The Lion King	1994	Buena Vista	G	11.9	1	1	-	-	-	-
Little Fockers	2010	Universal	PG-13	8.1	40	31	8	1	-	-
The Lone Ranger	2013	Buena Vista	PG-13	11.4	11	10	1	-	-	-
Lone Survivor	2013	Universal	R	15.7	2	1	1	-	-	-
Looper	2012	TriStar	R	8.5	9	6	2	1	-	-
The Lorax	2012	Universal	PG	27.0	4	4	-	-	-	-
Lucy	2014	Universal	R	15.7	7	4	1	1	1	-
Mad Max Fury Road	2015	Warner Bros	R	17.8	4	2	2	-	-	-
Madagascar 3 Europe's Most Wanted	2012	DreamWorks	PG	26.6	4	4	-	-	-	-
Madea's Witness Protection	2012	Lionsgate	PG-13	8.1	14	14	-	-	-	-
Magic Mike	2012	Warner Bros	R	14.0	33	15	17	1	-	-
Maleficent	2014	Buena Vista	PG	29.0	4	2	2	-	-	-
Mama	2013	Universal	PG-13	9.0	3	2	1	-	-	-
Man of Steel	2013	Warner Bros	PG-13	34.7	4	3	1	-	-	-
The Martian	2015	Fox	PG-13	25.9	5	5	-	-	-	-
The Maze Runner	2014	Fox	PG-13	12.7	0	-	-	-	-	-
MIB 3	2012	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	22.0	11	10	1	-	-	-
Minions	2015	Universal	PG	40.7	5	5	-	-	-	-
Mirror	2012	Relativity	PG	8.2	17	15	2	-	-	-
Les Misérables	2012	Universal	PG-13	18.6	10	4	3	1	2	-
Mission: Impossible Ghost Protocol	2011	Paramount	PG-13	26.6	5	5	-	-	-	-
Mission: Impossible Rogue Nation	2015	Paramount	PG-13	23.6	2	2	-	-	-	-
Mr Peabody & Sherman	2014	Fox	PG	14.0	5	4	1	-	-	-
Mr Popper's Penguins	2011	Fox	PG	8.5	5	5	-	-	-	-
Moneyball	2011	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	9.5	2	2	-	-	-	-
Monsters University	2013	Buena Vista	G	32.0	3	2	1	-	-	-
The Monuments Men	2014	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	9.8	3	3	-	-	-	-
The Muppets	2011	Buena Vista	PG	11.3	4	2	2	-	-	-
Neighbors	2014	Universal	R	18.0	45	21	17	1	4	2
Night at the Museum Secret of the Tomb	2014	Fox	PG	13.8	5	3	2	-	-	-
No Strings Attached	2011	Paramount	R	9.0	41	27	12	-	-	2
Noah	2014	Paramount	PG-13	12.7	6	3	3	-	-	-
Non-Stop	2014	Universal	PG-13	11.6	6	4	2	-	-	-
Now You See Me	2013	Lionsgate/Summit	PG-13	14.0	9	7	2	-	-	-
Oblivion	2013	Universal	PG-13	10.6	7	3	3	1	-	-
Olympus Has Fallen	2013	FilmDistrict	R	12.5	2	-	2	-	-	-
The Other Woman	2014	Fox	PG-13	10.1	38	27	10	1	-	-
Oz the Great and Powerful	2013	Buena Vista	PG	29.6	7	4	3	-	-	-
Pacific Rim	2013	Warner Bros	PG-13	13.0	4	4	-	-	-	-
Paddington	2014	Weinstein/Dimension	PG	9.4	4	3	1	-	-	-
Paranormal Activity 3	2011	Paramount	R	13.3	4	2	1	-	1	-
Parental Guidance	2012	Fox	PG	9.7	15	8	7	-	-	-
Paul Blart Mall Cop 2	2015	Sony/Columbia	PG	8.3	4	2	2	-	-	-
The Peanuts Movie	2015	Fox	G	14.7	10	10	-	-	-	-
Penguins of Madagascar	2014	Fox	PG	10.1	8	6	2	-	-	-

