Queering HIV/AIDS Narratives of Suffering: Cultural Representations at the Dawn of the 2020s

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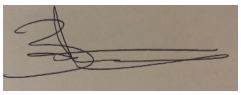
Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: 

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I conclude this section by citing one of my favourite quotes which summarises how I often feel about writing about HIV/AIDS.

"You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending." C. S. Lewis

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List of Abbreviations

ART: Antiretroviral Treatment
ARVs: Antiretroviral Drugs
AIDS: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BAME: Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (a UK demographic)
HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HIV/AIDS: In general, HIV/AIDS is said to be inappropriately used because it implies that HIV and AIDS are either the same or interchangeable which they are not (HIV Ireland, 2020). In this study, HIV/AIDS is used when the condition of a person who has tested positive is unknown. Especially when discussing people for whom there are no data as to whether their HIV proceeded to AIDS, I use the term HIV/AIDS. The stroke stands for *or* but not in a manner that suggests that the terms are interchangeable.
LGBTQI+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and any other way in which individuals understand and/or identify with in relation to their sexual orientation and/or gender expression.
MSM: Men who have Sex with Men
PLWH: People/Person Living With HIV
PLWHA: People/Person Living With HIV or AIDS
PrEP: Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis
STI: Sexually Transmitted Infection

Queering narratives of HIV/AIDS Suffering: Cultural Representations at the Dawn of the 2020s

Abstract

Angelos Bollas

This study analyses contemporary cultural representations of HIV/AIDS suffering in the English-speaking global North from screen to celebrity activism and activist campaigns. In doing so, it aims to provide an understanding of whether and how subverting, or *queering*, cultural discourses around HIV/AIDS suffering can be achieved. In the last couple of years, there has been a change in the way HIV/AIDS is portrayed in popular culture (e.g. *Pose*, *It's a Sin*). Rather than offering a nostalgic – and arguably stigmatising – history of the virus, I argue that we have started being presented with mainstream productions which change/*queer* the way in which HIV/AIDS suffering is represented.

We are soon approaching the end of the fourth decade with HIV/AIDS. During the crisis years 1981 – 1996, popular culture treated HIV/AIDS with terror, shame, discrimination, and stigma (Caron, 2001). In 1996, antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) were introduced and rendered life with HIV possible. Since then and until the beginning of the 2010s, the engagement of mainstream culture with HIV/AIDS was significantly minimised (Race, 2001). This silent period came to an end in the 2010s when a renewed interest in HIV/AIDS emerged in popular media and culture (Kagan, 2018).

Since the outbreak of the epidemic, numerous academic studies analyse cultural representations of HIV/AIDS arguing that these representations are dictated by heteronormative and homonormative hegemonies aiming at pathologizing non-heterosexual identities (Becker, 2006). My claim is that since 2018 we have been presented with new, *queer* narratives of HIV/AIDS suffering which reverse the stigmatising discourses that have been associated with the people who live with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). This investigation provides a queer reading of cultural texts; in particular it focuses on media texts, discussing the ways in which HIV/AIDS suffering is *queered* in an attempt to de-stigmatise PLWHA.

I. Introduction

The end of the second decade of the 21st century can be characterised as a period of crises; social, political, environmental, and financial crises dominated the world (Brabazon, Redhead, and Chivaura, 2019). In the global North, the end of the 2010s brought about the election of Trump in the presidency of the United States, the decision of the people of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, and significant financial challenges, which were experienced by state members of European Union and led to equally significant instability and a turn to conservativism (*ibid.*). One would expect that these events would most probably result in media also adopting a more conservative approach by contributing to the promotion of social cohesion and order rather than the provision of space for marginalised voices to be heard. Against this cultural background of growing conservatism, it would not be surprising if the media gave little to no attention to people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and to contributions (or lack thereof) of governments toward the fight against HIV/AIDS and HIV/AIDS related stigma. Between 1996, when antiretroviral drugs were made available, and the second decade of the 21st century, media coverage of anything related to HIV/AIDS was minimal if not negligible (Kagan, 2018). However, this changed toward the end of the 2010s. Many TV programmes focusing exclusively on HIV/AIDS, for example *Pose* (2018 - 2021), *It's a Sin* (2021) and *Halston* (2021), or those focusing on portraying issues of non-heterosexual interest on TV and issues related to visibility, for example *Disclosure* (2020), made their appearance.

This unexpected, at least for me, but arguably necessary revival of media interest in HIV/AIDS related issues triggered the inception of this thesis. One might speculate about the reasons for such revival, with a possible tentative conclusion being that media creators, producers, and artists started using their work to challenge current regressive socio-political conditions and to sensitise their audiences to being humane and understanding of each other. However, speculating about the significance of the revived interest in HIV/AIDS related issues is not the focus of the thesis. Rather, it focuses on analysing representations of HIV/AIDS and, in particular, on the ways HIV/AIDS as social suffering is represented in contemporary media productions. It carries out a textual analysis to determine the ways that cultural discourses about HIV/AIDS are *queered* with particular attention to how PLWHA and the related *social suffering* are represented in media texts. This involves brief analyses of earlier representations of HIV/AIDS in corporate mainstream media so as to establish common patterns among these earlier works and more in-depth analyses of contemporary representations of HIV/AIDS. In

turn, this allows a thorough understanding of not only how these works challenge normative schemata with regards to PLWHA and HIV/AIDS in general, but also how such challenging is enabled through the use of certain media properties. This thesis does not adhere to rigid disciplinary boundaries; rather, it synthesises knowledge and methodologies from a number of disciplines and traditions. It is also original in that it underscores the focus on shifting frames and discourses concerning filmic and TV representations of PLWHA with a unique application of the concept of *social suffering*.

In focusing on television, instead of other media, and on how HIV/AIDS is mediated through TV, I concur with Adorno's (2005) understanding of the power of the medium to promote ideologies and exclusively encourage homogeneity in society, though I do not share his pessimistic reduction of television to a means of ideological buffering between an undefined, omnipresent force and the public. I am also not of the opposite view, that is of regarding television as a necessarily improving force in society. Rather, I concur Arditi's (2021) more pragmatic view on the very nature of cultural texts, and by extension the means through which these are consumed. He argues that "[...] no matter how transgressive, [cultural texts] operate within a dominant cultural context, while never losing the potential to challenge and transgress dominant cultural values" (pp. 8-9). Indeed, this thesis follows closely Arditi's position in that it initially sets out to explore perceptions about and understandings of HIV/AIDS within the dominant cultural context of the Anglophone North; then, it describes a methodological approach through which the representation and mediation of HIV/AIDS in cultural media texts is analysed; and, it finally provides in-depth analyses of contemporary productions, examining their "[...] potential to challenge and transgress dominant cultural values" (*ibid*.). The thesis is organised into four chapters, starting from the theoretical contextualisation of the discussion about HIV/AIDS and PLWHA, continuing with the methodological approach deployed in the thesis, and moving on to the analysis of representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering in four contemporary cultural texts.

The chapter that follows this introduction, chapter II, surveys the notion of hegemony within gender, queer, and sexuality studies, as well as the role of representation in perpetuating or challenging hegemonic structures. I present *hegemonic othering* as a theoretical frame through which representations of HIV/AIDS can be examined. This frame acknowledges hegemony as a transhistorical construct which produces historically and socio-culturally specific hegemonic power dynamics that *other* certain identities. This frame also allows for an analytical focus on

the processes through which dominant and Other identities are produced, rather than on the specifics of the identities that are *othered*. Representation is treated in this thesis as a *locus*, yet not the only one, of *hegemonic othering*. As such, representation is viewed as producing identities and as classifying them as dominant and Other. With particular attention to HIV/AIDS, it is argued that through representations of PLWHA, a new type, for lack of better word, of masculinities has emerged, *viral masculinities*. The plural indicates that this is not a total category whereby all PLWHA behave in the same way; rather, it suggests - and it is discussed in detail - that among PLWHA, *hegemonic othering* enables distinctions between dominant and *othered* men. The chapter is not balanced with regard to its focus between masculinities and femininities. This reflects both the abundance of theoretical work on hegemonic and dominant masculinities compared to how little has been written about dominant femininities, as well as the pattern observed in the way society initially associated HIV/AIDS with homosexual males.

At this point, it is important to note that absence of accurate and widely communicated accounts of the history of HIV has contributed to the disproportionate stigmatisation of gay male communities in the anglophone global North. Indeed, the history of the virus situates colonialism and open sexual networks as the primary reasons that contributed to the spread of HIV in the global North. At the same time when the mutation of SIV (Simian Immunodeficiency Virus) into HIV from Green Monkey to humans occurred in the 1930s, migrant workers from Haiti were sent in what was then known as Congo, transporting goods from one village to the next (Pepin, 2011). Naturally, these workers engaged sexually with the local population who were already infected with HIV which resulted in migrant workers also being infected with the virus. When these workers were back in Haiti and in absence of any other opportunity for paid work, they resorted in sex work to make ends meet. Their clients were often upper-middle class American gay men who, upon return to the American metropoles, brought the virus with them (*ibid*.). Another effect of colonisation was the suppression of the traditional ring-shaped marriage model that African nations had used for centuries whereby one male patriarch had several wives (Montagnier, 2002). This is a closed sexual network which does not contribute to the spread of HIV. However, colonisers outlawed this marriage model in favour of the one man/one woman marriage binary, typical of Western cultures. In doing so, locals were forced to maintain their traditional sexual networks in hiding which resulted in the disruption of their social rigidity, leading individuals to move from one marriage ring to another and create an open sexual network which enabled HIV to spread

(Jaffar *et al.*, 2004). Even though the thesis does not discuss the history of HIV, it is important to acknowledge how limited knowledge of it has enabled stigmatising discourses against gay men to prevail. Indeed, it is for this reason that the thesis focuses primarily on HIV and gay men.

The next chapter, chapter III, shifts the attention from HIV/AIDS or PLWHA to HIV/AIDS as *social suffering*. This allows the discussion, and the analysis that follows, to focus not only on those who live with HIV or those who have died with AIDS-related illnesses, but also on everyone else who has been affected by HIV/AIDS in a direct or indirect manner. This includes friends and families of people who died with AIDS-related illnesses, as well as non-heterosexual individuals, primarily men, whose lives - sexual and otherwise - have been defined by HIV/AIDS. The chapter then moves to the presentation of an adapted version of Chouliaraki's (2006) *analytics of mediation*, the methodological approach deployed in this thesis. This approach allows for the combination of multimodal and critical discourse analyses which in turn allow for an analytical study of products of representation and the possibilities they provide to audiences for meaning-making. It is important to note that the focus of the analysis is on the frames and discourses concerning filmic and TV representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering. The thesis does not examine how audiences make meaning as a result of watching the representations in focus; rather, it examines the meaning production process with attention to the potential that features of representations provide to audiences with regard to possible responses to HIV/AIDS. The chapter concludes with an application of this methodological approach to the analysis of cultural media texts representing HIV/AIDS which were produced from the outbreak of the pandemic until the middle of the 2010s. It emerges that all products under examination included features that neither contributed to the provision of a realistic representation of life with HIV, nor did they contribute to the amelioration of suffering.

The question that the following two chapters, chapters IV and V, set out to answer is whether patterns of representation changed following the resurgence of interest in addressing HIV/AIDS in cultural productions toward the end of the 2010s and the beginning of the 2020s. The first of these chapters, chapter IV, focuses on analysing *Pose* (2018 - 2021) and *It's a Sin* (2021). These works are analysed together as they belong to the retrovision genre, dramatising the early years of the pandemic. Audiences are shown what reality was like before and immediately after the outbreak of HIV/AIDS. It emerges that contrary to earlier representations

of the initial years of the pandemic, these two cultural texts succeed in addressing HIV/AIDS in an empowering rather than stigmatising manner. *Pose*, in particular, was ground-breaking in that it was the first series produced by corporate mainstream media to employ PLWHA and members of the queer community in the creative team. Similarly, *It's a Sin* challenges previous representations of the early years of the pandemic by not contributing to the association of HIV/AIDS with a discourse of illness and death. Rather, it presents the social suffering that emerged with HIV/AIDS and provides space for audiences to reflect on their contribution to the suffering of others.

The next chapter, chapter V, focuses on non-fictional narratives by examining the ways HIV/AIDS suffering is represented through activist campaigns which used television as a platform to inform and sensitise. The chapter analyses celebrity activist, Jonathan Van Ness from *Queer Eye* (2018 - present) and non-celebrity activist, Bruce Richman from the U=U campaign. A close analysis of the activists' television appearances as cultural media texts reveals that on the one hand, Van Ness focuses on explaining what life with HIV today means for the individual and society, and he addresses the social and political dimensions of HIV/AIDS-related stigma. Van Ness is critical of the Trump administration and invites his followers to be so as well, and to consider the implications of their vote. On the other hand, Richman employs a less direct approach. His narrative is focused on presenting facts and scientific evidence about the fact that when a HIV positive person's viral load is so minimal that becomes undetectable, they can no longer transmit the virus to another person. In doing so, Richman calls everyone to be tested so that they can get on medication, reduce their viral load, and end HIV/AIDS once and for all. However, contrary to Van Ness's narrative, and possibly given the limited airtime that Richman is given as a non-celebrity, he focuses extensively on facts and numbers, risking the reduction of the experience of HIV/AIDS, and by extension of PLWHA, to the domain of medical, and thus public, concern.

In some countries of the global North, such as Ireland, there is little or no official government intervention or information about HIV/AIDS (Duffy, 1993). As such, one can expect the public to look to culture and cultural productions for information about HIV/AIDS. Sections II. D. and III. D. 4. of this thesis confirm that up until the end of the 2010s, positive or de-stigmatised filmic and TV representations of HIV were far and few between. As such, people were presented with anachronistic and horrifying representations of people dying with AIDS as opposed to the reality of people living healthily with HIV when on medication. In turn, this

contributed to what the UNAIDS recognises as "[...] the cycle of stigma" (Ren and Lei, 2020, p. 499) whereby people avoid getting tested in fear of being stigmatised. It is therefore unsurprising that countries such as Ireland still have high penetration levels of HIV (World Health Organisation, Regional Office for Europe, 2022) and this further contributes to the significance of providing people with positive and de-stigmatised filmic and TV representations of HIV. This kind of bottom-up organising in absence of governmental support is not new in the history of HIV activism. In 1983, HIV activists organised a meeting in Denver which drew to a close with what is now known as the Denver Principles, "[...] a list of profound basic rights [...]" (King, 2013) whereby those infected with the virus demanded that they were not labelled as victims; rather, they were to be treated as "[...] people with AIDS" (*ibid.*). This was not a mere issue of lexical choice. Through the Denver Principles, people with AIDS "[...] demanded that physicians see their patients as "whole people," and provide "accurate information." They believed their opinion on their care should be awarded equal weight [...]" (*ibid.,* emphasis in original). In line with the Denver Principles, it is important to note that the use of the words suffering and sufferers in this thesis refers only to cultural productions that present HIV/AIDS and PLWHA within discourses and contexts of suffering. The aim of the thesis is to challenge such representations (chapters II and III) and to examine whether contemporary representations of HIV/AIDS and PLWHA provide alternative, positive and de-stigmatised, representations of HIV/AIDS and PLWHA (chapters IV and V).

It is also important to note that this thesis is written in full acknowledgement of the author's privileges including, but not limited to the privilege of conducting research in academia, of being white, cisgender, and HIV negative man. It is acknowledged that these privileges have created a certain position from which the thesis and its arguments are formed. By no means does the thesis aim to dictate to anyone how to voice their truths, how to communicate the effects stigma has had on their lives, or how to read cultural texts. The thesis confirms that there are certain features of cultural products that affect the kinds of meanings that are produced, and it acknowledges the potential influence media can have on publics even though it does not examine whether publics are indeed influenced by these cultural products. Even though it does not examine representations from an audience reception point of view, it identifies the need for such a study to be produced. This would complement the thesis in that it would be able to provide an insight about a possible correlation between meaning production and meaning making/reception. The cultural texts which are analysed in the final two chapters ignite a sense of optimism in that corporate media can be put to good use and contribute to the

making of a more accepting and understanding society. It is this optimism that this thesis aims to contribute to.

II. Hegemony, Sexuality, Representation, and the Possible Subversion of Normativity

II. A. Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to situate this study in its theoretical framework. In the first part, I explore the notion of hegemony within gender, queer, and sexuality studies. In the second part, I explore the role of representation in maintaining and subverting hegemonic structures. After presenting well-established theoretical constructs which were developed by feminist, gender, and sexuality studies scholars, I present an alternative framework which, as I argue here, I believe to be more suitable for the study of the representation of HIV/AIDS. My framework, which I call *hegemonic othering* recognises hegemony as a transhistorical structure producing, through *othering*, historically and socio-culturally specific power formations among dominant and Other identities. *Hegemonic othering* also aims to cater for the complexity of intersectionality as a lens to approach identity formation. In other words, it does not value one characteristic of identity as more important than another one. Rather, it focuses on the processes through which dominant and Other identities are produced and, more importantly, on the production of power relationships among these identities.

I, then, continue my argument and suggest that representation in cultural productions is one key way through which dominant and Other identities, as well as power formations among them, are produced. I focus first on the production of identities through representation, and I turn to power formations among identities by tracing the representation of viral masculinities in cultural productions from the outbreak of the pandemic in the early 1980s until the 2010s. Finally, I present *queering* as a method, or tool, that both theoreticians and practitioners have at their disposal to subvert normative representations and, in effect, hegemonic structures of *othering*. In this chapter, I synthesise theories from a variety of disciplines. As such, I do not claim to comprehensively analyse the body of theoretical work within each one of them; rather, I bring relevant disciplines together to strengthen my argument. Further to this, I start the discussion by focusing a lot on masculinities, be it hegemonic, dominant, gay masculinities, and toward the end of the chapter, I shift the focus to queer. With this, I aim to reflect both the abundance of theoretical work on hegemonic and dominant masculinities in relation to

hegemonic and dominant femininities as well as the pattern observed in the way society initially associated HIV/AIDS with homosexual males.[1]

II. B. Hegemony and Sexuality

The first part of this chapter focuses on hegemony and sexuality. In particular, I start by tracing the use of hegemony by feminist scholars up to and including Butler's (1990) *heteronormative matrix*. Then, I discuss the theoretical constructs of Ludwig's (2011) *heteronormative hegemony* and Messerschmidt's (2018) *hegemonic masculinity*. The aim of this discussion is to situate hegemony within gender and sexuality studies and present the main arguments that have resulted from the integration of hegemony in the ongoing discussion about normativity in relation to gender and sexuality. To focus more on non-heterosexual but dominant masculinities, I turn the discussion to Bourdieu's (2001) work on masculine domination, echoing the argument that non-heterosexual males still identify and function as males and can, therefore, assume dominant status. I further support this claim by presenting relevant literature on gay masculinities, for example Nardi's (2000) work. Using Duggan's (2003) construct of *homonormativity*, I argue that within neoliberal society, homonormativity exhibits hegemonic qualities. I conclude this part of the chapter by arguing that situating homonormativity within hegemonic discourses is theoretically productive in that it does not only focus on relations of sexuality and gender but situates them within systems of power production and exercise. In the next part of this chapter, then, I follow on from this argument and focus on representation as a system of power production and exercise in relation to HIV positive individuals, in particular.

II. B. 1. Hegemony and Gender, Queer, and Sexuality Studies

Following an understanding of heteronormativity as relational to other societal power-generating forces (Butler, 1993; Anzaldúa, 2000; Giffney, 2004; Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz, 2005), hegemony has been used by a number of gender, queer, and sexuality theorists to further expand our understanding of how heteronormativity attains and maintains its power. For example, Genschel (1996) provides a dialogue between heteronormativity and hegemony to argue that heteronormativity is not a contested social force; rather, she argues, it is a socially accepted one. Lorenz (2009) further develops Genschel's argument and examines the ways in

[1] The initial absence of representation of cisgender and transgender women from cultural representations of HIV and AIDS and their inclusion in contemporary representations is something that is analysed in detail in chapters 3 and 4.

which heteronormativity achieves its universal acceptance. Borrowing Silverman's (1992) *dominant fictions*[2] and Foucault's (1978) *tactical polyvalence of discourses,*[3] Lorenz (2009) argues that the heteronormative universal consensus results from individual people's ongoing struggles against hegemonic discourses.

In *Heteronormativität* (Hartmann *et al.*, 2007), the concept of ongoing subjective struggles against hegemonic discourses as the means of stabilisation of heteronormativity becomes the starting point of an analysis of the relation of hegemony and heteronormativity. For Hartmann *et al.* (2007), hegemony is viewed as a structure maintained through struggles for domination, and heteronormativity is seen as one sub-category or field of hegemony. Wagenknecht (2007), suggesting a material dimension of heteronormativity, uses hegemony to explain that "[queer politics of citizenship engage] in struggles over hegemony, where meaning and evaluation of sexual practices and struggles over resources are regulated by the same forces" (p. 29). The discussion has provided just few examples of how gender, queer, and sexuality studies have benefitted the dialogue between heteronormativity and hegemony.[4] It is, therefore, evident that queer theory cannot but engage in criticisms of power. By combining queer theory and hegemony then, such criticisms become stronger. What is to be highlighted here is that each dialogue between hegemony and heteronormativity results in an augmented understanding of heteronormativity within a broader context of power relations. Before exploring this further, it is important to briefly revisit hegemony as it was originally conceived by Antoni Gramsci.

While scholars like Forgacs (2000) propose that Gramsci situated hegemony within economic terms, the earlier discussion on the use of hegemony by gender, queer, and sexuality theorists suggests that it is possible for all types of relations to be governed by hegemony.[5] Indeed, Gramsci's starting point was to understand how, despite its exploitative and oppressive nature, capitalism managed not to lose its stability. The maintenance of its stability is enabled, according to Gramsci (1985), because of hegemony which, through "[...] intellectual and moral

[2] Silverman (1992) expands on Jacques Rancière's (2008) *dominant fiction* to describe the discourses which provide a social structure in which they can identify themselves. See Rancière, J. (2008) *Le spectateur émancipé*. Paris: La Fabrique Editions.
[3] Discourses the function of which is "[...] neither uniform nor stable [...]" (Foucault, 1978, p. 100) and serve a purpose in the maintenance, if not creation, of power relations. Full reference in List of References section.
[4] For a more detailed discussion on scholarly work that links theories of hegemony and heteronormativity, see Varela M., Dhawan, N., and Engel, A. (2011). Full references in List of References section.
[5] Also important scholarly work on Hegemony and State/Political Power in Hall, S. (1991) 'Reading Gramsci', in Simon, R. (ed) *Gramsci's political thought*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 7-10. Buci-Glucksmann, C. (1980) *Gramsci and the state*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

leadership [...]" (p. 57), prompts people to subscribe to it. In other words, hegemony leads people to "[...] affirm social orders, social practices and certain ways of living [...]" (Ludwig, 2011, p. 91) even if these are against their best interests. Contrary to its quotidian meaning, Gramsci does not use hegemony to refer to forceful persuasion, domination, or oppression. What is associated with his usage of hegemony is practices which produce what he calls "[...] common sense [...]" (1985, p. 44).

Following Gramsci, scholars agree with consensus being central to the notion of hegemony, but many theorists challenge the notion of forms of governance as enactors of hegemony.

> It has been proposed that hegemonic rule does not only depend on leading groups or political parties but also on socio-cultural concepts, shared norms and habituated normalities. For example, heteronormativity can become hegemonic without a specific group claiming leadership (Varela, Dhawan, and Engel, 2011, p. 36).

To further illustrate Varela, Dhawan, and Engel's (*ibid.*) argument, one can examine HIV/AIDS related stigma. HIV positive people suffer from HIV/AIDS related stigma, but such stigma is not necessarily imposed by those in leadership positions. As I discuss later in detail, HIV negative individuals can also, and indeed do, stigmatise those who are HIV positive. The very act of stigmatisation is an enactment of hegemony not by those in leadership positions, but by those who assume power relations over others.

Based on the distinction between oppression and consent and following that hegemony operates through the latter, Ludwig (2011) argues that hegemony

> [...] relies on self-activities of the (majority of) subjects - which are simultaneously activities carried out by subjects themselves and 'externally directed' processes. Thus, stating that hegemony operates through leading and guiding implies that subjects can and do adopt hegemonic worldviews (p. 92, emphasis in original).

As we are now going to see, this performative element of hegemony is what led theorists like Butler (1990), Ludwig (2011), and Messerschmidt (2018), among many others, to develop their concepts of the *heterosexual matrix*, *hegemonic masculinities*, and *heteronormative hegemony*, respectively. Through their scholarly work, these theorists identify how hegemony, as a

structure, is scaffolded, how we consent to our own repression and, if possible, how to break the cycle of power-consent.[6]

II. B. 2. Heterosexual Matrix

Judith Butler (1990) analyses the relation between power and gender and identifies a power formation called "[...] heterosexual matrix [...]" (p. 151) the effects of which include our perceptions of gender and sex. She argues that we understand biological differences of the sexes in a manner that is socially constructed rather than biologically inherent within us. What seems to be a natural biological fact, that is the physiological differences between men and women, dictates, in fact, our values, judgments, and beliefs about how men and women ought to behave as well as whom to desire.[7] "Butler introduces the heterosexual matrix in order to reject the assumption that gender and gendered subjects are the effects of a pre-given sex. Instead, gender is a construction constituted within the discursive realm of the heterosexual matrix" (Ludwig, 2011, p. 87). [8] Not only does Butler (2004) argue that the assignment of gender is not a natural result of the sexed body, but she views gender operating as a norm . "To claim that gender is a norm is not quite the same as saying that there are normative views of femininity and masculinity, even though there clearly are such normative views" (p. 42). Her focus on gender as a norm explains how and/or why the binary was constructed.

The norm allows for the existence of two genders and our understanding of each one gender is based on its

> [...] oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. [...] The institution of a compulsory and naturalised heterosexuality[9] requires and regulates gender as binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this

[6] Hegemony gains its power from the fact that it requires consent from the people on whom hegemonic power is to be exercised. Johnson (2017) illustrates this power of hegemony by referring to *the riddle of steel* from the movie *Conan the Barbarian* (1982). See Johnson, A. (2017) 'Hegemony, Trump, and the riddle of steel', *Anthropology 365*, 31 October. Available at: https://anthropology365.com/2017/10/31/hegemony-trump-and-the-riddle-of-steel/ (Accessed: 22 December 2019).

[7] An artistic explication of Butler's theory is *Pink or Blue* (2017), a poem written and performed by Hollie McNish and directed by Jake Dypka. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0Z2KAwEPPE

[8] Butler borrows *discourse* from Foucault (1978). By *discourse,* she refers to "[...] ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern" (Weedon, 1987, p. 108, emphasis in original). See Weedon, C. (1987) *Feminist practice and post-structuralist theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

[9] Here, Butler alludes to Adrienne Rich's seminal essay. See Rich, A. (1980) 'Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence', *Signs*, 5(4), pp. 631-660.

> differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire (1990, pp. 22-23).

In other words, one cannot just *be* male or female; rather, one can *do* male or female in the sense that gender ascribes and is ascribed to practices, or performative acts, of gender. Butler further notes that these performative acts do not refer to single instances of performance but, instead, these are ongoing and repetitive acts through which the naturalisation of the differences between the sexes is achieved.

Butler's theories have been pivotal in providing new understandings of sex, gender, and the social construction of the binary male-female, among others, all of which have inspired third-wave feminists[10] and, more recently, queer scholars of the 20th and 21st centuries.[11] However, scholars have highlighted certain shortcomings of her theories, especially in relation to the absence of a thorough analysis of the power relations involved in the creation of as well as within the *heterosexual matrix*.[12] Here, I want to summarise Ludwig's (2011) observations regarding the lack of systematic examination of the formation of power in Butler's theories.

Ludwig's initial objection with Butler's *heterosexual matrix* lies within the term itself. Ludwig argues that

> [...] although the term heterosexual matrix undoubtedly clarifies the role of heterosexuality as a structuring social force and although this has brought forth compelling contributions for rethinking radical politics, its underlying conceptualisation of power remains limited (p. 84).

Ludwig argues that replacing *heterosexual* with *heteronormative*[13] is more productive in that the latter highlights that heterosexuality "[...] is not just a social practice [...]" (*ibid.*) but a structural entity that permeates all other facets of personal, social, and cultural life. To this, I want to add that *heterosexual* fails to entail the socio-historical evolution of our knowledge and

[10] Broadly defined as feminist theories that emerged from 1990 until the early 2010s.
[11] Professor Darin Barney from McGill University discusses the influence of Butler's theories in contemporary thought in Barney, D. (2013) 'In defense of Judith Butler', *Huffington Post*, 28 May. Available at: http://bit.ly/2EKJdvB (Accessed: 23 December 2019).
[12] Notable critiques include: Nussbaum, M. C. (1999) 'The professor of parody: The hip defeatism of Judith Butler', *The New Republic*, 22 February. Available at: https://newrepublic.com/article/150687/professor-parody (Accessed: 23 December 2019) and, Namaste, V. (2009) 'Undoing theory: The "transgender question" and the epistemic violence of Anglo-American feminist theory', *Hypatia*, 24(3), pp. 11-32.
[13] Ludwig refers to heteronormativity as it was introduced and analysed by Michael Warner in Warner, M. (1991) 'Fear of a queer planet', *Social Text*, 29, pp. 3-17.

understanding of sexuality.[14] Ludwig continues by analysing Butler's notion of gender construction as the rejection of the *other* gender.

In Butler's (1990) words "[...one] is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair" (p. 22). Ludwig (2011) recognises the inherent hierarchy of gender in Butler's theory but challenges her for not *incorporating* the hierarchical construction of gender into her theory (p. 86). Especially with regards to Butler's performativity, Ludwig notes that

> [the] flipside of Butler's understanding of performativity as the *modus operandi* of power (and respectively of the heterosexual matrix) is that not only are gendered subjects constituted through performative acts, but power is also enacted performatively (p. 87, emphasis in original).

We bring gender into existence by enacting performances of gender from a repertoire of possibilities dictated by the *heterosexual matrix* while the *heterosexual matrix* gains its power from our very performative acts. The ways in which the *heterosexual matrix* gains and exhibits power are not systematically analysed in Butler's theories. Ludwig argues that a discussion between Gramsci's *hegemony* and Butler's *heterosexual matrix* renders overcoming the gaps in Butler's theory possible. I discuss Ludwig's concept of heteronormative hegemony next.

II. B. 3. Heteronormative Hegemony

Ludwig (2011) takes as a point of departure the absence, in Butler's theories, of

> [...] a tool to systematically theorise the (ambivalent) activities of the subject in the processes of taking on power. In other words," Ludwig argues, "Butler does not address the question *how* and *through which techniques* the subject applies heteronormative scripts in everyday performative practices (p. 90, emphasis in original).

Another area in Butler's work that Ludwig finds problematic is the abstract nature of the *heterosexual matrix*. She argues that "[the] relation of social actions, social relations, and relations of social forces to the heterosexual matrix [...]" (p. 89) remain uncharted in Butler's theories. As a result, even though Butler's work problematises the implications of the heterosexual matrix and gender as norm in the constitution of gendered subjects, her theories do not render subversion of these constructs possible.

[14] As per Foucault (1978).

Ludwig argues that "[...] by replacing an understanding of power as matrix with the concept of hegemony, we can understand the subtle and ambivalent ways heteronormativity operates more precisely" (pp. 95-95). Following *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1993), in *Bodies that matter*, also argues that replacing the concept of the heterosexual matrix with hegemony will address the static nature of the former while allowing for better understandings of the workings of power. In particular, she states that activating the concept of hegemony allows for an understanding of "[...] the ways in which we consent to (and reproduce) those tacit and covert relations of power [...]" (p. 13). Ludwig (2011), therefore, proposes *heteronormative hegemony*[15] as a theoretical framework which

> not only enables us to analyse state regulations such as kinship regulations, family tax policies and laws that only recognize subjects as female or male 'beings', it also allows us to understand these regulations as a result of articulations within civil society (p. 95, emphasis in original).

Steering away from situating *heteronormative hegemony* within the limiting scope of juridical forms of power can prove fruitful in the dialogue between heteronormativity and hegemony. Here, I do not wish to support or reject criticisms of Butler, such as Nussbaum's (1999), and in effect of deconstructive and poststructuralist work as amoral. I argue, though, that an exclusive focus on juridical forms of power does not provide scholars with a broader understanding of the interplay between heteronormativity and hegemony.

Heteronormative hegemony is a framework which situates heteronormativity well within social relations and struggles (Ludwig, 2011). Following Gramsci, Ludwig argues that through heteronormative hegemony, "[...] the formation of state power [is] grounded in civil society" (p. 95). Following this, I argue that state power should not be seen as having a one-way top-down direction, that is as power enacted on members of the society (individuals, organisations, and institutions); rather, there ought to be a bottom-up approach to our understanding of it by focusing on the ways in which members of the society enact and further stabilise state power.

Ludwig also argues that by bringing together hegemony and heteronormativity, our understanding of the latter is enriched by the dynamic quality of hegemony. "[It] is both an

[15] Referring to the work of Warner (1991), Ludwig (2011) argues in favour of using heteronormative, rather than heterosexual hegemony, as the former more accurately demonstrates that heterosexuality goes far beyond certain social, *intimate* practices but rather serves as an imagined *normality* and as a norm, and thus as a crucial and powerful force in current 'Western' societies" (pp. 94-95). See also Warner, M. (1991) 'Fear of a queer planet', *Social Text*, 29, pp. 3-17.

effect of and the terrain for social struggles. It is produced, undermined, reinforced and shifted within social struggles" (p. 96). Consequently, Ludwig states,

> [heteronormative] hegemony then is always a historically and geographically-specific formation of power that is the effect of social struggles within civil society at a given time, which then materialises in state policies (*ibid*.).

There are two issues that I unpack and challenge in following sections of this chapter: Ludwig's claim about *heteronormative hegemony* being produced within social struggles as well as its historical and geographic-specific nature. If *heteronormative hegemony* is produced, by applying analogy of opposites it can also be prohibited. To further this line of thought, if *heteronormative hegemony* is produced within social struggles, it can be prohibited within social idleness.

With regards to my questioning Ludwig's claim about the historical and geographic-specific nature of heteronormative hegemony, I argue that if Ludwig's suggestion holds true, any discussion or attempt to understand it is obsolete at its outset. If *heteronormative hegemony* changes all the time and from one society to another, we would be unable to understand it. Historical, rather than dynamic, analyses would have to be produced. However, these analyses would only be able to examine what *heteronormative hegemony* was, rather than is, at a given point in time and place. As such, *heteronormative hegemony* would not be a productive construct, but a mere historical observation.

Another characteristic Ludwig (*ibid*.) attributes to *heteronormative hegemony* is that we can view "[...] sexed bodies and gendered subjects [as its] effects" (p. 96). Here Ludwig employs Butler's *performativity theory* and argues that sexed and gendered bodies and subjects "[...] become material through repeated performative acts [...]" (*ibid.*). A point of disagreement with Butler, though, is identified in the relation of heterosexual law in the constitution of gendered subjects. Ludwig argues that

> gendered subject constitution is not only the result of heterosexual law, as Butler proposes, but it is also an effect of technologies of the self [which are] motivated by a desire not to fall outside of normality, but to live, look and *be* normal" (p. 98, emphasis in original).[16]

[16] Here, Ludwig refers to Foucault's (1997) notion of 'techniques of the self' which are "[...] techniques that permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct" (p. 177). See Foucault, M. (1997) 'Sexuality and solitude' in Rabinow, P.

Ludwig finally argues in relation to the usefulness of her theory that "[...] such theorising could veer away from framing heterosexual power as sovereign authority. Instead it would allow us to raise the question of how it gains authority" (p. 91). Her claim here supports my earlier point on the importance of working with theoretical constructs which are not descriptive, but productive; constructs which can enable scholars to deconstruct and subvert power relations. She further elaborates,

> [...] this kind of theorizing would enable us to incorporate social relations and struggles as well as their potential to change the heterosexual matrix into our theorizing - leading to an understanding of heteronormativity as a dynamic power formation. Finally, it would allow us to view heteronormativity as a power formation that also operates using technologies of the self. The constitution of gendered subjects, then, could be theorised as an effect of simultaneous subjugation and empowerment (p. 91).

The dynamic role of hegemony is evident in Ludwig's discussion of gendered subjects as effects of subjugation and empowerment. To revisit my earlier argument, hegemony does not involve an one-direction linear enforcement of power. Rather, it enables power formations at all levels in the social hierarchy. She also states that "[even] though [subjugation and empowerment of gendered subjects] are not outside heteronormative hegemony, they are able to articulate and shift heteronormative hegemony" (p. 98). In other words, subjugation and empowerment of gendered subjects are the effects of *heteronormative hegemony*, but they can also be used to 'shift' *heteronormative hegemony*. This research focuses on queering, that is using currently established norms and ideals in non-normative manners, as a way to subvert power formations. The *shifting* quality that Ludwig attributes to the products of hegemony resonates with my overall argument of this research.

In describing heteronormativity as dynamic and ever-changing, Ludwig states that

> [while] an increase in tolerance and diversity within politics as well as within political and social discourses can be considered an achievement of new forms of freedom, these gains are still only a transformation of heteronormativity (p. 89).

Despite her acknowledging the increased *tolerance and diversity* of - I assume as it is not clearly stated - non-heteronormative identities and practices, the concept of *homonormativity*, which I discuss in detail later, challenges *heteronormative hegemony*. Before discussing

(ed.) *Ethics: Subjectivity and truth. Essential works of Foucault 1954 - 1984*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: The New Press, pp. 175-184.

homonormativity and its relation - or place - within the hegemony discourse, I first present *hegemonic masculinities* as it was initially formulated by Connell (1987) and subsequently developed by Messerschmidt (2018).

II. B. 4. Hegemonic Masculinity/ies

The concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, originally formulated by Connell (1987), reformulated by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), and *amplified* by Messerschmidt (2018), "[…] contributes to a significant understanding of how unequal gender relations are legitimated between men and women, masculinities and femininities, and among masculinities" (2018, p. ix). Messerschmidt, in his work *Hegemonic Masculinity* (2018), situates the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* within its theoretical and socio-political context by initially tracing the development of feminist scholarship and, in particular, radical and socialist feminist thought.[17] In doing so, Messerschmidt highlights the fruitful transition from patriarchy to gender in gender and sexuality studies.

> The shift from patriarchy to gender [...] included the emergence of the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" alongside a theoretical conceptualisation of *gender relations* as one of the most important theoretical projects feminists undertook in the 1980s (p. 22, emphasis in original).

As has transpired from the previous sections, shifting focus from patriarchy to gender enabled the development of not only the concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, but concepts such as the *heterosexual matrix* and *heteronormative hegemony*.

Connell (1985), developed *hegemonic masculinity* as a theory of gender practice that would help solve the problems associated with the feminist thought of her time. Her focus was on "[...] the structure of [gender] relations as a condition of all practice" (p. 267). One of the characteristics of *hegemonic masculinity* that was initially highlighted by scholars of the time was its emphasis on how power was practiced by one gender over the other, men over women, instead of limiting its scope over a theorisation of role expectation and gender identity formation. Messerschmidt (2018) explains that

> [hegemonic] masculinity was conceptualised by Connell (1987, 1995) as a specific form of masculinity in a given historical and society-wide social setting that *legitimates*

[17] A comprehensive historical account of feminist thought in the 1960s and 1970s as well as a detailed discussion on the shift from patriarchy to gender can be found in Messerschmidt (2018, pp. 1-23). Full reference in List of References section.

> unequal gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities (p. 28, emphasis in original).

In the years that followed, the concept was welcomed by a number of scholars who further developed it "[...] by documenting the consequences and costs of hegemony; by uncovering mechanisms of hegemony; by showing greater diversity in masculinities; and by tracing changes in hegemonic masculinities" (pp. 31-32).[18] Along with the positive reception of *hegemonic masculinity* within gender and sexuality studies scholarship, there have been many who criticised the concept.[19] Based on these criticisms, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) discarded three features of the original formulation of the concept: the oversimplified feature of social relations involved in and involving *hegemonic masculinities*, the presentation of *hegemonic masculinity* as a rigid type in a typology of masculinities, and lastly the ambiguity around the relation between hegemonic and dominant masculinities.

The reformulated concept of *hegemonic masculinity* addresses "[...] four principal areas: the nature of gender hierarchy, the geography of masculine configurations, the process of social embodiment, and the dynamics of masculinities" (Messerschmidt, 2018, p. 50). These principal areas suggest that hegemonic masculinity is a dynamic and productive construct. Therefore, it is through the deconstruction of these areas that the subversion of hegemony can potentially be achieved. Messerschmidt explains that the reformulated concept of *hegemonic masculinity* recognises the - hegemonic - hierarchical dimension of the relationships that occurs among hegemonic masculinity, femininity, and other masculinities. Also, the concept caters for intersections between gender and social inequalities of other types by acknowledging not only the power of the hegemonic group but also the "[...] agency of subordinated groups" (p. 69). Thirdly, it renders possible for hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities to be "[...] challenged, contested, and changed" (*ibid*.), and finally, it promotes an analysis of "[...] hegemonic masculinit*ies* at three levels: local, regional, and global" (*ibid*., emphasis in original). What is of significance in the reformulation of the concept is the shift from *hegemonic masculinity* to *hegemonic masculinities* which is further explored in Messerschmidt's (2018) work. He, specifically, writes that

[18] Notable examples include: Messner, M. A. (1992) *Power at play: Sports and the problem of masculinity*. Boston, MA: Beacon. Brown, D. (1999) 'Complicity and reproduction in teaching physical education', *Sport, Education and Society*, 4(2), pp. 143-159. Higate, P. R. (2003) *Military masculinities: Identity and the state*. London: Praeger. Morris and Evans (2001) "Cheese makers are always women:' Gendered representations of farm life in the agricultural press', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 8(4), pp. 375-390.