**Appendix A: List of Films Studied, Year of Release, MPAA Classification, Ticket Sales and Number of Scenes at each Level of Graphicness per Leone (2002)**

Percy Jackson Sea of Monsters	2013	Fox	PG	8.7	0	-	-	-	-	-
Pirates of the Caribbean On Stranger Tides	2011	Buena Vista	PG-13	29.9	16	13	3	-	-	-
Pitch Perfect	2012	Universal	PG-13	8.4	21	18	2	1	-	-
Pitch Perfect 2	2015	Universal	PG-13	21.4	24	20	4	-	-	-
Pixels	2015	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	9.5	15	11	4	-	-	-
Planes	2013	Buena Vista	PG	11.5	4	4	-	-	-	-
Prometheus	2012	Fox	R	15.6	5	4	1	-	-	-
The Purge Anarchy	2014	Universal	R	8.9	3	1	2	-	-	-
Puss in Boots	2011	DreamWorks	PG	19.1	8	8	-	-	-	-
Rango	2011	Paramount	PG	15.7	13	12	1	-	-	-
Real Steel	2011	Buena Vista	PG-13	10.9	2	-	2	-	-	-
Ride Along	2014	Universal	PG-13	17.0	9	6	2	1	-	-
Rio	2011	Fox	PG	17.8	7	5	2	-	-	-
Rio 2	2014	Fox	G	15.8	2	2	-	-	-	-
Rise of the Guardians	2012	DreamWorks	PG	12.9	1	1	-	-	-	-
Rise of the Planet of the Apes	2011	Fox	PG-13	22.3	2	-	2	-	-	-
Safe Haven	2013	Relativity	PG-13	9.0	9	1	7	-	1	-
Safe House	2012	Universal	R	16.0	1	-	-	-	1	-
San Andreas	2015	New Line	PG-13	18.0	3	1	2	-	-	-
Saving Mr Banks	2013	Buena Vista	PG-13	10.2	1	-	1	-	-	-
Maze Runner The Scorch Trials	2015	Fox	PG-13	9.9	3	2	1	-	-	-
Sherlock Holmes A Game of Shadows	2011	Warner Bros	PG-13	23.8	6	3	3	-	-	-
Silver Linings Playbook	2012	Weinstein Co	R	16.6	12	8	3	1	-	-
Skyfall	2012	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	37.8	7	3	4	-	-	-
The Smurfs	2011	Sony/Columbia	PG	18.0	9	7	2	-	-	-
The Smurfs 2	2013	Sony/Columbia	PG	9.1	2	1	1	-	-	-
Snow White and the Huntsman	2012	Universal	PG-13	19.1	8	4	3	-	1	-
Spectre	2015	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	22.7	10	3	4	3	-	-
The SpongeBob Movie Sponge Out of Water	2015	Paramount	PG	20.1	2	2	-	-	-	-
Spy	2015	Fox	R	13.4	30	20	4	4	2	-
Star Trek Into Darkness	2013	Paramount	PG-13	27.3	7	3	4	-	-	-
Star Wars The Force Awakens	2015	Buena Vista	PG-13	74.9	2	2	-	-	-	-
Straight Outta Compton	2015	Universal	R	19.5	17	10	5	-	1	1
Super 8	2011	Paramount	PG-13	15.8	12	12	-	-	-	-
Taken 2	2012	Fox	PG-13	17.4	3	1	2	-	-	-
Taken 3	2015	Fox	PG-13	11.0	4	2	2	-	-	-
Tammy	2014	New Line	R	10.5	19	15	4	-	-	-
Ted	2012	Universal	R	26.9	32	20	9	2	1	-
Ted 2	2015	Universal	R	9.9	37	30	7	-	-	-
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	2014	Paramount	PG-13	23.7	10	10	-	-	-	-
Terminator Genisys	2015	Paramount	PG-13	10.9	6	5	1	-	-	-
Think Like a Man	2012	Screen Gems	PG-13	11.3	45	25	16	4	-	-
This Is 40	2012	Universal	R	8.4	36	25	6	2	2	1
This Is the End	2013	Sony/Columbia	R	12.1	24	21	3	-	-	-
Thor	2011	Paramount	PG-13	22.5	6	5	1	-	-	-
Thor The Dark World	2013	Buena Vista	PG-13	24.7	8	5	3	-	-	-
300 Rise of an Empire	2014	Warner Bros	R	13.4	6	2	3	-	1	-
Tomorrowland	2015	Buena Vista	PG	10.9	0	-	-	-	-	-
Tower Heist	2011	Universal	PG-13	10.0	18	18	-	-	-	-
Trainwreck	2015	Universal	R	13.4	44	32	7	2	2	1
Transformers Age of Extinction	2014	Paramount	PG-13	29.5	14	13	1	-	-	-
Transformers Dark of the Moon	2011	DreamWorks	PG-13	43.7	21	18	3	-	-	-
True Grit	2010	Paramount	PG-13	12.8	1	1	-	-	-	-
Turbo	2013	Fox	PG	10.6	4	4	-	-	-	-
21 Jump Street	2012	Sony/Columbia	R	17.5	31	23	6	-	1	1
22 Jump Street	2014	Sony/Columbia	R	23.0	26	22	3	1	-	-
2 Guns	2013	Universal	R	9.6	6	3	2	1	-	-
Unbroken	2014	Universal	PG-13	14.1	4	4	-	-	-	-
Unknown	2011	Warner Bros	PG-13	8.1	9	3	6	-	-	-