[19] For a detailed account of the criticism of the original formulation of heteronormative hegemony, see Messerschmidt (2018, pp. 34-46). Full reference in List of References section.

> [...] the variety of hegemonic masculinities provide models of relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities. And because of the ubiquity of hegemonic masculinities, gender inequality often is broadly accepted and unquestioned. Gender hegemony functions to obscure unequal gender relations while effectively permeating public and private life, encouraging all to endorse, unite around, and embody such unequal gender relations (p. 106).

Here, and in combination with his focus on a geography of masculine configurations, Messerschmidt argues that hegemonic masculinities achieve normality in everyday life at local, regional, and global levels. While acknowledging their diversity, Messerschmidt reminds us that it is through "[...] relational practices and discursive meanings [...]" (p. 107) that hegemonic masculinities render unequal gender relations legitimate.[20] Similarly to Ludwig - discussed in the previous section - Messerschmidt highlights that the relational and discursive practices that enable *hegemonic masculinities* to emerge - and occur, should we accept them as performative - are historically and socio-culturally specific. Their significance, he argues, lies on their ability to "[...] shape a sense of what is "acceptable" and "unacceptable" gendered behaviour for co-present interactants in specific situations" (p. 107, emphases in original). The last two chapters of Messerschmidt's *Hegemonic Masculinity* (2018) focus on the social construction of *hegemonic masculinities* as well as on their ability to be resisted, contested, altered, and dismantled.[21]

For the purposes of this study, a further presentation of Messerschmidt's thought would not be productive. However, it is important to highlight one feature of his theory that I have already introduced: the distinction between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities. A distinction between these two types of masculinities is important for the discussion that follows. In his discussion on intersections among gender and other types of social inequalities, Messerschmidt creates a typology of non-hegemonic masculinities consisting of four types: dominant, dominating, subordinate, and positive masculinities. Before presenting Messerschmidt's typology, it is important to highlight that, according to him, the key aspect of *hegemonic masculinities* is the "[...] legitimation of unequal gender relations" (p.71). From this, it is ensued

[20] This is a point where Messerschmidt's thought meets Butler, Foucault, and Ludwig as discussed above.
[21] Messerschmidt uses a theoretical framework which he terms *structured action theory* building on the work of Thomas Laqueur (1990). See Laqueur, T. (1990) *Making sex: Body and gender from the Greeks to Freud.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

that non-hegemonic masculinities do not contribute to rendering unequal gender relations legitimate.

The first two types of non-hegemonic masculinities are dominant and dominating masculinities. Messerschmidt defines dominant masculinities as "[...] the most celebrated, common, or current form of masculinity [...] in a particular social setting" (p. 125) and dominating masculinities as those that "[...] involve commanding and controlling specific interactions and exercising power and control over people and events [...]" (*ibid.*). Messerschmidt further explains that hegemonic masculinities can be dominant or dominating under certain conditions but the reverse is, according to him, not possible.[22] Another type of non-hegemonic masculinities is subordinate masculinities defined by Messerschmidt as "[...] lesser than or aberrant and deviant to hegemonic masculinity [...] as well as to dominant/dominating masculinities [...]" (p. 126). An example of this type of masculinities, according to Messerschmidt, is gay or lesbian people. He claims that the feminisation of gay men and the masculinisation of lesbian women provides evidence of the fact that being gay or lesbian is perceived as embodying those qualities that are not on a par with dominant and dominating masculinities and femininities.

Last in this typology is the category of positive masculinities, "[...] those that legitimate an egalitarian relationship between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities and femininities [...]" (p. 127).[23] Where I would like to focus on, though is that on the one hand, Messerschmidt highlights that dominant and dominating masculinities are not involved in legitimising "[...] hierarchical relationship[s]" (p. 125) - because this is the role of *hegemonic masculinities*. On the other hand, he demonstrates that they create hierarchical relations in gender-based terms, with subordinate masculinities. Messerschmidt actually uses homophobia as an example of a social practice of gender-based hierarchical relations - both embodied and discursive. As such, I argue that dominant and dominating masculinities do not constitute types of masculinities that are distinctively different to *hegemonic masculinities*; rather, they are symptoms of *hegemonic masculinities*.

[22] Those conditions are not made clear in *Hegemonic Masculinities* (2018). However, Messerschmidt recognizes the need for empirical studies that focus on exploring "[...] when, how, and under what particular social conditions hegemonic masculinities are simultaneously dominant and/or dominating, and when they are not" (p. 126).
[23] The sixth chapter of Messerschmidt's book (2018, pp. 133-158) contains a variety of examples of positive masculinities, which, for brevity purposes, I do not discuss here.

To further critique Messerschmidt's (2018) and Ludwig's (2011) concepts of *hegemonic masculinities* and *heteronormative hegemonies*, I first present a brief overview of Bourdieu's theory of social fields.[24] In doing so, I want to further make the case that dominant and dominating masculinities are not different categories to *hegemonic masculinities* but symptoms of hegemony. Bourdieu[25] argues that our life consists of constant navigation through various *social fields*.[26] These fields are environments consisting of any number of social networks, for example occupation, education, leisure, etc. By occupying any of these fields, Bourdieu argues, our expression of agency is non-voluntary. In other words, he says that we do not create our own identity and adjust it accordingly to suit the constraints of each field (Hilgers and Mangez, 2014); rather, and here is where Gramsci's theory becomes relevant, we adopt identities which have already been constructed for and given to us by society. So, when one person enters a particular social field with its pre-assigned symbols, ideas, and beliefs, they adopt various identities in different situations by navigating through a collection of symbols, ideas, and beliefs which are unique to each specific *social field*.

The overall mechanism which decides the course of political, economic, and cultural action is hegemony (Nexon and Neumann, 2018). To bring this back to the discussion about Messerschmidt's theory, the emergence of a dominant or dominating group depends on whether the collective network of symbols, ideas, and beliefs of one particular field is fashioned appropriately. For example, by teaching one group that certain human traits constitute a form of masculinity which is to be celebrated while other traits constitute a form of masculinity which is not only of a lesser quality but also potentially able to undermine the dominance of the celebrated group, one teaches, in effect, this group to hate those embodying the latter form of masculinity. In section *II. D. Representation and Hegemony*, I discuss how HIV positive masculinities are being represented as less able and, in extension, less masculine than HIV negative ones. This, I argue next, does not only lead to the stigmatisation of HIV positive individuals as second-class citizens. Most importantly, HIV positive masculinities, I argue

[24] Scholars have argued that Bourdieu's theory of social fields is actually a method rather than a theory. See Lewin, K. (1943) 'Defining the "Field at a given time"', in Lewin, K. (ed.) *Field theory in social science. Selected theoretical papers*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. For the purposes of this study, I will use the term 'theory' to refer to Bourdieu's social fields.

[25] Bourdieu's theory of social fields cannot be attributed to a single work of his. His written work in which he articulates his theory spans from 1966 to 2013 (including publications that followed his death). A comprehensive account of his theory of social fields is offered by Hilgers and Mangez (2014). Full details can be found in the list of references.

[26] The term had been previously used by positive sciences. Bourdieu appropriated its use to fit his sociological scholarship. See Martin, J. L. (2003) 'What is field theory?', *American Journal of Sociology*, 109(1), pp. 1-49.

later, are being represented as potentially threatening in that they can undermine the dominance of HIV negative masculinities. As such, HIV negative people are not only led to disregard HIV positive people, but they are also led to develop feelings of detest and hate toward PLWHA. In doing so, the behaviour of each group is now predictable and controlled. As such, I return to my previous argument about hegemonic and dominant or dominating masculinities not being different categories or types of masculinities; rather, dominant and dominating masculinities are symptoms of *hegemonic masculinities*.

Before exploring dominant and dominating masculinities in more detail, I want to highlight a paradox that arises from Bourdieu's theory: any scholarship on hegemony is inevitably caught in a network of hegemony and, thus, it is bound to be controlled by the narrative(s) that scholars identify with or are caught in themselves. This being the case, most scholars break this approach into separate subjects, like political, economic, religious, or cultural hegemony, which are, in turn, broken down into further categories such as the ones I discuss in this chapter: *heteronormative hegemony* or *hegemonic masculinities*, as examples. What this suggests is that while acknowledging the field - and the complexities of each field - each scholar is pre-occupied with, there might be a need to discuss hegemony in a manner that simplifies, rather than makes complex our understanding of its characteristics. This is a point that I return to in following sections. At this point, though, it is important that I discuss dominating and dominant masculinities with attention to how what Messerschmidt terms *subordinate masculinities* can, and indeed become dominant or dominating ones.

II. C. Towards Hegemonic Homonormativity

In this section, I examine hegemony and its effects on non-heterosexual individuals. In particular, I discuss power formation within a community of people who seemingly belong outside of normative society. The earlier discussion which focused on hegemony and heterosexuality now turns to hegemony and homosexuality.

II. C. 1. Bourdieu's *Masculine Domination* (2001) and an Introduction to Homonormativity

One of the key observations in Pierre Bourdieu's *Masculine Domination* (2001) is what he terms as *paradox of doxa* (p. 1). Referring to a situation where social "[...] transgressions, subversions, contraventions, and 'follies'" (*ibid.*, emphasis in original) become ordinary,

Bourdieu describes a sense of taken-for-grantedness that permeates culture. As such, hegemony is very rarely contested in everyday life. Its manifestation is not easy to be identified since, according to Bourdieu's *paradox of doxa*, it becomes part of the "[...] order of the world [...]" (*ibid.*) and it forms "[...] obligations and […] penalties [which are] broadly respected" (*ibid.*). The implications of the normalisation - and normativisation - of hegemonic societal forces such as the ones I discussed earlier, *heteronormative hegemony* and/or *hegemonic masculinities*, often interfere in the processes of identifying and challenging those hegemonical systems. "[...] Being included in the object that we are trying to comprehend, we have embodied the historical structures of the masculine order in the form of unconscious schemes of perception and appreciation" (p. 5). In other words, Bourdieu suggests that when challenging a dominating societal force, one, inescapably operates from within the systems of operation themselves.[27]

Referring to masculine domination, in particular, Bourdieu (2001) notes that when trying "[...] to understand masculine domination, we are […] likely to resort to modes of thought that are the product of [this] domination" (p. 5). His suggestion to this problem is "[…] finding a practical strategy for objectifying the subject of scientific objectification" (*ibid.*). Through this study, I argue that understanding dominant and dominating masculinities as a symptom of hegemony, rather than defining them as different types of hegemonic masculinities, can enable scholars to focus on hegemony in a more holistic manner. Additionally, I also argue that media and artistic representations of HIV provide a platform through which hegemony can be objectified and, thus, studied. I elaborate on this further in the next part of this chapter.[28] Before analysing those hegemonical societal structures, it is important to discuss in more detail the process of normalisation and normativisation, mentioned above, of masculine domination.

Bourdieu (2001) argues that masculine domination is "[…] affirmed in the objectivity of the social structures and the productive or reproductive activities, based on a sexual division of the labour of biological and social production and reproduction which gives the better part to men […]" (p. 33). Here, Bourdieu provides a symbiotic relationship between the social and the corporal/biological. If the male body is the one which is charged with the biological ability to

[27] This observation is very similar to the one that I presented in the earlier section when discussing the paradox of conducting scholarly research on hegemony while being part of or affected by it.

[28] The second part of this chapter focuses on the role of representation in promoting hegemony by establishing relations of domination. This is followed by what I term *queering* in representation, a framework whereby by altering the use of established discourses of domination, hegemony is challenged. The final two chapters of this study provide detailed analyses contemporary cultural productions through this framework.

produce and reproduce - for example, stronger body, able to hunt and feed the family - it is the male body which will be socially able to produce and reproduce - resulting in more food at home and better position in the society, among others. Once what Bourdieu observes becomes accepted by society, masculine domination becomes normalised, expected, and, thus, normative. "These schemes, shaped by similar conditions, and therefore objectively harmonised, function as matrices of the perceptions, thoughts and actions of all members of the society" (*ibid*.). Hence, one needs not wonder why recipients - or victims, I would argue - of such dominant behaviours do not easily react to being dominated.

Bourdieu (2001) shifts his focus on women and writes that

> […] the androcentric representation of biological reproduction and social reproduction is invested with the objectivity of a common sense, a practical, doxic consensus on the sense of practices. And women themselves apprehend all reality, and in particular the power relations in which they are held […]. Their acts of cognition are acts of practical recognition, doxic acceptance, a belief that does not need to be thought and affirmed as such (p. 34).

In other words, the act of domination is extrinsic at its outset - enacted by the dominant one - but progressively becomes intrinsic - asserted by the dominated one. A significant analogy to Bourdieu's thought can be drawn here. In his work, he explores the process of male domination through the prism of the male-female binary. By applying his thought to the heterosexual - non-heterosexual binary, one can examine not only the process of domination of the heterosexual over the non-heterosexual but also the non-heterosexual's acceptance of the role of the dominated one. At a later part in his book, Bourdieu writes

> [collective] expectations, positive or negative, through the subjective expectations that they impose, tend to inscribe themselves in bodies in the form of permanent dispositions. Thus, by virtue of the universal law of the adjustment of expectations to chances, aspirations to possibilities, prolonged and invisibly diminished experience that is sexually characterised through and through tends, by discouraging it, to undermine even the inclination to perform acts that are not expected of women - without them even being denied to them (p. 61).

The internalisation and self-acceptance of the role of the dominated one by women - and non-heterosexuals, I argue - as described here by Bourdieu offers an explanation for the absence of reaction on behalf of the dominated one. To further understand the process of inscribing to

rather than opposing dominant ideologies, one needs to look further into the relationship between the biological, corporal, and the social.

> The social world constructs the body as a sexually defined reality and as the depository of sexually defining principles of vision and division. This embodied social programme of perception is applied to all the things of the world and firstly to the body itself, in its biological reality" (p. 11).

What seems to biologically distinguish one sex from the other, the male from the female body, forms the basis of a social distinction between the - up until recently only two accepted - genders, the man and the woman. However, Bourdieu suggests that this is not a one-way process.

Not only are biological differences used as grounds for social discrimination, but social discrimination *justifies*, in a sense, biological distinctions between the male and the female body. "[The] particular strength of the masculine sociodicy comes from the fact that it combines and condenses two operations: it legitimates a relationship of domination by embedding it in a biological nature that is itself a naturalised social construction" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 23). In the course of masculine domination, the female body has been regarded as weaker than the male one. "Manliness […] is an eminently relational notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity, in any kind of fear of the female, firstly in oneself" (p. 53). However, this is true for homosexual and heterosexual bodies. By means of feminisation of the non-heterosexual male body, heterosexual males are perceived as superior and, therefore, their domination over non-heterosexual males is legitimised.

So far, male domination over the female and, by means of analogy, heterosexual male domination over the non-heterosexual male has been discussed. What remains to be investigated is why heterosexual males need to continuously exert their domination over non-heterosexual males. What further perplexes this investigation is the way in which Bourdieu (2001) presents "[...] male privilege [...]" (p. 50) as problematic for the dominant males themselves. He identifies the sustentation of male domination as problematic for males and explains that they often find themselves trapped in the need to continuously prove their manliness.[29] "Male privilege," he argues, "is also a trap, and it has its negative side in the

[29] This was also highlighted by Metcalf and Humphries in *The Sexuality of Men* (1985), what is considered to be one of the first scholarly works on masculinity studies. See Metcalf, A. and Humphries, M (eds) (1985) *The sexuality of men*. London: Pluto Press.

permanent tension and contention, sometimes verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances" (*ibid.*). His position is clear: certain roles, which could even be undesirable by some men, are being enforced on all men by societal forces. Therefore, male domination does not necessarily result from the will of men but is inscribed in societal structures.[30]

Bourdieu (2001) defines manliness as "[…] sexual or social reproductive capacity, but also as the capacity to fight and to exercise violence," (*ibid.*) and continues

> […] a real man is someone who feels the need to rise to the challenge of the opportunities available to him to increase his honour by pursuing glory and distinction in the public sphere […]. Everything thus combines to make the impossible ideal of virility the source of immense vulnerability (p. 51).

Here, the concept of violence is introduced and defined in relation to vulnerability. The very fact that enactments of manliness are tied to exertions of violence makes the establishment of manliness a source of vulnerability. One is vulnerable because his manliness is not *a priori* established. Rather, whether they like it or not, they need to exert violence toward others for their manliness to be confirmed. "Like honour […] manliness must be validated by other men […] and certified by recognition of membership of the group of 'real men'" (p. 52, emphasis in original). The ongoing struggle of men to establish their manliness in front of other men drives them, according to Bourdieu, to acts of violence against the feminine, since - as discussed earlier - the relational nature of masculinity defines it as non-femininity. The whole point of my research is to transcend the binary and approach the issue from a queer perspective. In the second section of this chapter, I extend Bourdieu's observations beyond the binary male-female.

Earlier, I briefly introduced an analogy whereby I connected the female and the non-heterosexual bodies as they are both going under a process of feminisation by the structures of masculine domination. Such structures have given rise and continue to promote heteronormativity whereby non-heterosexual people are perceived as inferior to their heterosexual counterparts. What is interesting, though, is how male domination permeates not only heteronormative but also homonormative regimes. Bourdieu (2001) does not discuss

[30] This further adds to my criticism on Messerschmidt's take on hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities which I presented in the previous section.

homonormativity *per se*, but offers an insight as to how homonormativity emerged from heteronormative practices. He notes that "[…] the dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear as natural. This can lead to a kind of systematic self-depreciation, even self-denigration […]" (p. 35). Here, he discusses the process whereby non-heterosexuals 'succumb', for want of better word, to masculine domination, and therefore heteronormative sociodicy, to the point that they internalise feelings of inferiority and subservience.

While dominated by their heterosexual counterparts, non-heterosexual men have been left excluded from the "[...] group of 'real men'" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 52, emphasis in original) and the only way for them to regain 'membership' to this group is by complying to the groups' admission criterion which, as discussed earlier, is no other than the assertion of one's " [...] sexual or social reproductive capacity, but also […] the capacity to fight and to exercise violence" (p. 50). The relationship between masculinity and violence is not new. Scholars have written extensively about their observations regarding males exerting violence over females as an enactment of their duty of domination.[31] What is of importance for this research is that we now see non-heterosexual males exerting violence over other non-heterosexual males to enact their duty of domination, join the *group of 'real men'* and, in turn, reclaim their dominant place in society. In the two sections that follow, I particularly focus on violence in the relationship between heterosexuals - non-heterosexuals and between the homonormative binary *good gays - bad queers*, respectively. My analysis centres around Bourdieu's observations as they were presented in this section. My argument is that violence does not exist only within the binary male-female. Rather, violence becomes a means for hegemonic relationships of power to be established.

From the previous discussion, one concludes that manliness is not asserted in isolation, but it is relational: one affirms their manliness when compared to another one. Often, as the earlier discussion has shown, this happens when men exert their domination over women or other men. Such exertion of domination is frequently concentrated on the corporal level first, for

[31] Among others, Karner (1998) states that "[...] masculinity appears intertwined with violence and aggressive domination" (p. 198), Kaufman (1995) asserts that acts of violence "[...] are like ritualised acting out of our social relations of power; the dominant and the weaker, the powerful and the powerless, the active and the passive (p. 13), and Prince and Arias (1994) argued that strength and dogma are central features of men's self-recognition as men. Full bibliographic details can be found in the list of references section of this thesis.

example by arguing that the masculine body is more productive and reproductive than the feminine one, and it is then translated into the sociocultural level. Bourdieu (2001) notes that

> [the] masculinisation of the male body and the feminisation of the female body, immense and in a sense interminable tasks which, perhaps now more than ever, always demand a considerable expenditure of time and effort, induce a somatisation of the relation of domination, which is thus naturalised (pp. 55-56).

Therefore, domination becomes normative. Normative dominant bodies assert their status by dominating non-normative dominated ones. Bourdieu discussed this in terms of the male-female binary but one can equally apply Bourdieu's thoughts on the heterosexual-non-heterosexual relationship. Earlier, I discussed that heterosexual and non-heterosexual males exert violence to other non-heterosexual males as a means of asserting their manliness. In terms of the somatisation of such a form of domination, the most usual manner in which this is achieved is through the feminisation of the non-heterosexual male body. In other words, an effeminate male is perceived as weaker in comparison to a masculine one and, therefore, can be dominated. However, the "[...] somatisation of the relation of domination" (pp. 56) is not as straightforward as the previous simplified statement aimed to suggest.

> Bodily *hexis*,[32] which includes both the strictly physical shape of the body ('physique') and the way it is 'carried', deportment, bearing, is assumed to express the 'deep being', the true 'nature' of the 'person', in accordance with the postulate of the correspondence between the 'physical' and the 'moral' which gives rise to the practical or rationalised knowledge whereby 'psychological' and 'moral' properties are associated with bodily or physiognomic indices (p. 64, emphasis in original).

Here, Bourdieu creates a connection between the physical and the moral/psychological. Dominating a body which is not only weak but also immoral cannot but make the position of the dominant even stronger. In the course of the 20th century, among the most well-known cases of male bodies being presented as weak and immoral at once is the case of HIV positive bodies. I deliberately used the verb 'presented' in the previous sentence to suggest that HIV positive bodies, as well as dominant-dominated relations in general, are being established as weak and/or immoral by sociocultural structures governed by dominant/normative individuals and institutions. "[…] Far from asserting that the structures of domination are ahistorical,"

[32] Here, Bourdieu makes a reference to his work on the *habitus*, the way in which the body and the mind of individuals has been shaped by group culture. The *hexis* is one of the two features of the *habitus* and refers to the way one uses their own body. A detailed discussion of Bourdieu's *habitus* can be found in Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu (2001) writes, "I shall try to establish that they are the product of an incessant labour of reproduction to which singular agents […] and institutions - families, the church, the educational system, the state - contribute" (p. 34). It is, therefore, clear that HIV positive bodies are not inherently weak and immoral, but they are presented to be as such. The question that emerges, then, is whether or not the de-stigmatisation of the HIV positive body can be achieved by challenging or even 'reversing' the presentations that stigmatise it.

An understanding of the processes involved in the establishment of masculine - or, for the purposes of this project, heterosexual masculine - dominance is vital. If, indeed, the only way to challenge the very establishment of the heterosexual masculine construct, and its detrimental effects to those who do not embody it, is the 'reversal' of its mechanism of operation, then understanding how such an establishment occurs is key to this process. Taking the HIV positive body as an example of the dominated one in the HIV negative - HIV positive system of domination, one needs to understand how the HIV positive body has come to signify physical and moral weakness. However, simply acknowledging the fact that the HIV positive body has taken the role of the dominated one because it has been presented as weak and immoral is not productive. Failure to radically challenge the established systems of domination can only lead to further acts of domination. Bourdieu argues that

> [...] in the absence of the will or the capacity to undertake such a radical subversion of the social structures and the cognitive structures which would have to mobilise all the victims of a sexually based discrimination (and, more generally, all those who are stigmatised), one is inevitably trapped in one of the most tragic antinomies of symbolic domination: how can people revolt against a socially imposed categorisation except by organising themselves as a category constructed according to that categorisation, and so implementing the classifications and restrictions that it seeks to resist? (p. 120).

In the analysis that follows, I discuss how earlier attempts in art and the media to address and challenge the stigma associated with HIV have been unsuccessful and, actually, have created the opposite effects: they have aided in the promotion of further stigmatisation of HIV positive individuals. Bourdieu further explains that

> [...] the relation of complicity that the victims of symbolic domination grant to the dominant can only be broken through a radical transformation of the social conditions of production of the dispositions that lead the dominated to take the point of view of the dominant on the dominant and on themselves (pp. 41-42).

Here, Bourdieu describes the act of challenging male - or heterosexual - domination by using the very systems and structures that promote it and by presenting a reversed representation whereby the dominant becomes the dominated, and the dominated becomes the dominant. This is what this research calls *queering*. In later chapters, this is developed in detail by focusing on contemporary cultural products and the ways in which these have reversed/queered the way they represent HIV as a means of destabilising heterosexual masculine domination and, in effect, challenging hegemony. Further to the discussion on masculine dominance, I now turn to discuss gay masculinities in more detail.

II. C. 2. Dominant Gay Masculinities: Further Introduction to Homonormativity

Echoing Bourdieu's theory of social fields, Cruz (2000) situates gender within the social stratification process, arguing that one constructs their gender through the socialisation process, which, in turn, leads to the maintenance of the gender order.[33] Nardi (2000) further notes that our cultural history suggests that gender order, in other words what creates and maintains "[...] gender constructs" (p. 8), has been challenged by sexual difference. In turn, this has led to alienation among straight and gay men. In *Gay Masculinities* (2000), various scholars (Cruz, Halkitis, Nardi, among others) attest to the fact that non-heterosexuality was constructed to be perceived as threatening to heterosexuality, so that the established gender order remained intact. Nardi argues that "[...] sexual perversion [...]" was used by medical discourses of the late 19th century to describe people who allegedly wanted to be the opposite sex. Katz (1983) offers an even more clarified explanation and states that those "[...] who were said to have done one or more of the following: wore the clothes and hairstyle, undertook the work, played the games, gestured, walked, talked, drank the drinks, acted the political role, performed the sexual acts, and felt the emotions of the 'other' sex [...]" (pp. 145-146, emphasis in original) were labelled as sexual perverts. Kimmel (1996) further explains that this resulted in an emergent pressure on the part of heterosexual males to display their masculinity in an intense manner.

Kimmel writes that "[to] be considered a real man, one had better make sure to always be walking around and acting 'real masculine'" (p. 100, emphasis in original). Consequently, the

[33] Here, Cruz is building on the work of Lorber (1998) who stated that "[in] social interaction throughout their lives, individuals learn what is expected, see what is expected, act and react in expected ways, and thus simultaneously construct and maintain the gender order" (p. 216). See Lorber, J. (1998) 'Night to his day: The social construction of gender', in Kimmel, M. S. & Schmidt, M. (eds.) *Reading between the lines: Toward and understanding of current social problems*, Mountain View, CA: Mayfield. pp. 213-220.

opposite held true. Had a man or a woman failed to exhibit what was perceived as appropriate masculine or feminine behaviour respectively, they would have been treated as threats to the social order of gender construction. Nardi (2000) confirms that "[...] effeminate behaviour in men and mannish styles in women, [...] were viewed as threatening to 'traditional' masculinity and femininity" (p. 2, emphasis in original). Observing contemporary American society, Herek (1986) notes that "[...] to be a man in contemporary American society is to be homophobic - that is to be hostile toward homosexual persons in general and gay men in particular" (p. 563). He also notes that masculinity is exhibited in anti-feminine terms, something which I also presented in the earlier discussion on Bourdieu (2001). Since society could not accept desire for the same sex as a feature of masculinity, gay men were labelled deviant or effeminate.[34] This process, part of one's socialisation process, starts at home and as Connell (1995) observed even "[boys] who grew up to be gay were raised in families where the role of 'manhood' was clearly outlined but has no acceptance for any man who was attracted to other men" (pp. 143-144, emphasis in original).

Apart from the obvious detrimental effects such an upbringing has on those boys who are gay but are being raised in families that teach them that being gay is deviant, one can only assume that such a socialisation must have a negative effect on the way these boys come to see themselves and other gay men. Among others, Messner (1997), Levine (1998), and Ward (2000) analyse the over-masculinised social upbringing of gay men, and argue that it often results in a simultaneous rejection and celebration of what Kimmel (1994) terms as *hegemonic masculinity*.[35] Levine (1998) also highlights that such a behaviour is a result of socialisation. He argues that gay men grow up in similar families as straight men, thus, receiving the same socialisation in relation to gender and sexuality. Ward (2000) further explains that gay men "[...] learn the male gender role and sexual script, but more important, they ingest the ideals of heterosexual masculinity, ideals that include both sexism and homophobia" (p. 164). This further results in gay men adopting the behaviours of their heterosexual counterparts.

[34] Halkitis (2000), who will be discussed later in this section, offers a detailed account on the emergence of deviant as a label for gay men. Full bibliographical details are in the list of references section of this thesis.
[35] Kimmel (1994) argues that "[the] hegemonic definition of manhood is a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, and in control" (p. 125). See Kimmel, M. S. (1994) 'Masculinity as homophobia: Fear shame and silence in the construction of gender identity', Brod, H. & Kaufman, M. (eds.) *Theorising masculinities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. pp. 119-141.

Cruz (2000) claims that "[…] gay men are involved in 'doing gender,' which results in the same types of behavioural outcomes (*i.e.*, use of violence and force, need for domination, perpetuation of homophobic attitudes) that are produced by men in heterosexual society" (p. 79, emphasis in original). For Linneman (2000) this extends to gay men isolating and excluding other gay men who behave in manners that society labels as more feminine in the fear of being found out. Nardi (2000) explains homophobic behaviour by gay men as a result of gay men performing masculinity in the same manner heterosexual men do, that is "[...] by using force, by exhibiting the need for domination, and by the perpetuation of homophobic attitudes" (p. 8). This internalised homophobic behaviour,[36] Bersani (1995) argues, is employed by gay men so that they can conceal their own sexuality and benefit from the social advantages associated with heterosexual masculinity. By many scholars, this phenomenon is analysed using the framework of *hegemony*. Messner (1997), for example, argues that "[...] newly hegemonic hard and tough gay masculinity [...]" (p. 83) resulted in the marginalisation and subordination of effeminate gay men. The attempt of gay men to ascribe to discourses and behavioural patterns associated with heterosexual masculinity also extends to the physical level where the somatisation, or embodiment, of heterosexual masculinity by gay men resulted in what Nardi (2000) observes as "[...] the transformation in gay masculinity from the 'failed male,' or sissy, into the hypermasculine clone" (p. 5, emphasis in original).

As it emerges from the discussion so far, on the one hand, there are heterosexual men who "[...] tend to engage in constant assertion or construction of a masculine identity due to the very real repercussions of being mistaken for a homosexual" (Cruz, 2000, p. 75). On the other hand, there are non-heterosexual men whose upbringing results in concealing their same-sex attraction to avoid social marginalisation.[37] There has been disagreement among scholars as per the reasons for the over-masculinisation of gay men. Kleinberg (1995) argues that this is a result of gay men accepting their sexuality and masculinity while Connell (1992) suggests that this is a result of hegemonic masculinity to which many gay men subscribe, as well. Halkitis (2000), Cruz (2000), and the majority of contemporary scholars tend to follow Connell's suggestion. In particular, Halkitis (2000) argues that "[in] an attempt to define themselves as

[36] Ward (2000) defines "[...] internalised homophobia, or an internalisation of the symbols of hegemonic masculinity [as those] instances in which gay men eroticise, glorify, or actively struggle to achieve hegemonic masculinity" (p. 154).

[37] See Connell, R. W. (1992) 'A very straight gay: Masculinity, homosexual experience, and the dynamics of gender', *American Sociological Review*, 57, pp. 735-751. Kleinberg, S. (1995) 'The new masculinity of gay men, and beyond', in Kimmel, M. S. & Messner, M. A. (eds.) *Men's lives* (3rd ed.), Boston: Allyn & Bacon. pp. 45-57.

masculine and to develop their own sense of masculinity, many gay men have chosen to adopt an ideology of masculinity that is based on physical prowess and blue-collar acceptance" (p. 132).[38] There is, therefore, an emphasis on not only exhibiting behaviour typically associated with heterosexual masculinity, but also on literally *looking* the part.

Halkitis (2000) further explains that "[…] masculinity to a large extent is defined by physical beauty, by the body perfect, by sexual prowess [...]" (p. 146). From the 1950s onward, it has been observed that gay men have used their bodies to redefine gay masculinities. An example of such body paradigm is the *buff* body, the butch male, who came to replace the image of gay men with more effeminate features.[39] In the discussion on embodied masculinity by non-heterosexual men, though, one should not omit to take into consideration the role of AIDS which came to change everything related to the somatisation of gay masculinities. Halkitis (*ibid.*) writes on this matter:

> The AIDS epidemic worked counter to this movement, however, causing buff, physically strong men infected with the virus to deteriorate into thin, weakened, and frail beings. The reaction of many gay men, both HIV positive and HIV negative, has been to remain healthy and in turn to work with even greater vigour to achieve the butch and buff appearance. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, these efforts toward defining oneself as masculine and remaining healthy and strong have become intimately intertwined, perpetuating a reality where often the self as physical ideal has become the one overarching goal for many gay men (p. 147).

Following the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic, the emphasis on building a body that achieves both not to resemble the stereotypes associated with having AIDS and to resist association with effeminate masculine features became a core part of gay masculinities. At this point in time, "[...] masculinity and physical prowess become indistinguishable, synonymous, and overlapping" (p. 148).

The discussion so far has highlighted that gay men were led to ascribe to what was viewed by society as traditional heterosexual masculinity on the physical, behavioural, and discursive levels. As such, further to the divide between heterosexual and non-heterosexual masculinities,

[38] In cultural discourses, this look has been associated with the masculine, Marlboro man (Harris, 1997). See Harris, D. (1997) *The rise and fall of gay culture*. New York, NY: Hyperion.
[39] Harris (1997) offers a comprehensive account on the evolution of the gay image. Full bibliographic details can be found in the List of References section of this thesis.

there has been an additional divide between masculine-looking/behaving non-heterosexual masculinities and non-masculine-looking/behaving non-heterosexual masculinities. The effects of this divide are discussed next.

II. C. 3. Hegemonic Homonormativity

For reasons that were presented earlier, gay masculinities are divided between those who look and behave in a manner that fits the stereotypical idea of the heterosexual masculine, and those who do not. This divide is not only observable in the way gay men look and behave, but it is also evident in the way activism and politics have developed. In the second decade following the AIDS outbreak, activist and political groups were split between assimilationist and queer activist groups (Sullivan, 2003). On the one hand, assimilationist groups were seen to be "[...] seeking a place at the proverbial table of heteronormativity," Grzanka (2019) notes; while queer activists sought "[...] its disestablishment or deconstruction" (p. 4). Other scholars further highlight that this divide hindered the success of what was previously known as gay activism.[40]

Duggan (2003), for example, notes that "[...] gay civil rights groups have adopted neoliberal rhetoric and corporate decision-making models" (p. 45). At the time Duggan was writing, in the global north the majority of gay civil rights groups were focused on issues related to gay marriage and child adoption policies and laws.

> No longer representative of a broad-based progressive movement, many of the dominant national lesbian and gay civil rights organisations have become the lobbying, legal, and public relations firms for an increasingly narrow gay, moneyed elite (*ibid.*)

There has been a noticeable shift in contemporary activist agendas. Not only the subject-matter of activist protests has changed, but the rhetoric that is being employed has changed, as well. Rather than celebrating diversity, we have observed attempts to *normalise* difference. 'We are the same', or 'We are no different' seems to be the message on placards. Duggan further explains that "[...] the push for gay marriage and military service has replaced the array of political, cultural, and economic issues that galvanised the national groups as they first emerged from a progressive social movement context several decades earlier" (p. 45).[41] The effect of this to

[40] I use the term 'gay activism' to refer to activism that was born following the AIDS outburst at the beginning of the 1980s.

[41] Duggan (2003) highlights that she does not refer to all gay civil rights groups and presents the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force as an example of an organisation which "[...] retains its progressive vision" (p. 94).

HIV/AIDS-related activism could not go unnoticed. In section II. D. 2 of this chapter, I discuss this in detail.

In a similar manner, Ward (2000) observes that the gay liberation movement adopted a mainstream agenda "[...] aspiring to, or internalising, traditionally masculine ideals and shifting their attention from radical change to mainstream acceptance" (p. 164). He continues his observation by referring to Messner's (1997) work, and concludes:

> [...] the mainstreaming of gay culture and the popular assertion that gay people are 'just like normal people' was in part a protective mechanism against waves of gay bashing and hate rhetoric but also a reflection of gay men's desire for the rewards of hegemonic masculinity experienced by heterosexual men (Ward, 2000, p. 164, emphasis in original).

Duggan in *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (2003) discusses the emergence of these assimilationist groups as an effect of neoliberal sexual politics.[42] She argues that

> [...] it is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption (p. 50).

Playing on the concept of heteronormativity, Duggan termed the new neoliberal sexual politics "[...] *the new homonormativity*" (*ibid.*, emphasis in original). Even though she highlights that there should be no parallels between heteronormativity and homonormativity,[43] homonormativity as a framework has been proven productive[44] in understanding how certain achievements in sexuality politics have been very beneficial for some people but rather stigmatising for others (Grzanka, 2019).

[42] Duggan (2003) defines neoliberalism as "[...] a late twentieth-century incarnation of Liberalism, [which] organises material and political life *in terms of* race, gender, and sexuality as well as economic class and nationality, or ethnicity and religion" (p. 3, emphasis in original).

[43] Duggan (2003) notes that "[...] there is no structure for gay life [...] that might compare with the institutions promoting and sustaining heterosexual coupling" (p. 94).

[44] Many scholars have conducted research on the effects of homonormativity in an array of areas of everyday life. Some examples include: Boyd, N. A. (2008) 'Sex and tourism: The economic implications for the gay marriage movement', *Radical History Review*, 100, pp. 223-235. Hanhardt, C. B. (2013) *Safe space: Gay neighborhood history and the politics of violence*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Grzanka, P. R. and Mann, E. S. (2014) 'Queer youth suicide and the psychopolitics of "It Gets Better"', *Sexualities*, 17*,* pp. 363-393.

An example of how homonormativity privileges some and stigmatises others is the legalisation of the right to civil marriage for people of the same sex. Following Duggan's thoughts on homonormativity, one understands that the right to civil marriage has come to benefit those who can, are willing to, and indeed avail of it while, at the same time, it reproduces "[...] stigma and exclusion for other LGBT people, sex workers, LGBT persons with disabilities, and undocumented LGBT people" (Grzanka, 2019, p. 4). In other words, those who cannot or do not want to avail of the right to civil marriage are destined to suffer social exclusion. Such a social exclusion, though, is now intensified as it is produced by the heterosexual and reproduced by the non-heterosexual society as an effect of homonormativity. Grzanka further notes that "[...] homonormativity - not unlike heteronormativity - only affords privilege to those who can exhibit and embody its idealised standards" (*ibid*.). What is being observed here is a cultural shift: a part of what Messerschmidt (2018) termed "[...] subordinate masculinities [...]" (p. 127) evolved and acceded to "[...] dominant/dominating masculinities [...]" (p. 126). What is more, neoliberal and homonormative discourses have given these new homonormative masculinities hegemonic quality as, according to Duggan (2003) they are being reproduced through consensus by members of the broader society for the benefits of neoliberal politics.

Here, I revisit Ludwig's (2011) work to highlight that hegemony can be adopted and *done* by subjects as long as their adopted actions are being socially inscribed and accepted. Since hegemony "[...] relies on self-activities of the (majority of) subjects - which are simultaneously activities carried out by subjects themselves and 'externally directed' processes - [...] subjects can do and adopt hegemonic worldviews" (p. 92, emphasis in original). Further to this, neoliberal politics and discourses render unequal relations among non-assimilationist non-heterosexual masculinities and other masculinities legitimate, which has been a core feature of hegemony according to Messerschmidt (2018). As such, one effect of neoliberal politics is *hegemonic homonormativity*, symptoms of which are dominant and dominating non-heterosexual masculinities as well as subordinate non-heterosexual masculinities. Situating homonormativity within hegemonic discourses is theoretically productive in that it does not only focus on relations of sexuality and gender but situates them within systems of power production and exercise.[45] This study focuses on representation as a means of power production and exercise in relation to hegemonic discourses and in particular on representation of

[45] In line with Brown's (2012) criticism, I view homonormativity problematic in the way it was been used by queer theorists as a construct. However, a discussion on the role of representation of hegemonic discourses should precede any criticism of homonormativity. The latter follows in subsequent sections of this chapter.

HIV/AIDS. It looks at the way in which HIV/AIDS is represented and it examines the possibility of reversing this representation in a manner that challenges and questions power production. Therefore, the study now turns to discussing the role of representation in maintaining and promoting hegemonic discourses.

II. D. Representation and Hegemony

The question, therefore, that this study aims to answer is how representation can be used in a manner that ends the production of power formations and subverts *othering*. The discussion that follows provides initially an introduction to the significance of representation in relation to the production and exercise of power. On the premise that, through representation, meaning is constructed by hegemonic sociocultural structures, I frame the discussion around discourse analysis instead of semiotics. This enables me to introduce *othering* as a practice of representation that allows hegemonic structures to manifest and produce power formations between dominant and Other identities. To support this claim, I use Freud, Derrida, and Foucault's theories of identification, and I conclude that representations of masculinities have been used as a means of creating subject-positions that, once assumed, aid the regulation of dynamic formations of power.

Following this, I turn the discussion to the construction of viral, HIV/AIDS masculinities and I argue that the representation of HIV/AIDS individuals in cultural productions has enabled their *othering* in three ways: in relation to heterosexual individuals, in relation to non-heterosexual but HIV negative individuals, and in relation to HIV positive but assimilationist individuals. The result of this triple *othering* has been the social stigmatisation and exclusion of certain people. What follows from this is that if stigmatisation is an effect of representation, de-stigmatisation could also be an effect of representation. I, then, discuss *othering* as a way to achieve subversion. If discourses of representation create power formations through *hegemonic othering*, queering refers to the appropriation of these discourses with the intention not only to question but to alleviate and disrupt those hegemonic structures which provoke power formations to occur.