**Appendix A: List of Films Studied, Year of Release, MPAA Classification, Ticket Sales and  
Number of Scenes at each Level of Graphicness per Leone (2002)**

The Vow	2012	Screen Gems	PG-13	15.8	16	9	7	-	-	-
War Horse	2011	Buena Vista	PG-13	10.1	1	1	-	-	-	-
War Room	2015	TriStar	PG	8.2	4	4	-	-	-	-
Warm Bodies	2013	Lionsgate/Summit	PG-13	8.4	4	-	4	-	-	-
We Bought a Zoo	2011	Fox	PG	9.6	4	3	1	-	-	-
We're the Millers	2013	New Line	R	19.1	28	21	6	-	1	-
White House Down	2013	Sony/Columbia	PG-13	8.7	2	1	1	-	-	-
The Wolf of Wall Street	2013	Paramount	R	14.4	59	29	10	6	7	7
The Wolverine	2013	Fox	PG-13	16.9	8	2	6	-	-	-
World War Z	2013	Paramount	PG-13	24.1	1	-	1	-	-	-
Wrath of the Titans	2012	Warner Bros	PG-13	10.6	3	2	1	-	-	-
Wreck-It Ralph	2012	Buena Vista	PG	23.6	3	1	2	-	-	-
X-Men Days of Future Past	2014	Fox	PG-13	28.1	5	4	1	-	-	-
X-Men First Class	2011	Fox	PG-13	18.2	21	14	5	2	-	-
Zero Dark Thirty	2012	Sony/Columbia	R	12.1	4	3	1	-	-	-
Zookeeper	2011	Sony/Columbia	PG	10.1	8	6	2	-	-	-