II. D. 1. The Role of Representation in Maintaining and Promoting Hegemonic Discourses

The discussion on representation in this study assumes a constructionist approach to meaning formation in that it rejects both the idea of things in themselves carrying fixed meaning and the idea of individuals prescribing meaning which is proposed by the reflective and intentional approaches to meaning formation. Rather, this study aims to situate signification at the core of social and cultural life, and it examines the ways through which hegemonic structures produce signs, as well as the extent in which signification produces hegemonic structures.[46] As such, the discussion that follows does not focus on the legacies of Saussure and the semiotic tradition. Their trans-historical approach and narrow focus on language as a separate, isolated system fails to account for the role of power in who uses language and to what ends. Following Foucault's (1980) discursive approach to representation enables this study to focus on "[...] relations of power, not relations of meaning" (p. 114). Foucault's understanding of power diverged from the, then established, Marxist definition of power in close relation to economic and social class terms. Rather, Foucault's understanding of power is, in many ways, very close to Gramscian hegemony which has been discussed in sections II. B. and II. C of this chapter.

The theories that have been presented so far place two concepts at the core of understanding hegemony in relation to gender and sexuality: relationality and consent. Gender and sexuality have come to be understood in relational terms - a man is the opposite of woman, a heterosexual is a non-homosexual, *etc*. Consensus through ongoing social struggle about who ascends to assume a hegemonic position in society and culture is at the core of Gramsci's theory on hegemony. In an earlier section, I criticized Ludwig's (2011) theorization of hegemony's unfixed nature as being theoretically unproductive.[47] My criticism of Ludwig's position as theoretically unproductive refers to the deterministic aspect of her theory. Since hegemony is linked to social struggles, change, and transformation, hegemony's historical and geographical

[46] Here I allude to the work of Du Gay's (1997) on the *circuit of culture* which explores the role of representation in the production of culture. I also allude to Woodward's (1997) work on the importance of making meaning of representations in forming and maintaining a sense of identity as well as to Thompson's (1997) work on the regulatory and organisational role of representation in setting social rules, norms, and conventions. See Du Gay, P. (ed.) (1997) *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production*. London: Sage/The Open University. Woodward, K. (ed.) (1997) *Identity and Difference*. London: Sage/The Open University. Thompson, K. (ed.) (1997) *Media and Cultural Regulation*. London: Sage/The Open University.

[47] Indeed, Gramsci (1985) argued that "[...] social struggles are not only integral to hegemony but also constantly change and transform hegemony" (p. 182). Based on that, Ludwig (2011) concluded that "[...] we can never define 'the' universal or ahistorical hegemony. Instead hegemony is always historically and geographically specific formation of power" (p. 93, emphasis in original).

specificity is not to be questioned. As such, analysing *heteronormative hegemony*, or in Messerschmidt's case *hegemonic masculinities*, is theoretically unproductive: it offers a clear understanding of the effects of power formations generated by hegemony and affecting relations of gender and sexuality, but it fails to account for what constructs those power formations in a trans-historical manner. I propose *hegemonic othering* as an alternative theoretical framework which allows the study of power formations across cultures, societies, and timelines.

Othering has been used by various disciplines to theorise meaning making or, indeed, formations of power. Four theories have been the most prominent ones and are summarised here. The first two theories of *othering* come from linguistics. The first one is associated with de Saussure and Derrida. The former argued that without the difference achieved by the presence of an *Other*, no meaning could ever be established (Saussure, 1960). Meaning, therefore, is dependent on difference. This account has been criticized by opponents of the reflective approach as a reductionist way of establishing meaning but others, like Derrida (1972), have highlighted the lack of neutral binary oppositions.[48] As a result of this observation, Derrida argues that one of the two ends of each binary opposition is dominant while the other is subordinate to the dominant one. This reminds us of the earlier discussion on the relational nature of hegemony. As examples of power formation between binary oppositions, Derrida gives the following: masculine/feminine, white/black, upper class/lower class. Based on the earlier discussions on the *heteronormative hegemony* and on *homonormativity*, we could extend those examples and include heterosexual/non-heterosexual, and assimilationist (aka homonormative) non-heterosexual/non-conforming non-heterosexual. The second theory on *othering*, which also emerged from the linguistic tradition, is associated with the linguist Bakhtin. Bakhtin (1981) argued that by engaging in a dialogic relationship with the *Other*, meaning can be constructed. More specifically, he writes that

> [the] word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when [...] the speaker appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic expressive intention. Prior to this [...] the word does not exist in a neutral or impersonal language [...] rather it exists in other people's mouths, serving even other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own (pp. 293-294, emphasis in original).

[48] For criticisms on Saussure's reductionism see Culler (1976) and Joseph (2012). Culler, J. (1976) *Saussure*. London: Fontana. Joseph, J. E. (2012) *Saussure*. London: Oxford University Press.

Meaning, for Bakhtin, is not predetermined but constructed through the difference between participants in any dialogue. As such, the role of the *Other* in the process of making meaning is essential. In section II. C., for example, I discussed the importance of the *Other* in determining the non-Other as the dominant one, the one that exerts power over the *Other*. Hall (1994) criticized Bakhtin's theory arguing that if there can never be a fixed meaning of anything outside of a dialogic relationship, no one can ever be in charge of meaning. What this would mean in the case of HIV positive people is that their *othering* is not a result of a dialogic relationship with non-Others, HIV negative people, and themselves; rather, the non-Others took a conscious decision to attach negative meanings to HIV positive people. One cannot but wonder: if, as Hall argues, there is someone in charge of meaning, who put them in charge in the first place?

The third theory of *othering* is rooted in anthropology. Douglas (1966) argues that meaning is constructed by positioning and ordering things into classificatory systems. A core prerequisite of classification, though, are binary oppositions which, for Douglas, are essential in establishing a clear difference between things. This, in turn, leads to their classification. Douglas furthers her theory and discusses disturbance of cultural order in relation to things which misfit a category. This is a very important concept that provides an understanding of how *hegemonic homonormativity* has caused a divide among non-heterosexual people. A divide that separates good gays from bad queers and, by default, marginalises HIV positive people. I return to this point in the following section.

Finally, the fourth theory of *othering* comes from psychoanalysis and is attributed to Freud who viewed the *Other* as essential for constructing one's self and sexual identity. Even though Freud's theory has created a lot of scholarship by theorists who either further or challenge it, what is significant to note is that all scholarly works view the *Other* as essential in the development of the self. [49] The preoccupation of theorists from a range of disciplines with the significance of *othering* in the construction of meaning and, in extension, the construction of power relationships is significant in that it situates the representation of the *Other* at the core of this investigation.

[49] Among those in favour of Freud's theory were Lacan (1977) and Segal (1997) while Klein (1957) is one among his critics. Lacan, J. (1977) *Èrits*. London: Tavistock. Segal, L. (1997) 'Sexualities', in Woodward, K. (ed) *Identity and Difference*: London: Sage/The Open University. Klein, M. (1957) *Envy and Gratitude*. New York, NY: Delta.

Any examination of *othering* cannot omit a discussion about the role of stereotyping in relation to the construction of *otherness*, social exclusion, as well as power. Richard Dyer, in *Gays and Film* (1977) highlights the difference between typing and stereotyping. His main argument is that we make sense of the world through types, but we construct and maintain order through stereotypes. More specifically, he writes that "[...] a type is any simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognised characterisation in which a few traits are foregrounded and change, or "development," is kept to a minimum" (p. 28, emphasis in original). For example, if someone describes a chair to us, we understand that they refer to a chair even if we have never seen the particular chair they refer to.[50] Stereotypes, in turn, emphasise those "[...] simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognised" (*ibid*.) characteristics and reduce one's identity to these by exaggerating or simplifying them. Another characteristic of stereotyping, according to Dyer, is that it defines normal and creates its binary opposite abnormal. He argues that

> [...] a system of social- and stereo-types refers to what is, as it were, within and beyond the pale of normalcy. Types are instances which indicate those who live by the rules of society (social types) and those who the rules are designated to exclude (stereotypes). For this reason, stereotypes are also more rigid than social types. [...] stereotypes, one of the mechanisms of boundary maintenance, are characteristically fixed, clear-cut, unalterable (p. 29).

With this statement, Dyer (1977) situates stereotypes as pivotal in the maintenance of social order. Stereotyping creates binaries with inherent power relations. Through stereotyping, then, the distinction between acceptable/unacceptable or between normal/deviant or pathological can be achieved. In turn, this enables the inclusion of those whose types identify with the dominant part of the binary, while it facilitates the social exclusion of those whose types identify with the non-dominant, the *Other*.[51] Here, we observe parallels among Dyer's theory on stereotyping, Foucault's theory on power and knowledge, and Gramsci's theory on hegemony. Dyer further notes that

> [the] establishment of normalcy (i.e. what is accepted as 'normal') through social- and stereo-types is one aspect of the habit of ruling groups [...] to attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value system, sensibility and

[50] Schutz (1967) extended this into his theory of typifications according to which we understand the specific in terms of its type. See Schutz, A. (1967) *The phenomenology of the social world.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

[51] This formed the basis of Kristeva's (1982) theories on the abject. See Kristeva, J. (1982) *Powers of Horror*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

> ideology. So right is this world view for the ruling groups that they make it appear (as it *does* appear to them) as 'natural' and 'inevitable' - and for everyone - and, in so far as they succeed, they establish their hegemony (p. 30, emphasis in original).

So far in this section, I have discussed theories of *othering*, and I have focused on Dyer's (1977) thoughts on types and stereotypes to argue that *hegemonic othering* is the process of producing binary constructs through practices of representation whereby one end of the binary dominates and exerts power over the other. Following Foucault and Gramsci, though, I do not hold that *hegemonic othering* is only repressive. Rather, I have discussed its productive nature by describing dominant and subordinate roles as symptoms of *hegemonic othering* which are not fixed in time and place but constantly evolving and changing.[52] To further this argument, in subsequent sections, I discuss the reversal of hegemonic discourses as challenging to power formations ensued by *hegemonic othering* but first, I focus on subjectivisation.

For Foucault (1980), discourses provide specific positions for individuals. These positions are historically specific and give individuals specific agency and identity. As it has already been discussed earlier, the assumption is that identity and agency are not inherent to each individual but socially, or discursively, constructed. For example, the associations we make with HIV positive people are not only relevant to the time these associations were made, but they are also relevant to each current socio-political context. What is of importance, though, is not only the social construction of those subject positions but, possibly more importantly, the processes involved while individual persons actually occupy these subject positions. Mitchell Dean, in *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (1999), further explains that individuals are being subjected by power through the "[...] government of conduct" (p. 10). Referring to Foucault's *The Subject of Power* (1982), Dean defines the *government of conduct* as the norms that prescribe a conduct of what is acceptable and what is out of limits. However, because according to Foucault power is productive, the social prescription of this conduct offers

[52] This echoes the earlier discussion on Bourdieu's theory of social fields. Hilgers and Mangez (2014) argue that "[...] there are various fields within the social world, and each field is a relational space of its own, dedicated to a specific type of activity. [...] For Bourdieu a field is a relatively autonomous domain of activity that responds to rules of functioning and institutions that are specific to it and which define the relations among the agents. [...] However, beneath the substantial variations that distinguish each of the fields and the specific rules of their functioning, it is possible to bring to light the invariants that shape and structure them" (p. 5). Here, I argue, that *hegemonic othering* is the invariant that shapes and structures all fields by producing field-specific power formations.

individuals a certain form of agency.[53] On the topic of subjectivisation, Foucault (1980) writes that

> [...] power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth without depending on the mediation of the subject's own representations. If power takes hold of the body, this isn't through it having first to be interiorised in people's consciousness (p. 186).

Power, in other words, affects the placement of individuals in specific discourses. In turn, the individual is subjected by those discourses without necessarily having to have accepted and supported them. To revisit the dialogic nature of meaning-making and its relevance to HIV that I provided in the previous section, HIV positive people participate in a dialogic relationship with HIV negative people. The result of this dialogic relationship is the marginalisation of the HIV positive people as *Others*. However, the very dialogue itself, Foucault seems to suggest, is not a dialogue in equal terms. The non-Other enters the dialogic process while having *a priori* assumed the dominant position.

Hunter (1993) explains that the subjectivisation of the individual occurs through the "[...] brute outcome" (p. 128) of imitative performance. So far, Foucault's argument is that by means of imitating what is being represented, and not by consciously agreeing on the legitimacy of what is being represented, an individual is being subjected; they become a subject. Two other scholars have focused on the process of subjectivisation: Freud and Lacan. Central to Freud's theory are the concepts of identification, scopophilia, narcissism, and splitting. Freud (1977) argues that when an individual is exposed to the external world, a collection of *Others*, they develop a desire to have or to be an *Other*. The latter is what Freud calls *identification*. He further argues that a central aspect of human sexuality is the desire in looking, or scopophilia, through which the individual develops an obsession with the human form, which he terms *narcissism*. These three concepts summarise one of the two ways that identification is achieved: because of our desire to look at the *Other*, we develop a fascination with the human body of the *Other*, which results in either a desire to *have the Other* or to *be the Other*. This desire to be the Other is one of the two ways identification is achieved according to Freud. The other way is a process he calls splitting and involves a split between an identification that one accepts and an identification that one refuses.[54] Applying the framework of *hegemonic othering* to

[53] Milchman and Rosenberg (2005) also offer a comprehensive account of Foucault's conceptualisation of power in Milchman, A. and Rosenberg, A. (2005) 'Michel Foucault: Crises and problemisations' in *The Review of Politics*, 67(2), pp. 335-351.

[54] Rose (1986) provides a detailed illustration of Freud's theory of identification using the myth of Oedipus in Rose, J. (1986) *Sexuality in the field of vision*. London: Verso.

Freud's splitting, we can argue that once an individual is exposed to the external world where many representations of many *Others* exist, they decide on which *Other* they identify with (and thus, this *Other* is not *Other* any longer) and which one(s) they will reject. Freud further argues that, thereafter, the rejected one is repressed by the individual. The question that is relevant to this study is how the decision of which *Other* is to be identified with and which *Other* is to be rejected, is made. Lacan (1968) also focuses on the process of splitting and argues that at a very early stage, self-identification is a result of the mirrored image of one's self, either by literally looking at one's own reflection or by what is reflected in one's mother's eyes. The identification occurs when the individual misrecognises themselves for the mirrored image of themselves.

The psychoanalytic theories of identification presented above differ from Foucault's early theory of subject-positions in that the former provide a transhistorical account while Foucault is interested in the historical aspect of subjectivisation. As I have argued earlier, for example in section II. B. 3, I examine subjectivisation within its socio-political and cultural context. Therefore, psychoanalytic theories are not directly relevant to the analysis of the following chapters. However, the discussion of these theories aims to highlight the importance of the visual in the processes of assuming subject-positions. It therefore further aims to justify the need to focus on representation when examining power formations resulting from hegemonic discourses. In his later works, Foucault argues that the process of subjectivisation does not only include representation of forms but, more importantly, it includes representation of practices. In an interview in Rabinow (1984), he argues that

> [...] it is not enough to say that the subject is constituted in a symbolic system. It is not just in the play of symbols that the subject is constituted. It is constituted in real practices. There is a technology of the constitution of the self which cuts across symbolic systems while using them (p. 369).

What is of significance here is that the practices that are projected in various representations, through the processes involved in assuming one's subject-position, can be replicated or performed by the individual who assumed the subject-position of a particular representation. For instance, this provides an explanation for homophobic behaviour exhibited from people who identify as non-heterosexual. Earlier, when discussing cultural representations of masculinities, I noted the portrayal of the Marlboro man dominant in the 1950s (footnote 38). This representation of masculinity was not confined in the visual characteristics of what constitutes the ideal man. It was also followed by a set of practices, namely being tough, emotionless, hard, and in control. These sets of practices which were represented along with

the visual representation of the Marlboro man constituted a subject-position. When an individual is positioned to this subject-position, as a result of power exhibited on them by hegemonic discourses, they assume the identity in this case of the Marlboro man by not only imitating his visual characteristics but also the sets of practices that come with him. Foucault (1988) further explains about the occupation of these subject positions that they

> [...] permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality (p. 18).

In summary, Foucault's initial position was that discourses produce identities through regulation and discipline. However, his later work further builds his initial argument and suggests that discursive subject-positions, when occupied, become performed practices which, in turn, constitute the individual.[55] To bring back the discussion to the representation of masculinities as a means of creating subject-positions that, once assumed, aid the regulation of dynamic formations of power, I turn to an examination of viral masculinities, masculinities that followed the outbreak of the HIV pandemic at the beginning of the 1980s. This is a significant case in the analysis of the relation between representation and hegemonic discourses, because it incorporates power formations which combine characteristics from constructs that have already been presented here as *hegemonic heteronormativity* and *hegemonic homonormativity*. The section that follows surveys representations of masculinities starting from the 1980s until the beginning of the 2010s. As these are years that have been studied by many scholars, I present the most significant arguments that have been put forward focusing on the ones that illustrate the theories that have already been presented in this study, and which form the basis for the analysis that is the focus of the following chapters.

II. D. 2. Viral Masculinities

After providing a brief survey of the first two decades following the HIV pandemic, Dion Kagan's *Positive Images* (2018) focuses on representations of HIV/AIDS in cinema and television spanning from the end of the 1990s to the middle of the 2010s. In doing so, Kagan analyses the socio-cultural implications of the ways in which HIV/AIDS came to be represented. Even though his approach focuses on exploring the relations between gay men

[55] This was further expanded by Butler (1993) who discussed performing imitation of discursive norms as a means of occupying a subject-position.

and HIV, his analysis provides insights on the ways in which viral masculinities were constructed. Those representations illustrate what has been argued so far in this study: in all representations of HIV/AIDS in corporate mainstream media, there are two subject positions presented to the audience. One subject-position entails characteristics which are acceptable and celebrated by society, and one *Other* subject-position which is represented in comparative terms to the 'normative' one and is always found to be lacking something, ranging from a stable physical health to an accepted position in society.

Therefore, when it comes to representations of HIV/AIDS, we observe *hegemonic othering* at play. When subject positions are represented in comparison to one another, power formations and subjectivisation can be observed. Kagan justifies the explosion of public interest in the HIV/AIDS epidemic by situating its occurrence with the emergence of communication technologies. Here, Kagan echoes Treichler's (1988) dubbing of the explosion of media coverage of HIV/AIDS as an *epidemic of signification* and Edelman's (1994) *plague of discourse*. Williamson (1989) and Butler (1990), though, further argue that the media used the virus to present HIV as equivalent to being gay by representing the former as an inescapable effect of the latter. Miller (1993) further confirms that during the first fifteen years of the epidemic, HIV/AIDS was represented as "[...] the disease of gayness itself" (p. 212).[56] The result of this tendency was the representation of HIV/AIDS men in relation to their heterosexual counterparts. The representations of the latter enforced the ideals of heterosexual masculinity, namely "[...] maleness, muscularity, sexual aggressiveness, and virility" (Halkitis, 2000, p. 130) while HIV/AIDS masculinities were associated with weakness, disease, and death.[57] Moving, therefore, away from representing non-heterosexual men as effeminate and, instead, associating them with contagion and disease resulted in absolute stigmatisation and isolation of the HIV infected man, which was also extended to the non-heterosexual man irrespective of their being infected or not.

In the 1990s, there has been a shift in the representation of HIV/AIDS masculinities, not in as much as the way they themselves were represented but, more crucially, in the way they were represented in relation to non-HIV infected gay masculinities. In *Reality Bites* (1994), an

[56] A similar observation is presented in Weeks, J. (1988) 'Male homosexuality: Cultural perspectives' in Adler, M. W. (ed.) *Diseases in the homosexual male*. Dordrecht: Springer.
[57] A comprehensive account of the signification of AIDS during the early years of the pandemic can be found in Patton, C. (1990) *Inventing AIDS*. London: Routledge.

American romantic comedy-drama directed by Ben Stiller, one of the characters, Sammy, is gay. In contrast to his likely presentation had the drama aired in the 1980s, Sammy is shown to be celibate. The image of the promiscuous gay man whose lifestyle will inevitably lead him to contracting HIV is now being replaced by the image of the desexualised gay character. However, the association between HIV and promiscuity is not absent from this drama. Even though we are not presented with an HIV-infected character, Sammy's best friend and housemate Vickie expresses her fears about the possibility of contracting HIV as a result of being sexually promiscuous.

Kagan (2018) notes that "[...] Sammy exemplifies a broader 1990s trend of recruiting queer characters to secondary and supporting roles in hetero-oriented narratives, and, importantly, the quarantining of them from other queer people and from acting on their sexual desires" (p. 51). Despite the fact that there is no physical presence of an HIV-infected character, viral masculinities are represented, *in absentia* here, as promiscuous and deathly; therefore, they are to be avoided. Their representation is situated relationally to non-viral but homosexual masculinities who are, in turn, desexualised and reduced to coming out narratives.

> The phenomenon of a desexualised gay character who is restricted to a narrative of disclosure was particularly ubiquitous in the 1990s and there is a substantial archive of criticism, both popular and scholarly, on these avowedly 'positive images' (p. 51, emphasis in original).

In other words, in the 1990s, HIV/AIDS was represented in order to be disavowed. The disavowal of HIV/AIDS includes the desexualisation of the gay character as well as "[...] rituals of symbolic purification, including domestic labour, the obsessive eradication of dirt, the symbolic burial of the AIDS body and the renunciation of the PLWHA" (p. 52).[58] Similar representations of gay, in opposition to HIV positive, men are found in a variety of films and TV series. Examples include *Philadelphia* (1993), *Ellen* (1994-1998), *The Birdcage* (1996), *In and Out* (1997), *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997), *The Object of My Affection* (1998), *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003), and *The Next Best Thing* (2000). Criticising the representation of gay men in the 1990s, critic Bruce Vilanch (1998) writes that

> Homosexuals are allowed to exist as long as they never have (homo)sex. [...] Rupert Everett in *My Best Friend's Wedding* and Greg Kinnear in *As Good as It Gets* had a

[58] Also see Miller, D. A. (1993) 'Sontag's urbanity' in Abelove, H., Barale, M. A., and Halperin, D. M. (eds.) *The lesbian and gay studies reader*. London: Routledge.

> very dry white season. [...] *The Object of My Affection* creates a universe in which the casual acceptance of gays in a straight world is unquestioned, and that's certainly refreshing. But you are asked to believe that an attractive man like Paul Rudd could come out of a four-year relationship with another man, move in with a strange woman, and never have so much as a phone call from any gay person he's ever met. Not to mention sex (p. 59).

In the first two decades of the pandemic, viral masculinities were presented within a binary system. In the 1980s there was the heterosexual who was placed in binary opposition to the AIDS-infected or soon-to-be-infected person; in the 1990s the opposition tended to be between the de-sexualised gay man on the one end and the promiscuous, disease-bearing gay man on the other end. Further to that, the way each binary was positioned constructed power formations between the two ends with the non-infected end of each binary being presented as the norm, while the *Other*, the infected or potentially infected one stands for all that is to be repudiated.[59] Kristeva's concept of *abjection* enables an understanding of the function of the *Other*. In *Powers of Horror* (1982), she writes that

> A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death - a flat encephalograph, for instance - I would understand, react, or accept. [...] refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being (p. 3, emphasis in original).

Following Kristeva's thought, the subject-position offered by the representation of viral masculinities is the one of the abject.[60] It is through the repudiation of viral masculinities that heterosexual, in the 1980s, and non-infected gay men, in the 1990s, can maintain a dominant position in society. Situating this trend in representation of viral masculinities within the sociocultural context of the time highlights a parallel with what was happening in activism. On the one hand there was the AIDS activism, and on the other hand the 1990s marked the emergence of gay activism. As illustrated in section II. C. 3. of this chapter, AIDS activism is centred around the organisation ACT UP and its ongoing efforts to improve the lives of

[59] Here I refer to what Kristeva (1982) described as "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules [...]" (p. 4). Full bibliographical information is at the list of references.

[60] A similar argument is put forward by Young (1990) who suggests that AIDS produces a crisis resulting from "border anxiety" (p. 156) fear of blurring the boundaries between what is normal and what is abnormal. See Young, I. M. (1990) *Justice and the politics of difference*, New Jersey, NY: Princeton University Press). Similar arguments are presented in Epstein, J. (1995) *Altered conditions; Disease, medicine, and storytelling*. New York, NY: Routledge.

PLWHA (Douglas and Rolston, 1990) while gay activism is following a more assimilationist direction by highlighting the similarities between homosexual and heterosexual people in order to allow the former to assimilate into *normalcy* (Huebenthal, 2017). As it is further observed by Duggan (2003),

> [...] AIDS activism deepened and expanded the scope of gay politics, crucially supplementing a newly well-established gay rights movement focused on antidiscrimination and decriminalisation. New activist energies organised in the face of the AIDS pandemic also helped to spawn a vigorous, emergent queer political front with visions of social and cultural transformation beyond the limits of identity politics. [But] alongside radical and progressive AIDS activism, a new strain of gay moralism appeared - attacks on "promiscuity" and the "gay lifestyle" accompanied advocacy of monogamous marriage as a responsible disease prevention strategy. [...] In this fertile ground, new gay politics [emerged] - a politics that offers a dramatically shrunken public sphere and a narrow zone of "responsible" domestic privacy" (p. 53, emphasis in original).

This assimilationist tendency manifests itself in representations of viral masculinities of the third decade of the pandemic. In depictions of viral masculinities of the 2000s, we are presented with the *buff* body which, as discussed earlier, signifies an anxiety to associate viral masculinities with an ideal physical existence. Here, we should not forget that this follows the introduction of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) in 1996 which rendered life with HIV possible (Race, 2001). "It is in this milieu that gay men, both HIV positive and negative, have perpetuated this subculture that so clearly associates masculinity with physicality [...]" (Halkitis, 2000, p. 132). In *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005), we are presented with an HIV positive character, Ben, who unlike HIV positive characters of the previous decade, appears to be healthy with a strong, muscular body. Ben also functions as a vehicle for the series to discuss serodiscordant relationships.[61] Indeed, the series is ground-breaking in that it portrays a contemporary reality of HIV positive people and unlike what was portrayed in previous decades, the HIV positive person is not represented within a binary involving heterosexual or HIV negative gay men. Among other themes, the series focuses on issues of social stigmatisation and exclusion of HIV positive people caused by both the heterosexual and the homosexual community. There is a highlighted emphasis on the struggles that Ben goes through in order for him to be socially accepted, namely adopting a healthy lifestyle which

[61] Serodiscordant relationships is a term that refers to relationships between people of different HIV status.

includes numerous hours at the gym and a fixation with his body image, being educated to the highest level, maintaining financial independence, and seeking a monogamous romantic life, all of which are ideals that have culturally been associated with heterosexual masculinity.

Kagan (2018) criticises the series for highlighting the differences between HIV positive and negative men and argues that "[...] this narrative demands both the privatisation of the individual's everyday management of HIV and the couple's quiet, domestic administration of the problem of serodiscord" (p. 124). I want to return to the discussion of subject positions in relation to viral masculinities by focusing on a new binary created by their representation in this series. One of Ben's activities includes volunteering and offering psychological support to newly diagnosed HIV positive men. In the third season, Ben offers shelter to a teenage man, Hunter, who is HIV positive. It is through the relationship between Ben and Hunter that the series creates a new binary. Ben is portrayed as a fully realised individual for whom another character of the series says that is "[...] perfect except for one thing" referring to him being HIV positive. Hunter, on the other hand, is a teenage prostitute who lives on the streets. In a similar fashion to the binaries created in the 1980s and the 1990s, we are now presented with a new one: on the one hand there is the subject-position of the HIV positive man who works hard to redeem himself for whatever led him to contract HIV and enjoys, to a certain extent, the privileges of a normative life; on the other hand, we are presented with a reckless and promiscuous HIV positive man who exhibits no signs of remorse and is socially excluded and isolated. In other words, during the third decade of the virus, we were still presented with representations of viral masculinities which illustrate what was earlier termed as *hegemonic othering*, even though this time the HIV positive individual is marginalised in relational terms to another group of people, HIV negative non-heterosexual ones.

The representation of two subject positions enables the construction of power formations between the dominant one and the *Other*. Through such representations, viral masculinities are proven to have been consistently situated in the position of the *Other* resulting in the stigmatisation of the HIV positive individual on three accounts: against heterosexual masculinities, against non-heterosexual HIV negative masculinities, and against HIV positive but conforming masculinities. In the fourth decade of the virus, these representations persisted through the emergence of the *AIDS heritage* and *AIDS retrovision* genres both of which were criticised by Kagan (2018) for contributing to situating HIV and AIDS in the distant past, suggesting that it is no longer a matter of concern. Kagan argues that this is an effect of

neoliberal homonormative politics whereby the attention has shifted to securing legal and social recognitions that benefit norm-conforming non-heterosexual individuals but further stigmatise those who do neither fit nor follow the norms. This begs the question of how, if at all, representation can be used to ease and possibly alleviate the effects of *hegemonic othering* in relation to PLWHA.

II. D. 3. Queering Representation: A Possible Counteraction to Hegemonic Othering

The criticism of theoretical constructs such as *heteronormative hegemony* or *hegemonic masculinity/ies*, discussed earlier in this chapter, centres around the apparent situation of gender and sexuality on top of a hierarchy of other human traits such as race, social class, education. The two main scholars I critiqued, Ludwig (2011) and Messerschmidt (2018) include discussions on issues of intersectionality, but they emphasise gender and sexuality as the most significant traits on which hegemonic relations are constructed. The discussion so far assumes hegemony to be one of the most significant and transhistorical structural elements of our culture. At the same time, as I discussed in earlier parts of this chapter, power formations of domination are to best viewed as historically and socio-culturally specific. For this reasons, I offer *hegemonic othering* as an alternative construct.

Referring to Derrida's theories, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990) observes that societies of all times and places are organised hierarchically based on dichotomies which deem the *Other* as inferior. What is dependent on time and place, though, is what these dichotomies include and exclude. In the western culture, we have seen dichotomies based on gender (man/woman), race (black/white), ethics and religion (good/bad), sexuality (heterosexual/non-heterosexual), and so on. Spivak (*ibid*.) argues that maintaining these dichotomies, even in attempts to reverse them, will not contribute to any significant change. Any deconstruction of these hierarchical dichotomies, Spivak suggests, should not focus on the reversal of these dichotomies but on revealing their mechanisms which, in turn, can bring about their rejection.

Duggan (2003) offers a similar position with regards to the futility of these dichotomies and of attempts to challenge such hierarchical structures which focus narrowly on recognition. With reference to queer politics, she writes that to "[...] place queer politics under the label of a purely "cultural" politics of recognition, denies that queer analysis addresses political economy,

material life, and the history of modes of production and reproduction of social life, at the centre of analysis" (p. 83, emphasis in original). Palazzani (2013) offers deconstruction as a way to challenge, both theoretically and in practice, established hierarchies without focusing narrowly on one category over others. "Deconstruction," Palazzani argues,

> is the revindication of the 'other,' understood as that which is unthought of and excluded from any categorisation. It denies the possibility of elaboration of unique and absolute concepts and meanings; it opens to the multiplicity of meanings never fully understandable and formulate as in constant transformation (p. 41, emphasis in original).

Palazzani discusses deconstruction in close terms to post-structuralism and further explains that the aim is to

> [...] de-structure, that is, expose and shake to its foundations every claim to identity structures, in order to exalt disorder and disorganisation, as liberation from the repressions imposed by the structured system" (*ibid*.). In relation to gender and sexuality, deconstructionism moved away from social constructionism in that social constructionism highlights the social construction of gender as an effect of socialisation while deconstructionism presents gender as a "structure" produced and organised by power (*ibid*., emphasis in original).

In other words, for social constructionists, sex and gender are two different categories whereby the former refers to nature and the latter to a socio-cultural construct. Both natural 'sex' and cultural 'gender' are vulnerable to deconstruction.

The first part of this chapter traces the development of constructionist and de-constructionist thought in Gender and Sexuality Studies. In particular, it focuses on the shift from patriarchy to gender and from gender as a social construct to gender as a site of power formation. Within the context of de-construction, gender theory gave way to queer theory (Seideman, 1996; Sullivan, 2003).[62] Duggan (2003) suggests that queer "[...] has been used most often precisely to question the uniformity of sexual identities and to replace a list of relatively fixed identity categories [...] with a notion of flexible, antinormative, politicised sexualities" (p. 58). Palazzani (2013) expands Duggan's definition and explains that there are two elements that distinguish Queer Studies from its predecessors, Gender and Sexuality Studies. These elements

[62] Queer was coined, in its current use, by De Lauretis at a conference in 1990. See De Lauretis, T. (1991) 'Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities. An introduction', in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 3(2), pp. iii-xviii).

are polymorphism and pansexualism. The former refers to practices which problematise and reject binary formations (Monro, 2007) while the latter concerns the problematisation and rejection of the privilege assigned to heterosexuality by society (Jackson, 1999). Palazzani writes about queer that it is

> [...] an amorphous and speculatively open term: a flexible, fluid, variable, permeable category against closed, rigid, fixed, impermeable dichotomies (p. 45). [...] Queer highlights the differences and at the same time the in-difference. It questions stable fixed and compliant identities; it deconstructs individual and social representations [...] (p. 47).

Situated within queer politics and activism, *queering*, the verb form of queer, has been discussed as a tool or a method used by queer theorists and activists to challenge heteronormativity (Barker and Scheele, 2016).[63] Originally, *queering* was used to refer to queer reading of texts and films whereby scholars analysed the ways in which artists challenged or questioned established norms around gender or sexuality (Sedgwick, 2013). Thelathia Young (2012) suggests that *queering* "[...] dismantles the dynamics of power and privilege persisting among diverse groups" (p. 128) and that, as a tool, it allows us to deconstruct "[...] the logics and frameworks operating within old and new [...] concepts" (p. 130). Applying Young's definition of *queering* to the earlier discussion on representation and hegemony, one can argue that *queering* occurs when established conventions of discourses of representation are adopted to challenge dominant power formations which, in turn, can subvert hegemonic social and cultural structures. If, in other words, discourses of representation create power formations through *hegemonic othering*, *queering* refers to the appropriation of these discourses with the intention not only to question but to alleviate and disrupt those hegemonic structures which provoke power formations to occur.

The case of HIV/AIDS is of particular significance here because its representations, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, have promoted power relations on three levels: between HIV

[63] Nardi (2000), for example, explains that "[for] some time, the media images of gay men as effeminate and lesbians as masculine have persisted. They illustrate the conflation of gender and sexual orientation and raise salient questions about the social construction and relational nature of femininity and masculinity" (p. 1). Purposeful attachment of characteristics opposite to what is socially expected can be thought of as a *queering* technique. He also uses drag to further explain his argument and writes that "[in the world of drag queens and drag kings] the masculine embodiment of the feminine reinforces in some ironic way the conventional notions of gender while simultaneously it argues for a situational understanding of power and gender. Drag queens are not subversive challenges to the masculine hierarchies of our culture […] they deconstruct for us the strong social nature of gender" (pp. 10-11).

positive and heterosexual individuals, between HIV positive and HIV negative individuals, as well as between HIV positive non-conforming and HIV positive assimilationist individuals. What is, therefore, to be examined is the extent in which contemporary representations of HIV/AIDS maintain these power formations or not. Therefore, by analysing the subject positions that are created through the representation of HIV/AIDS in contemporary cultural productions, it will be possible to examine if *hegemonic othering* has been employed to promote unequal power relationships among people based on their serostatus and sexuality. The chapter that follows examines HIV/AIDS as well as the contemporary socio-political context within which the cultural productions that will be analysed later have been created

III. Methodological Approach: Studying Representations of HIV/AIDS as Social Suffering

III. A. Introduction

This chapter aims to situate HIV/AIDS within the context of social suffering. Before the discussion begins, it is important to highlight that I do not wish to provide an explanation for the barbarity associated with the responses - medical, political, bureaucratic, social, cultural, *etc*. - to the epidemic and, most importantly, to PLWHA. Providing explanations presupposes finding meaning. Attempting to make sense of atrocities, such as various responses to HIV/AIDS, results inevitably in normalising and humanising them (Langer, 1997). Therefore, instead of rationalising responses to HIV/AIDS, this chapter analyses HIV/AIDS as social suffering and examines the trauma, physical and otherwise, PLWHA have been subjected to, as well as the social forces that have caused this trauma. "Social suffering results from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems" (Kleinman, Das, and Lock, 1997, p. ix). This study follows closely Kleinman, Das, and Lock's argument about the relationship between social suffering and power. For this reason, situating HIV/AIDS suffering within the theoretical concept of social suffering will allow us to analyse the power relations that cause HIV/AIDS suffering, as well as the power relations that emerge from HIV/AIDS suffering. In the previous chapter, I focused on the power relations that situate PLWHA as the *not-normal*, the problematic, the 'less-of', the Other. I used Gramsci's concept of hegemony to explain how PLWHA are subjected to hegemonic power exerted from heterosexual, non-heterosexual HIV negative, and non-heterosexual HIV positive-but-conforming people.

In this chapter, I aim to show how *hegemonic othering* transforms HIV/AIDS from a personal to a social experience. In other words, I focus on how political, economic, and institutional manifestations of power contribute to HIV/AIDS social suffering. Contrary to medical discourses which treat suffering as an individual experience, often by limiting it to the psychological and/or medical domains, HIV/AIDS, among other conditions, presents a different discourse (Duffy, 2005). PLWHA experience more than *just* HIV/AIDS. As it is discussed in the previous chapter, *hegemonic othering* can potentially compel PLWHA to

experience not only health-related problems but an array of other human problems including, but not limited to, social discrimination, isolation, depression, and suicide. This, in addition to the fact that PLWHA are found among societies of all levels of income, justifies discussing HIV/AIDS not only as personal but also as social experience. Kleinman, Das, and Lock (1997) confirm that social suffering involves "[...] conditions that are usually divided among separate fields, conditions that simultaneously involve health, welfare, legal, moral, and religious issues" (p. ix). The interplay of these fields in relation to HIV/AIDS becomes apparent when examined in conjunction with the concept of *hegemonic othering*, discussed in chapter II. The relations of power that are created by *hegemonic othering* inflict further trauma to those who are situated in the position of the Other. In other words, despite the fact that social suffering prevails equally in contexts of high and low income, it renders impotent those who are powerless.[64]

Equally important to the *phenomenon* of human suffering is *studying* this suffering (Wilkinson and Kleinman, 2016). This further supports my argument with regards to the need to study cultural representations of HIV/AIDS. I argued that representation is not only a cultural process through which social experience is constructed, but a process through which norms are constructed and reinforced. Concomitantly, representation is viewed here as an apparatus of power, which is used both to facilitate and to conceal the construction of normative social experience. This is in line with views such as the ones shared by Barthes ([1957] 1993) and Hebdige (1979) who discuss the ability of media texts to elide the socially constructed nature of the *status quo*. Focusing on the myth, as an example of such a text, Barthes (1993) discusses the existence of a "[...] hidden set of rules, codes, and conventions through which meanings, which are in reality specific to certain groups, are rendered universal and given for a whole society" (p. 114). According to this line of thought, representations appear to be objective, common-sense depictions of reality when, in fact, they are subjective interpretations of it. What is more, such representations are often put forward by those in positions of privilege and power and can reinforce certain ways for understanding the world as the correct, acceptable, and only ways or truths. The significance of this lies in the result such representations have on audiences. Mitchell (1984) explains that when people are exposed to *stimuli*, for example a book, a movie,

[64] A detailed discussion about the relationship between income, power, and suffering can be found at Desjarlais, R., Eisenberh, L., Good, B., and Kleinman, A. (eds) (1995) *World mental health: Problems and priorities in low-income countries*. New York: Oxford University Press. Their work also provides arguments about the relationship among power, political violence, trauma, health, social welfare, legislation, and social suffering that is discussed in this section.

or a picture, a mental image, an *internal representation*, is created. Eriksson (2009), with reference to Mitchell, argues that such mental images are significant in that they affect, if not shape, the way people perceive and understand the world. Even though we cannot but acknowledge that every individual can respond to *stimuli* differently, thus it is possible that each one of us creates a different mental image in response to the same *stimulus*, this does not diminish the necessity to study representations and challenge instances where they promote normative views of the world. It goes without saying that this does not suggest that all media and cultural productions serve dominant, normative views (Hebdige, 1979). The last two chapters of this thesis, for example, focus on and analyse examples of media texts created by those who offer a challenge to mainstream, dominant narratives.

Prior to continuing the discussion on the significance of representation and, later on, of mediation of suffering, it is important to highlight that references to audience or spectators are not meant to imply or assume the existence of a homogeneous group. Indeed, the audience is understood as active in that they engage in a dialogic relationship with a cultural product whereby they bring their own knowledge and understanding of the world - which depends on the way in which they have been socialised - in the process of responding to and reflecting on what is represented (Fiske, 1987). Other scholars have focused extensively on analysing the ways in which audiences decode texts. For example, Hall (1973) provides a typology of reader positions, by identifying *dominant/preferred reading* occurring when the audience share characteristics and interest with what is represented, *oppositional reading* occurring when the audience disagree with what is represented or when their values clash with what is represented, and *negotiated reading* when they agree with some but disagree with other parts of what is represented. However, the position taken in this study is in line with Seaman (1992) who argues that "[...] the problem is not with audience interpreting practices, but with what is available for interpretation" (p. 308). Indeed, acknowledging the varying responses to a cultural product is an important reminder of the absence of a homogeneous society and an embracing of the diversity of the audience and, by extension, of societies. It is, though, important to shift our focus from the diversity of possible readings of texts to the texts themselves so as to address social issues - such as social suffering - which are not focused on simply acknowledging the multitude of reader positions available; rather, it is important to focus on the ways in which social suffering is represented and mediated with attention to whether or not such representations provide opportunities for audiences of all walks of life to challenge dominant - and often damaging - worldviews.