## **Appendix B:Definitions of Character Relationships**

**Acquaintances:** Characters who know one another but are not friends

**Alone:** Character not in the company of another

**Casual:** Characters who meet one another for sexual relations without commitment

**Colleagues:** Characters employed by the same employer who work together

**Dating:** Characters who meet one another with an openness to sexual relations and commitment

**Engaged:** Characters who have agreed to marry one another

**Family:** Characters who are family members but not married to one another

**Friends:** Characters who like one another and enjoy leisure time with one another

**Married:** Characters who are married to one another

**Medical:** Character conducting professional duties related to medical practice

**Narration:** Character relating his or her experiences or thoughts in voice-over

**Neighbours:** Characters who live in close proximity to one another

**Professional:** Character undertaking duties related to employment or career

**Recently met:** Characters who have met one another during course of film

**Reunion:** Characters previously married and separated who have renewed their relationship

**Separated:** Characters married to one another but separated

**Strangers:** Characters who have not previously met

## Appendix C: Processes in Spoken References

- Accusing:** Claiming that someone has done something wrong
- Admiring:** Remarking with esteem and approval to another character about a third character's appearance or character
- Advising:** Offering recommendations as to what to do
- Apologizing:** Expressing regret for wrongdoing
- Appreciating:** Understanding a situation fully
- Approving:** Believing that something is good or acceptable
- Asking:** Putting a question to another to obtain information about something
- Asserting:** Stating a belief confidently or forcefully
- Bonding:** Establishing a relationship with another character based on shared feelings, interests, or experiences
- Bragging:** Saying something in a manner showing excessive pride and self-satisfaction in one's achievements, possessions, or abilities
- Commenting:** Expressing an opinion or reaction in speech
- Complaining:** Expressing dissatisfaction (lack of fulfilment of one's wishes, expectations, or needs, or the pleasure derived from this) or annoyance (the feeling or state of anger, displeasure or irritation) about something
- Complimenting:** Praising or expressing approval of another person's appearance or character by commenting to that person
- Confronting:** Coming face to face with (someone) with hostile or argumentative intent
- Denigrating:** Unfairly criticizing (indicate the faults of someone or something) in a disapproving way
- Denying:** Stating that one did not commit an action assumed or alleged to have done
- Describing:** give a detailed account in words of
- Desiring:** Strongly wishing for or want (something)
- Dirty talk:** Talking about sex in a coarse or salacious way
- Disapproving:** Expressing an unfavourable opinion
- Disclosing:** Making (secret or new information) known
- Discussing:** Talking about something with a person or people
- Disliking:** Expressing consideration of something as unpleasant or disagreeable
- Disparaging:** Regarding or representing as being of little worth
- Dreading:** Anticipating with great apprehension or fear
- Encouraging:** persuading another to do or continue to do something by giving support and advice
- Enjoining:** Urging someone to do something
- Entreating:** Asking someone earnestly or anxiously to do something
- Erring:** Making a mistake
- Exclaiming:** Crying out suddenly in surprise, strong emotion, or pain
- Excusing:** Seeking to lessen the blame attaching to a fault or offence; trying to justify
- Explaining:** Making an idea or situation clear to someone by describing it in more detail or revealing relevant facts; give a reason to justify or excuse an action or event
- Flirting:** Behaving as though sexually attracted to someone, but playfully rather than with serious intentions
- Harassing:** Subjecting to aggressive pressure or intimidation
- Informing:** Giving someone facts or information; tell
- Insinuating:** Suggesting or hinting (something bad) in an indirect and unpleasant way

## Appendix C: Processes in Spoken References

**Instructing:** Telling someone to do something, especially in a formal or official way

**Insulting:** Speaking to or treating with disrespect or scornful abuse

**Joking:** Saying things to cause amusement or laughter, especially a story with a funny punchline

**Lying:** Making an intentionally false statement

**Metaphor:** Figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable

**Ordering:** Giving commanding and self-confident instructions (likely to be respected and obeyed) to do something

**Performing:** Reading or acting or representing the words of another

**Permitting:** Officially allow someone to do something

**Preferring:** Expressing a liking for (one thing or person) better than another or others; tend to choose

**Promising:** Assuring someone that one will definitely do something or that something will happen

**Propositioning:** make a suggestion of sexual intercourse to (someone), especially in an unsubtle way

**Reassuring:** Saying something to remove the doubts and fears of someone

**Rebuking:** Expressing sharp disapproval or criticism of (someone) because of their behaviour or actions

**Reflecting:** Thinking deeply or carefully about

**Regretting:** Expressing feelings of sadness, repentance or disappointment over something that one has done or failed to do

**Rejecting:** Refusing to agree to (a request)

**Reminiscing:** Indulging in enjoyable recollection of past events

**Remonstrating:** Making a forcefully reproachful protest

**Reporting:** Giving a spoken account of something one has observed

**Resisting:** Trying to prevent by pleading

**Role playing:** Acting out or performing the part of a character

**Suggesting:** put forward for consideration

**Swoon:** Becoming overcome with admiration, adoration or other strong emotion

**Tattling:** Report another's wrongdoing; telling tales

**Taunting:** Teasing another with jeers, treating a person as deserving to be laughed at

**Teaching:** Imparting knowledge to or instruct (someone) as to how to do something

**Thanking:** Expressing gratitude to someone

**Threatening:** Stating one's intention to take hostile action against (someone) in retribution for something done or not done

**Warning:** Making aware of possible harm or danger

## Appendix D: Sexual Acts

- Anal penetration:** the insertion by a man of his penis into the anus of a sexual partner
- Anal rape:** the crime, typically committed by a man, of forcing another person to have anal intercourse with the offender against their will
- Anal stimulation:** Anal contact for the purpose of arousing interest, enthusiasm, or excitement
- Anilingus:** Sexual stimulation of the anus by the tongue or mouth
- Arousal (nipples):** the action or fact of arousing or being aroused
- Arousal:** the action or fact of arousing or being aroused
- BDSM:** Bondage, discipline (or domination), sadism, and masochism (as a type of sexual practice)
- Castration:** removal of the testicles
- Covering up:** Using clothes or other material to conceal nudity
- Cruising:** Wandering about in search of a sexual partner
- Cuddling:** Holding close in one's arms as a way of showing love or affection
- Cunnilingus:** Stimulation of the female genitals using the tongue or lips
- Dancing:** Moving rhythmically to music, typically following a set sequence of steps
- Demonstrating:** Giving a practical exhibition and explanation of (how a machine, skill or craft works or is performed)
- Digital penetration:** Penetrating anus or vagina with fingers
- Dirty talk:** Sexually explicit speech or conversation intended to seduce or arouse someone
- Disrobing:** Taking off one's clothes
- Distraction:** Preventing (someone) from concentrating on something, divert (attention) from something with sexual display
- Drug use:** Consuming drugs from another person's naked body
- Dry humping:** Simulating sexual intercourse with (someone)
- Ejaculation:** Ejecting semen from the body at the moment of sexual climax
- Erection:** Enlarged and rigid state of the penis, typically in sexual excitement
- Exercise:** Activity requiring physical effort, carried out to sustain or improve health and fitness
- Exposure:** Removing clothing to exposes genitals or female breasts
- Fantasising:** Indulging in daydreaming about something desired
- Fellatio:** Oral stimulation of a penis
- Fetish:** a form of sexual desire in which gratification is linked to an abnormal degree to a particular object (food or feet)
- Flirting:** Behaving as though sexually attracted to someone, but playfully rather than with serious intentions
- Fondling:** Stroking or caressing a penis (outside clothing)
- Foreplay:** Sexual activity that precedes intercourse
- Gazing:** Looking steadily and intently in admiration
- Gesture:** a movement of part of the body, especially a hand or the head, to express a sexualised meaning (e.g. masturbation)
- Grinding:** Gyrating the hips erotically
- Groping:** Fondling female breasts, accidentally or without consent
- Group sex:** Sexual activity involving a number of people
- Harassment:** Subjecting to aggressive pressure or intimidation
- Horny:** Feeling or arousing sexual excitement
- Hugging:** Squeezing (someone) tightly in one's arms, typically to express affection