Kleinman, Das, and Lock (*ibid.*) suggest that studying social suffering and its socio-cultural responses *en masse* elucidates the "[...] permeability between the borders of moral imagination, bodily affect, and social processes" (p. xi). A thorough understanding of this permeability should precede any attempt to create public policies that aim to contribute to the cessation of social suffering. Indeed, social suffering is often caused by public policies and socio-cultural responses that normalise and universalise pathologies. For this reason, I agree with Kleinman, Das, and Lock who argue that "[...] we need first to examine the most basic relationships between language and pain, image and suffering" (*ibid*.). Doing so allows for further understanding of "[...] how the clash among globalising discourses and localised social realities so often ends up prolonging personal and collective tragedy" (*ibid*.). In short, through representation, the individual becomes social, the personal becomes collective, and the local becomes global. *Ergo*, through representation and by means of hegemony, social suffering often becomes a normalised experience that appears to require no intervention. In turn, this contributes to the intensification of suffering, resulting in perpetuating both suffering itself and its adverse consequences.[65]

In chapter II, I discussed the relationship between politics and culture. In particular, I focused on *hegemonic othering* as a societal force which inscribes cultural responses to HIV/AIDS. I first showed the permeability of hegemony as evidenced by the role of heteronormativity and homonormativity in the emanation of HIV/AIDS-related stigma. Then, I discussed how this extends into public policies and political violence. The vicious cycle continues with the emergence of cultural responses that address the effects of such violence. These responses often create a language of suffering into the socio-cultural consciousness which, in turn, creates the social experience of suffering.

> Existential processes of pain, death, and mourning are metamorphosed by these historically shaped rationalities and technologies, which [...] are inattentive to how the transformations they induce contribute to the suffering they seek to remedy (Kleinman, Das, and Lock, 1997, p. x).

[65] The relationship among norms, normality, and pathology has been demonstrated in detail by scholars such as Canguilhem, Foucault, and Hacking. Canguilhem, G. (1989) *The normal and the pathological*. New York: Zone Books. Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage. Hacking, I. (1990) *The taming of chance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This can explain why, for example, there have been cultural representations of HIV/AIDS which seemingly contribute to the termination of HIV/AIDS-related stigma but in reality only normalise and intensify it. Such an example is the character of Ben in *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005) who was discussed in chapter II. Kleinman, Das, and Lock's (1997) argument is used here to further support the need for close examination of the representation of social suffering. Understanding how social suffering becomes normalised through representation can provide a theoretical foundation based on which cultural practitioners can produce works that do not partake in the vicious cycle described above; on the contrary, such works can dramatise HIV/AIDS, or any other form of social suffering for that matter, in a manner that encourages, promotes, and contributes to the ending of stigma associated with the form of social suffering in question.

III. B. Representing Social Suffering

In *Social Suffering* (1997), Kleinman, Das, and Lock argue that there are three themes that transpire from representations of social suffering. These are "[...] cultural representations, social experiences, political and professional processes" (p. xi). Cultural representations of suffering are very common in popular culture as well as in specific social institutions. Such representations make use of visual and aural modalities and include, among others, images, still and/or moving, tales that almost take the form of archetypal tales, and linguistic devices for metaphors in everyday life. In chapter II, I discussed cultural representations as means of establishing certain moralities which, in turn, are used to justify conservative policies and politics. Here, I wish to extend this, and argue that suffering is not only social, but it is often used as a tool which aids social regulation. To illustrate this, one needs only consider the function of the retrovision genre (see section II. D. 2. *Viral Masculinities* in previous chapter). By recycling an anachronistic perception of the reality of the HIV positive person and the society within which this person lives, conservatism is being authorised. Audiences of such representations are manipulated to ignore contemporary advances of science and succumb to the fear and social prejudice of the past.[66] Therefore, by means of cultural representation, social suffering becomes part of social experience. If, in other words, we accept that experience is not

[66] Kleinman, Das, and Lock (1997, p. xi) further argue that the establishment of such historical memories of suffering also contributes to the commodification of suffering. Even though this is evident in our current society and the way PrEP is being marketed, this is not the focus of this section and, therefore, I will not expand on this further.

inherited but learned, then cultural representations can be considered to be a way through which experience is learned, norms are created and, thereupon normalised.

"Even what we so easily assume to be the existential ground of the human condition [...] may undergo change in keeping with epochal transformations in the nexus of symbolic-moral systems and the political economy [...]" (Kleinman, Das, and Lock , 1997, p. xii). Here, the authors further illustrate how even what is considered to be the core of human existence is not as significant as it might be thought to be. A case in point is the constitution of masculinity which, as I discussed in chapter II, is erroneously thought to be a universal invariable but, in fact, is dynamic and oscillates in accordance with its socio-cultural context. Based on the relationship between cultural representations and social experience that has been discussed so far, one concludes that social suffering is exploited in such a way as to fashion responses to it, according to the political and socio-cultural context of a given place and time. Such manipulation of social suffering, Kleinman, Das, and Lock argue, involves "[...] political and professional processes [that are] both authorised and contested [...]. Even in seeking to manage social suffering, [these processes] have, through intended and unintended effects, intensified human misery" (p. xii). The workings of homonormative politics attest to this argument. Non-heterosexual individuals populate popular media, purportedly to reduce social discrimination against non-heterosexuals but, as I discussed in chapter II, the way they are represented results in further stigmatisation of non-heterosexuals who do not conform to heteronormative values.

If, therefore, cultural representations define what is - perceived to be - real and what is not, then Kleinman, Das, and Lock (*ibid.*) are right in arguing that "[s]ocial suffering is a feature of cultural representation both as a spectacle and as the presentation of the real" (p. xii). We know of social suffering because it is shown to us; further, we know how to respond to social suffering because this is *also* shown to us. Reality is mediated through cultural representations and, as it has already been discussed, what is - mediated as - real depends on power.[67] The banality of the description of our culture as a visual one comes at play when one considers that the way we visually represent social suffering becomes the way social suffering is. "The very act of picturing distorts social experience in the popular media and in the professions under the

[67] Mitchell (1994) writes about the ethics of representation and focuses on the relationship between representation and responsibility arguing that this relationship constitutes a major moral dilemma of contemporary life. See Mitchell, W. T. J., (1994) *Picture theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 421-425.

impress of ideology and political economy" (p. xiii). Reality is transformed both for the spectators of social suffering and for the sufferers themselves.

> Is that transformation *anamorphic* in the sense of a greater experience of complexity, or is it anamorphic in the sense that the global lenses of the media and other transnational institutions distort local images while providing the optical system for regularising (normalising) the global recovery of images and experiences? (p. xiii)

In cultural representations of HIV/AIDS, the latter seems to prevail. From *Philadelphia* (1993) to *The Next Best Thing* (2000) to *The Line of Beauty* (2006) to *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013),[68] representations of HIV/AIDS have been contributing to the creation of a cultural memory of HIV/AIDS which normalises types of social suffering as well as responses to it. Who is to be pitied, who is to receive help, and who is to be deemed deserving of their suffering is dictated by the ways in which social suffering is depicted in these representations. If the language[69] of representation dictates - and/or distorts - reality, then it must be through this very language of representation that change can occur. In other words, to prevent the distortion of understandings of social suffering, one has to modify the way language is used in cultural representations of social suffering to define, illustrate, and present it more accurately. By appropriating practices of mediation and offering a greater plurality of representations of PLWHA, it is more likely that an accurate picture of the reality of life with HIV/AIDS can be painted. Indeed, "[...] cultural representations of suffering [...] authorise transformations of core symbol systems and cultural discourses and thereby alter social experience, inducing ominous historical change in experiences of suffering in our own epoch" (Kleinman, Das, and Lock, 1997, p. xviii). What we need to consider, therefore, is practices that will eventually destabilise the trivialisation of suffering,[70] reverse the romanticised version of the victim as hero, and expose the workings of power in the construction, mediated or otherwise, of social suffering.

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[68] For an in-depth analysis of these productions, see Kagan (2018).

[69] I use the word language to refer to the means through which representation is realised, i.e. images, body language, gestures, words, looks, subtext, etc.

[70] This 'trivialisation of suffering' in cultural products is achieved in a number of ways. There have been works focusing on HIV/AIDS the publicity of which did not mention HIV/AIDS at all (for example, Aron's *The Stanley Parkers* (1990)). Also, in theatre, for a very long time, there had been plays insisting on not portraying AIDS-caused deaths on stage; or plays in which only offstage characters died with AIDS (for example, Deegan's *Queen and Peacock* (2000). For more information about HIV/AIDS in theatre, see Singleton, B. (2011) *Masculinities and the contemporary Irish theatre*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Also, O'Brian, C. (2017) 'HIV and AIDS in Irish theatre: Queer masculinities, punishment, and 'post-AIDS' culture,' *Journal of Medical Humanities*, pp. 1 - 14. Also, with regard to television, there are many cultural products which trivialise HIV/AIDS as social suffering. I discuss these in section III. D. of this chapter.

Before attempting to *queer* suffering by using established representations of suffering in a manner that abates rather than intensifies it, one has to better understand why suffering is represented in the first place. Kleinman and Kleinman (1997) argue that "[the] existential appeal of human experiences, their potential to mobilise popular sentiment and collective action, and even their capability to witness or offer testimony are now available for gaining market share" (p. 1). Observing the circulation of the visual representation of suffering among both local and global audiences/markets, Kleinman and Kleinman's argument here highlights the commercialisation of suffering which presupposes the commodification of experience. It should be noted that commercialising experiences of suffering can have positive outcomes as long as it is done in a manner that is not exploitative or distortive. Examples of representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering that have positive results are the main focus of chapters IV and V of this study. However, when representations of suffering are distortive, the experience of suffering becomes a commodity. As such, audience/markets are not presented with the reality of this experience *per se*; rather they are presented with a version of said reality. Reality is, thus, re-told, re-enacted, re-performed, and the experience of suffering becomes replicated. What the audience is presented with is not the experience of suffering but an imitation of that experience. Creating an imitation of reality is very likely to lead to presenting a distorted version of the experience of suffering. Kleinman and Kleinman further observe that suffering "[...] is routinely appropriated in American popular culture, which is a leading edge of global popular culture" (p. 2). The representation of a staged, thus possibly distorted, version of social suffering reminds us of the Platonic *simulacrum*. For Plato, writing in the fourth century BCE, representations of reality had to be distorted so that they could be thought to be as real(istic) as possible.

To illustrate his point, Plato used statuary as an example. To ensure an accurate representation for the viewer, the top part of sculptures had to be larger than the bottom one. To the viewer, this created the illusion that the statue was an accurate representation of real life. Had the same sculpture been viewed in scale, its deformity would have been obvious. With this metaphor, Plato highlighted the fact that distortion can be perceived as truth if the way it is represented is manipulated in such a way that creates a real(istic) effect. In modernity, Baudrillard (1994) extends Plato's view on representation and suggests four types of it, viewed either as individual phases or a continuum. These are: a faithful imitation of reality; a representation of reality, based on reality, that aims to conceal its flaws; a representation of reality which is not based on reality but pretends to be the reality itself; and, a presentation of reality which is based on a

representation of what ought to be real and is so far removed from reality which is not related to reality at all. The last is what Baudrillard defines as *simulacrum.*[71]

What is achieved by a *simulacrum* of social suffering? What end is served through the distortion of experience for the sake of representation? and how does the cultural appropriation of social suffering through representation contribute to the prescription of socio-cultural responses to social suffering? Kleinman and Kleinman (1997) describe a process whereby sufferers, through the narrativisation of their suffering, are reduced into their trauma stories, further reduced into victims, and from victims they become patients. More specifically, Kleinman and Kleinman write about sufferers that "[...] their intimately interior images of violation are made over into *trauma stories*. [...] Increasingly, those complicated stories, based in real events, [are] reduced to a core cultural image of *victimisation* [...]. Then, [the victim] becomes a patient [...]" (pp. 9-10, emphasis in original). The pathologisation of suffering, as described by this quote, might indeed be a way for sufferers to claim financial and other benefits. It could, therefore, be a transformation they actively seek out in order to survive.

Following the development and fights of early AIDS activism, in the States for example, allows us to understand how representation of suffering became an objective of activists since this was an effective way for sufferers to be provided with medical, moral, and possibly financial support. However, a closer examination of early societal and political responses to HIV/AIDS provides a clearer understanding of how the representation of HIV/AIDS as social suffering created a *simulacrum* whereby the identity of the sufferer was distorted. Rather than perceiving the HIV positive or the AIDS patient as the person who suffers, representations of suffering created a discourse very different to the reality of suffering. AIDS patients, along with those who were potential AIDS patients, were viewed as a threat to social order, to health, and to morality. The sufferers were not the HIV positive people or the AIDS patients anymore, but those who were not infected. Representation created a *simulacrum* within which stigmatisation flourished on grounds that were completely justified in the consciousness of the many. Examples of this can be found in the discourses of moral panic that started with the outbreak of the epidemic whereby HIV positive individuals were described as the "[...] AIDS carriers [...]", those who can potentially infect the rest of the population (Altman, 2001, p. 145). In such

[71] I draw on Baudrillard's work to highlight the levels and layers of distortion reality goes through in the process of representation. For an in-depth discussion on Baudrillard's work, see Redhead's (2008) excellent study on Baudrillard. See Redhead, S. (2008) *The Jean Baudrillard reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

narratives, the sufferer was not the HIV positive or AIDS infected individual; rather, the sufferer was the one who was in danger of being infected by the amoral AIDS carrier. Those who were not infected were creating narratives of victimhood.[72] So, on the one hand, using cultural appropriations to situate HIV/AIDS social suffering within medical terms allowed HIV positive and AIDS patients access to medical and moral/social care and support. On the other hand, though, as Simon Watney (1987) explains, representations of HIV/AIDS resulted in HIV/AIDS "[...] being used as a pretext throughout the West to "justify" calls for increasing legislation and regulation of those who are considered to be socially unacceptable" (p. 3, emphasis in original). In the HIV/AIDS suffering *simulacrum*, the roles of the one who suffers the impact of HIV/AIDS and the one who does not are reversed. Before focusing on the question about who benefits from the reversal of these roles or before offering an explanation that satisfies such reversal, it is important to focus on the significance of *not* representing social suffering.

The appropriation of social suffering does not occur only through the construction and circulation of a language of representation via channels of cultural consumption, as I discussed earlier. Such an appropriation, and quite possibly one of more overt political significance, can also be achieved through the absence of representation. "The absent image is also a form of political appropriation," Kleinman and Kleinman (1997) note; "public silence is perhaps more terrifying than being overwhelmed by public images of atrocity" (p. 17). In the history of HIV/AIDS, there have been two periods in which this public silence was especially evident: the first at the outbreak of the epidemic, and the second from the end of the 20th century to the 2010s. Both instances of public silence attempted to render HIV/AIDS as well as PLWHA non-existent. Patton (1990), discussing the early years of the epidemic, describes silencing as the "[...] discursive effect symptomatic of relations of power" (p. 3), suggesting what has already been argued here and in the previous chapter: the silencing of HIV/AIDS as social suffering was not a sign of ignorance but a sign of conscious and strategic attempt to erase, metaphorically and potentially literally, the experience of the particular suffering and the sufferers themselves. In *Inventing AIDS* (*ibid*.), Patton describes the early years of the epidemic as a constant battle for representation. On the one hand, media and governments pretended to be ignorant about an epidemic which was killing an exponentially growing number of people;

[72] For a detail discussion on how AIDS was initially narrativised, see Patton, C. (1990) *Inventing AIDS*. London: Routledge.

on the other hand, activists were trying to bring the public's attention to HIV/AIDS as social suffering. The aim was "[...] to promote compassion and decrease irrational fear [...]" (p. 9). The years that followed saw an increased interest in broadcasting anything HIV/AIDS-related to the point that media representations gave rise to social and moral panics related to HIV and AIDS.[73]

The second instance of silence, which lasted significantly longer than the first one, followed the invention of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) and the subsequent antiretroviral treatment (ART). Kagan (2018) observes that from the invention of ARVs until the mid-2010s, cultural representations of HIV/AIDS were few and far between. As I discussed toward the end of the previous chapter, the reasons for the second erasure of HIV/AIDS from cultural representations served, yet again, homonormative political agendas. Similarly to the initial cultural erasure of HIV/AIDS which aided the inscription of HIV/AIDS as a social rather than a medical problem, the second attempt to erase it served the neoliberal homonormative agenda whereby the fight for marriage equality could not be *undermined* by images which linked homosexuality to deviance. With the pretext of HIV/AIDS being treatable following the invention of ARVs, HIV/AIDS disappeared from popular culture. Both instances of silencing, the one caused by conservative governments and the one stemming from conservative political agendas of neoliberal gay activists were equally dangerous. Kleinman and Kleinman (1997) note that the "[...] official silence is another form of appropriation [...] it prevents public witnessing" (p. 17). They further add that when such erasures occur, "[...] the possibility of moral appeal through images of human misery is prevented, and it is their absence that is the source of existential dismay" (p. 16). In other words, not only is the possibility of distorting the experience of suffering in the public arena looming over the silencing of suffering; but, most importantly, such an erasure of experience results in the intensification of suffering itself.

When analysing instances of cultural appropriation of suffering, we must spread our attention equally to instances of representation as well as instances of absence of representation. Kleinman and Kleinman (*ibid.*) wonder about the significance of representations, or the one of lack of representations, of social suffering.

[73] Both Patton (1990) and Watney (1987) offer a critical analysis of the political and socio-cultural responses to HIV and AIDS.

> To what uses are experiences of suffering put? What are the consequences of those cultural practices for understanding and responding to human problems? And what are the more general implications of the cultural appropriations of suffering for human experience, including human experiences of suffering? (p. 3).

To address these questions, we must first visualise how the observation and/or experience of - mediated - social suffering occurs. The very staging of the experience of social suffering requires two parties: the sufferers and those who are present in the scenes of suffering but do not directly experience suffering themselves. Further to these two parties who are present at the scene of suffering, there are those who aid the mediation process. For example, when considering the staging of HIV/AIDS in the TV adaptation of *Angels in America* (2003), we should not only think of the characters who are present in the scene of suffering. We should also consider producers, production managers, production assistants, HBO, companies which advertise their products while the series airs, and others who are not only involved in but also benefit financially and otherwise from the representation of suffering. Therefore, representation of suffering can become an exploitative situation whereby those who do not suffer gain from it, while the ones who actually experience suffering neither gain from nor participate in the process of representation. They are stripped of any role in this because it is not them who share their stories of suffering but actors. This has been one of the major criticisms of works such as *Paris is Burning* (1990) which documented the suffering of PLWHA. The creators of the show gave a nominal fee instead of what they would consider to be a fair share of the profits to those whose suffering became the focus of the documentary (Green, 1993). Kleinman and Kleinman (1997) confirm that "[we] gain in moral status and some of our organisations gain financially and politically, while those whom we represent, or appropriate, remain where they are, moribund, surrounded by vultures" (p. 8).

To aid the development of my argument, I will refer to the discussion on the work of Bourdieu that I presented in the previous chapter. In particular, I would like to revisit Bourdieu's theory of social fields and argue that the act of representation of social suffering creates a social field in which the one who suffers and the one who does not are positioned in a relationship of power. The former (the sufferer) is rendered at best powerless and at worst silenced, while the one who does not experience suffering, but benefits from it, is rendered powerful. Here, it is important to note that this social field does not include the audience; rather, it aims to describe the scene of suffering as a locus where unequal power relations are formed. Both the sufferer and the one who is present at the scene of suffering but does not actually suffer refer to

characters who make up the scene of suffering in cultural productions. What the role of the non-sufferer might be will be discussed in section III. D. of this chapter.

To further my argument, I use the term *real life* in contrast to the *simulacrum* that I discussed earlier. In *real life*, therefore, the non-sufferer has power over the one who suffers. In the *simulacrum*, as I discussed earlier, the distortion of reality has reversed the roles of sufferer and non-sufferer. There, the HIV-negative person is the one who is in danger of moral, social, or physical infection by the immoral, irresponsible, and aberrant Other, the HIV positive or the one who can potentially become HIV positive. This results in providing the one who has power in *real life* to use their position of weakness created in the *simulacrum* as an alibi for exercising power over the Other, the one who actually experiences suffering. Within the HIV/AIDS history, we have observed such exertions of power in the shape of physical, emotional, and moral violence as well as social discrimination, stigma, and isolation.

Before I proceed with focusing more on the mediation of suffering, it is important to clarify that the discussions about the *sufferer* so far in the chapter do not refer to a universal *sufferer*. What people perceive as suffering and, by extension, who they identify as *sufferer* largely depends on whether or not they can establish some sort of connection or identification with either the situation of suffering or with the sufferer. Morris (1997) observes that suffering "[...] is not a raw datum, a natural phenomenon we can identify and measure, but a social status that we extend or withhold. We extend or withhold it depending largely on whether the sufferer falls within our moral community" (p. 41). Morris focuses on suffering as a social status that is being extended to those whose suffering is identified by those who do not experience suffering and, thus, have the power to extend or withhold social statuses *ad libitum*. Morris further states that we "[...] do not acknowledge the destruction of beings outside our moral community as suffering" (*ibid*.). This offers an additional justification for my previous argument about the erasure of suffering through avoiding representations of it. It emerges that the absence of representation of social suffering signifies an acknowledgement of the sufferer as the Other.