## Appendix D: Sexual Acts

- Impotence:** Inability in a man to achieve an erection or orgasm
- Intercourse (anal):** sexual contact between individuals involving penetration of the anus, typically culminating in orgasm and the ejaculation of semen
- Intercourse (vaginal):** sexual contact between individuals involving penetration, the insertion of a man's erect penis into a woman's vagina, typically culminating in orgasm and the ejaculation of semen
- Intercourse:** sexual contact between individuals involving penetration, the insertion of a man's erect penis into a woman's vagina, typically culminating in orgasm and the ejaculation of semen
- Kissing:** Touching or caressing with the lips as a sign of love, sexual desire or greeting
- Lap dance:** An erotic dance or striptease performed close to, or sitting on the lap of, a paying customer
- Leering:** Looking or gazing in a lascivious or unpleasant way
- Licking:** Passing the tongue over (something) in order to taste, moisten, or clean it
- Lubrication:** The action of applying a substance so as to minimize friction and allow smooth movement
- Massage:** Rubbing and knead (a person or part of the body) with the hands
- Masturbation:** stimulation of one's genitals with one's hand for sexual pleasure
- Messing:** Behaving in a silly or playful way
- Nudging:** Prodding someone gently with one's elbow in order to attract attention or coaxing or gently encourage (someone) to do something
- Nudity:** The state or fact of being naked
- Orgasm:** The climax of sexual excitement
- Orgy:** A wild party characterised by excessive drinking and indiscriminate sexual activity
- Peeping:** Looking quickly and furtively at something, especially through a narrow opening
- Petting:** Engaging in sexually stimulating caressing and touching
- Pillow talk:** Intimate conversation in bed
- Pole dancing:** Erotic dancing which involves swinging around a fixed pole
- Pornography:** Printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate sexual excitement
- Posing:** Assuming a particular position in order to be photographed, painted or drawn
- Prostitution:** the practice or occupation of engaging in sexual activity with someone for payment
- Public sex:** Sex acts done, perceived, or existing in open view
- Rape:** the crime, typically committed by a man, of forcing another person to have sexual intercourse with the offender against their will
- Reproduction:** The production of offspring by a sexual or process
- Resist:** struggle or fight back against sexual advances
- Role play:** the acting out or performance of a particular role in a sexual act
- Safe sex:** Sexual activity in which people take precautions to protect themselves against sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS
- Seduction:** The action of seducing someone
- Sex talk:** Inappropriate talk about sex around children.
- Sex tape:** Recording sex act on mobile phone or video camera for one's own pleasure or for sexting or other distribution
- Sex toy use:** the use of an object or device used for sexual stimulation or to enhance sexual pleasure
- Sexting:** sending (someone) sexually explicit photographs or messages via mobile phone
- Sexual assault:** unwanted touching of another in a manner likely to be considered sexual without the touched person's consent
- Sexual enhancement:** An increase or improvement in quality, value, or extent in one's sexual attributes



## Appendix D: Sexual Acts

or features

**Shower:** An act of washing oneself in a shower

**Spanking:** slapping with one's open hand or a flat object

**Spanking:** slapping with one's open hand or a flat object, especially on the buttocks as a punishment

**STI:** Sexually transmitted infection

**Straddling:** to sit with one leg on either side of a sexual partner

**Stripping:** an act of undressing, especially in a striptease

**Swooning:** to be overcome with admiration, adoration or other strong emotion

**Taunting:** Jeering or mocking in a playful way

**Threesome:** a group of three people engaged in sexual activity

**Thrusting:** gyrating hips

**Torture:** the action or practice of inflicting severe pain on someone as a punishment or in order to force them to do or say something

**Touching:** bringing one's hand or another part of one's body into contact with OR come or bring into mutual contact

**Vasectomy:** The surgical cutting and sealing of part of each vas deferens, typically as a means of sterilisation

**Virginity:** The state of never having had sexual intercourse

**Voyeurism:** gaining sexual pleasure from watching others when they are naked or engaged in sexual activity

**Water sports:** Sexual activity involving urination

**Wet dream:** An erotic dream that causes involuntary ejaculation of semen