Within the HIV/AIDS history, Kerr (2016) also observes two periods of such *othering* through lack of representation. The first one, he argues, refers to the initial five years of the epidemic when Ronald Regan, then President of the United States, refused to utter the word AIDS in public. The second silencing refers to the period starting from the introduction of ARVs until

the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Based on Morris's observations about suffering being a status that mainstream culture assigns or withholds, it is not surprising that the big hit which broke the period of second silencing was the Academy Award winning and international success *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), the main character of which was white and heterosexual. Needless to say that this has not been the first or the last time where the PLWHA is depicted in a manner that provides opportunities for members of the audience to identify with. *Philadelphia* (1993), arguably the first mainstream film to focus on HIV/AIDS, also presented us with a main character who 'ticks the boxes' of mainstream culture. Andrew Beckett, the main character of the film, is a highly successful lawyer who keeps his homosexuality conveniently in the closet. How could the audience not identify him as a sufferer when he appeared to share so many common characteristics with them?

The question we need to ask, though, is whether it was the sharing of common characteristics that aided the identification of the audience with him or a hegemonic aspirational dynamic. He was white, upper-class, well-educated, and financially independent. With characteristics like these ones, he was identified as part of the broader moral community of the time and was extended sufferer status. Morris (1997) observes that representation has the "[...] power to reinvent suffering. [... By] extending or contracting the borders of a moral community, [representation] can be used with different degrees of blindness or insight" (p. 41). Taking the representation of the character of Andrew Beckett as an example, it becomes clear that the boarders of the moral community of the spectators were expanded. Because he is represented as white, upper-class, well-educated, and financially independent, he was not perceived as Other but as one of *us*.[74] Therefore, the borders of the moral community of the spectators were expanded to accept him as sufferer because, his suffering aside, he embodies mainstream society. Here, it should be highlighted that the diversity of the audience and their ability to read and respond to texts in a variety of ways is not ignored. The discussion about a moral community and mainstream society reflects an acknowledgement of the existence of a dominant, not hegemonic, worldview that is white, male, and middle class. Therefore, even if one does not belong to mainstream society by being white, male, and middle class, it is very likely - though not absolutely inevitable, that they might have adopted the worldview of mainstream society and, thus, forming a common moral community.

[74] Here, 'us' is used as an aspirational rather than a real category for most audience members.

This section has focused on the representation as well as the absence of representation of suffering in relation to power and power relations. Toward the end of this section, I focused on social suffering as social status and the relationship between sufferers and mainstream society. In the section that follows, I examine the mediation of suffering and its effects in more detail.

III. C. Mediating Social Suffering

So far, I have established that the way we understand and interact with social suffering is very much related to the ways in which suffering is represented, or to the significance associated with the absence of representation of suffering in culture. I have focused on how power relations are created through representations of suffering, and I have argued that a thorough understanding of social suffering as a spectacle is very important in examining ways that representation can be used to eliminate social inequalities related to social suffering. As such, I believe it is now necessary to turn the discussion onto the socio-cultural and political effects of the mediation of social suffering. If we accept Hannertz's (1996) definition of cosmopolitanism as "[...] an orientation, a willingness to relate with the Other" (p. 103, emphasis in original), we should examine the role of the media in representing the suffering Other and, more importantly, the role of the media in nurturing cosmopolitans. In Chouliaraki's (2006) words, we should examine "[...] the conditions under which it is possible for the media to cultivate an ideal identity for the spectator as a citizen of the world" (p. 2). The very act of mediation is an act of distancing, both physical and otherwise. The previous discussion attests to that: through representation, social suffering becomes a distant state that might concern people with whom we can identify, but it does not affect our immediate environment. It is therefore without question that, as scholars of culture, we are preoccupied with what the possible responses of audiences might be when they are presented with images of suffering.

So far, I have argued that the representation of social suffering aids the accumulation of power for mainstream society; through the *hegemonic othering* of the sufferer, the one who does not experience suffering becomes more powerful and is made to believe that they can exert their power over the ones who suffer. This realisation, though, is not a productive one. It does not offer any insights as to whether representation can be used to subvert established positions of power. It is, therefore, imperative to examine "[...] whether or not the media can cultivate a disposition of care for and engagement with the far away other; whether or not television can create a global public with a sense of social responsibility towards the distant sufferer"

(Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 1). If the media can, indeed, be used to raise public awareness of the conditions and implications of social suffering which, in turn, can lead to the improvement of life for all, then representation can be put in good use.

A post-disciplinary study of the kind that I present here is bound to examine its subject matter from a variety of perspectives. In chapter II, I presented *hegemonic othering*, a theoretical framework through which I approach the study of HIV/AIDS as social suffering and its representation. In this chapter, I focus on social suffering and the power dynamics that emerge from its representation. By examining the mediation of suffering, which is the topic of this section, I also present a methodological approach to the study of mediation that can be employed not only by studies of suffering but also by studies of mediation and representation in general. The starting point of the study of mediation is the examination of the possibilities that each mediation allows with regards to the spectators' reactions to portrayals of suffering. Indeed, one should not assume a homogeneous group when referring to spectators of cultural products. Therefore, rather than speculating how an assumed audience would react to representations of suffering, this study focuses on understanding the array of possible reactions that are elicited from the way a cultural product mediates suffering. A question that is of importance when studying representations of suffering is under what conditions one might feel an urge to act when presented with images of suffering. Chouliaraki (2006) argues that in order for the spectator to develop some sort of sympathy for and, possibly, help the one who experiences suffering, it is vital that both the suffering and its implications be presented to the spectator. In other words, through representations of suffering that are not *simulacra* but are as close to lived experiences as possible can spectators develop feelings that could motivate them to take action.

Here, it should be noted that *action* is understood in this project in line with Alexander's (1987) definition as "[...] interpretation and strategization" (p. 300). The former refers to a dialogic relationship between individuals' taking for granted that their understanding of the world is the only understanding possible and the change that occurs to that understanding every time individuals encounter understandings that are different to theirs. The latter, strategization, refers to action as more than just understanding the world; it refers to action as "[...] transforming and acting upon it" (p. 302). Surely, strategization appears to be the most significant component of action in that it can more decisively contribute to change. However, I am of the position that interpretation is an equally significant component of action with regard

to social suffering in that it is the prerequisite for strategization to occur. What is more, it might not be a realistic expectation from representations of suffering to elicit action in the form of strategization. Yet, creating representations of social suffering that have the capacity to encourage action in the form of interpretation appears more possible.

There are many questions that loom out of this remark: "[...] under which conditions is it at all possible for the media to induce displays of global care for people we know nothing about and will never meet?" (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 1) What does it take for a representation of suffering to not just create feelings of pity to spectators but make them take action, be it reconsidering their own prejudice against PLWHA, or actively helping and supporting them? "Do political protest and social solidarity have a place in television's mediations of distant suffering?" (*ibid*.) Also crucial to take into account is the very distance between spectator and spectacle that the mediation of suffering creates. Mass media provide spectators with vivid images of suffering upon which even if the spectators wished to act, the very distance created by the media of representation render any attempt for action worthless. Chouliaraki confirms that "[...] mass media have intensified the tensions involved in the enactment of public action because they constantly confront us with realities that occur too far away from everyday life for us to feel that we can make a difference to them" (p. 2).[75] The tension that is created between the need of spectators to take action and the inability to do so because of the distance that mediation creates is such that if intensified, there is the danger that spectators might switch off. In other words, this tension is a significant point for consideration that informs decisions relevant to representation. How suffering is represented, therefore, is affected by that tension. Mediation of suffering must ensure that the tension remains within *acceptable* limits.

When discussing the strategies involved in moderating the tension that the distance of mediation creates for spectators, Boltanski (1999) explains that representation is constrained so as it can be digested easily by the spectator; this is what Boltanski calls "politics of pity" (p. 7). In unpacking the politics of pity, which will in turn provide a thorough understanding of the staging and mediation of suffering, Chouliaraki (2006) suggests we examine "[...] how the sufferer is portrayed on screen and how the screen of suffering is narrated" (p. 3). This, she continues, can give us access to understand what is that orientates "[...] the spectator's attitude

[75] Chouliaraki here echoes the work of Ellis (2000) who focused on the moral demands made on spectators by television when presented with images of suffering without being offered the opportunity to do something about it, to act on it. See Ellis, J. (2000) *Seeing things: Television in the age of uncertainty.* London: I. B. Tauris.

towards the distant sufferer and, in the long run, [shapes] the disposition of television publics *vis-à-vis* the misfortune of faraway others" (*ibid*., emphasis in original).[76] In the previous section, for example, I examined one function of the mediation of suffering: this of helping communities define themselves as non-sufferers. By watching the suffering of Others, spectators identify themselves as non-sufferers. At the collective level, this might mean that through the suffering of Others, communities of non-sufferers develop a sense of togetherness; a togetherness that is free of suffering because they are in a safe distance from the sufferers. Therefore, "[...] aesthetic narratives of mediation have more to say about the life of spectators than the ethical dilemmas that the life of the distant sufferers may press on our societies" (p. 5). Through the representation of social suffering, the role of television becomes one of producing socio-cultural identities. Television, Chouliaraki argues, "[...] construes the nation as an 'imagined' community by homogenising differences internal to the nation state and, similarly, [...] transnational news flows construe a 'beyond the nation' community by establishing of a broader 'we'" (p. 10, emphasis in original). I would like to argue that this is true not only of television but of any technology of mediation.

To return the discussion to HIV/AIDS, I argue that representations of HIV/AIDS contributed to the emergence of a global North sentiment of communal identity among spectators of suffering: despite the possible physical proximity between HIV positive, or potentially positive, and HIV negative individuals, the cultural landscape in the global North was divided between sufferers and spectators. Spectators who were not part of the sufferers' group grew stronger as a result of that sense of togetherness that I described above. Not only did they have power because they were not part of the sufferers' group, their power grew because they formed part of a bigger group of those who do not suffer but consume media products that mediate the suffering of Others to satisfy their own emotional gratifications.

At this point, it is important to acknowledge the varying functions media have for people. For example, Bartsch and Viehoff (2010), using Uses and Gratification theory, argue for the overlapping uses and emotional gratifications that lead audiences to consume media. Among others, they refer to affective disposition - an observation initially made by Raney (2003), enjoyment that results from supporting a character who is presented as normative and moral,

[76] Silverstone (2004) advises to focus on both the institutions and the technologies through which mediation occurs if we are to truly understand it. See Silverstone, R. (2004) 'Mediation and communication', in Calhoun, G. *et al.* (eds.), *The SAGE handbook of sociological analysis*. London: SAGE.

as well as satisfaction that results from watching an amoral character suffer. Bartsch and Viehoff (2010) also discuss the functional importance of emotional involvement that results from a number of modes of reception including diegetic involvement, socio-involvement, and ego-involvement. That is, immersing oneself in the fictional world of the media product, identifying with the characters of this product, and reflecting on their own life based on what is dramatised in the product, respectively. Green and Brock (2000), Busselle and Bilandzic (2009), and Igartua (2010) further support that one reason spectators turn to entertainment media is to challenge their own perspectives by adopting the ones of the characters of a media product. Finally, Oliver (2008), Oliver and Bartsch (2010), and Oliver and Raney (2011) discuss as possible reasons for audiences to turn to entertainment media the need to empathise with characters who are not like them.

Unlike what mass society theory once argued about audiences being defenceless to the impact media has on them (Gusfield, 1994), Uses and Gratifications theory allows for audiences having an active role in the way media can influence them. In this study, the focus is not on audience reception; rather, the focus is on what possibilities cultural products provide audiences with. With regard to representations of social suffering and the possible reactions it might elicit from audiences, Chouliaraki confirms "[...] pity produces narcissistic emotions about the suffering 'other' that cannot move the spectator beyond the reflex of caring only for those like 'us'. Instead of global care, therefore, pity produces a form of global intimacy" (p. 13, emphasis in original). The questions we need to explore are: what defines which form of suffering can become worthy of the spectators' pity, and how suffering relates to structural violence - violence from the global spectators' society and culture.

III. D. Toward A Methodology of Mediation and Representation Analysis

In this section, I present an adapted version of Chouliaraki's (2006) *analytics of mediation* which forms the basis of my analysis of representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering in contemporary culture.[77] In *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (2006), Chouliaraki develops an

[77] Within the discourse of representations of social suffering, Chouliaraki's contributions have provided a methodological framework for a number of subsequent studies. Examples include Maier, S. R., Slovic, P., and Mayorga, M. (2017). 'Reader reaction to news of mass suffering: Assessing the influence of story form and emotional response', *Journalism*, 18(8), pp. 1011 - 1029; Monroe, K. R. (2014) 'Empathy and our relations to Others, in Laitinen, A., and Pessi, A. B. (eds.) *Solidarity: Theory and practice*, Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 88

analytics of mediation as "[...] an approach to the study of television that considers it as both a semiotic accomplishment (as text) and a technology embedded in existing power relationships of viewing" (p. 70). Her methodological approach is intended to be applicable to the analysis of suffering as broadcasted in news stories. She focuses on particular, context-specific analyses of news texts, and she examines the ways in which specific news stories establish normative values about social suffering. Chouliaraki follows an Aristotelian ethos of *phronesis*, whereby ethical considerations are not to be examined through *grand* theories; rather, Aristotle argued that a pragmatic approach to the examination of specific acts or actions is the only appropriate way to approach ethical questions. This is why Chouliaraki argues for the importance of engaging in close analysis of news texts.[78]

Even though I do not examine news stories and news texts, I appropriate Chouliaraki's *analytics of mediation* to conduct a close analysis of what she calls "[...] *regimes of meaning*" (p. 70, emphasis in original). According to her, the term refers to

> the bounded field of possible meaning relationships that obey a certain regularity in the ways in which they can be combined and circulated and, as a consequence, the possibilities they offer to constitute legitimate forms of knowledge about the world and of self for the spectator [...] (*ibid.*).

Therefore, the focus of analysis is not only the portrayal of, in this case, suffering. Most importantly, the analysis focuses on understanding what transforms particular portrayals of suffering into universal moral etiquettes, signifiers of acceptable moral behaviour.[79] By closely examining regimes of meaning, we can answer questions such as how spectators are encouraged to feel about HIV/AIDS as social suffering after watching movies like *The Normal Heart* (2014). Indeed in this movie, the initial years of HIV/AIDS activism are presented through the character of a conservative gay-identified HIV/AIDS activist who believes that HIV/AIDS is the result of gay promiscuity. Other questions that can be answered through the

- 104; Oliver, M. B., Dillard, J. P., Bae, K., and Tamul, D. J. (2012) 'The effect of narrative news format on empathy for stignatised groups', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 89(2), pp. 205 - 224; Powell, T., Boomgaarden, H., De Swert, K., and De Vreese, C. H. (2015) 'A clearer picture: The contribution of visuals and text to framing effects', *Journal of Communication*, 65(6), pp. 997 - 1017; and Pruce, J. R. (2012) 'The spectacle of suffering and humanitarian intervention in Somalia', in Borer, T. A. (ed.) *Media, mobilisation and human rights: Mediating suffering*, New York: Zed Books, pp. 216 - 239. Indeed, I found her framework relevant and well developed. It is for this reason that I decided to adapt it in such a way so as to use it in my analysis of varied cultural products.

[78] See Flyvbjerg (2001) for a detailed analysis of an Aristotelian approach in poststructuralism. Flyvbjerg, B. (2001) *Making social science matter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[79] Due to the limiting scope of this study which focuses on the global North, by *universal* I refer to widely accepted in the West.

close examination of regimes of meaning include what message about HIV/AIDS as social suffering is communicated through the serodiscordant relationship between Ben and Michael in *Queer as Folk* (2000 - 2005), or how these ideas might affect political decisions with regard to access to preventative practices, such as PrEP. To answer such questions, an *analytics of mediation* must be deployed in a manner that focuses on *regimes of meaning* which focus on very specific instances and types of suffering. In doing so, we can examine the possibility of *regimes of meaning* to contribute to the creation of normative responses to suffering.

In performing an *analytics of mediation*, two levels of analysis should be considered: multimodality and critical discourse analysis. Chouliaraki (2006) identifies as central "[...] to this analytical language [a] distinction between *hypermediacy* and *immediacy*" (p. 71, emphasis in original). What is suggested by this distinction is that there are two levels of meaning which need to be analysed separately and in conjunction with one another: meaning as projected through the medium of mediation and meaning created by the relationship between the spectacle and the spectator. The former is what Chouliaraki terms *hypermediacy*, while the latter refers to *immediacy*. What we are presented here with is the need to perform an analysis within and outside of the semiotic. Chouliaraki recommends "[...] an analysis of how meaning making about suffering takes place [...] as a hypermediated accomplishment [...]" together with an analysis of how mediation "[...] brings forth emotions and wishes for engagement with the suffering as an immediate reality for the spectator" (p. 71). These two levels of analysis that Chouliaraki suggests refer to multimodal and critical discourse analysis respectively.

Therefore, an analytics of mediation provides the opportunity to combine

> [...] the critical interest in the production of meaning on [the medium of mediation] - in *difference within the semiotic* - with the regulative function of [the medium of mediation] to shape specific dispositions of viewing and acting - in *difference outside the semiotic*" (*ibid*., emphasis in original).

In other words, multimodality refers to an examination of what is represented in a vacuum, outside of its socio-cultural context; and critical discourse analysis refers to "[...] the analysis of the space-times within which each [instance of mediation] places the encounter between spectator and sufferer and the options for action that this piece makes available for spectators" (*ibid*.). To illustrate this further, it might be helpful to consider the way HIV/AIDS as social suffering is presented in *Buddies* (1985), one of the first films to deal with AIDS in the American film industry. In this movie, spectators follow the life of a gay New Yorker who

volunteers his time supporting another gay man dying of AIDS. A multimodal level of analysis can help us conclude that spectators are presented with the reality of HIV/AIDS as social suffering, the political negligence to take action because of the association of the disease with homosexuality, as well as the social stigma associated with it. A critical discourse level of analysis, though, can allow us to juxtapose what is represented in the movie with the actual socio-cultural context of the place and time of representation. This might enable us to conclude that the movie invites the spectators to respond to social suffering by putting any prejudice they might have against non-heterosexual people aside and to stop treating PLWHA as second class citizens. Another example that illustrates the importance of conducting analysis at both multimodal and critical discourse levels is *Angels in America* (2003). Even though a multimodal analysis of *Angels in America* (2003) allows us to reach a similar conclusion about the way HIV/AIDS as social suffering is represented as with *Buddies* (1985), taking into consideration the socio-cultural context of the place and time of representation might lead to very different conclusions. By promoting an imagery of death and disease, at a place and time where the effectiveness of ARVs ensures a healthy life to PLWH, it can be argued that *Angels in America* contributes to the promotion of social stigma associated with HIV/AIDS as social suffering by perpetuating anachronistic imagery and by encouraging outdated stereotypes associated with the disease. These two examples illustrate the need to deploy both levels of analysis when examining representations of suffering so that not only do we develop an informed understanding of the representation *per se* but, most importantly, we understand the implications of *a* representation. In the remaining part of this section, I present a more detailed analysis of multimodal and critical discourse levels of analysis within the *analytics of mediation* framework.

III. D. 1. Multimodal Analysis

As it is mentioned above, multimodal analysis focuses on examining what Chouliaraki (2006) terms the difference *within* the semiotic. Following the work of Derrida (1982), difference here is not used to signify a social category but a systemic one. It is the interplay between the medium and the representation itself that constitutes the signifying mark. "Meaning making," Chouliaraki (2006) argues, "combines marks that are both oral and visual" (p. 73).[80] Therefore, meaning is not an established entity that yields to be identified; meaning results from the

[80] The visual as a semiotic mode has been extensively discussed by van Leeuwen (2001). See van Leeuwen, T. (2001) 'Semiotics and iconography', in van Leeuwen, T. and Jewitt, C. (eds.) *Handbook of visual analysis*. London: SAGE, pp. 92-118.

difference that emerges when the oral and the visual come together to produce a whole.[81] In other words, when analysing a movie, we cannot focus only on what is said or on what is shown. Rather, we must focus on examining what is said in conjunction with what is shown. Also important in this examination is the realisation that signs are not fixed in place and time. Howarth (2000), also building on the work of Derrida on the *iterability* of the mark/sign, suggests that "[...] traces of signs exhibit a minimal sameness in the different contexts in which they appear, yet are still modified in the new contexts in which they appear" (p. 41). The difference within the semiotic, then, refers to the ability of the mark to at once change contexts and be identifiable. Such an approach is significant mainly in comparative studies. For example, the difference within the semiotic can be focused on when analysing how responses to social suffering are evoked differently when reading Randy Shilts's *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (1987) compared to when watching the TV film adaptation by Roger Spottiswoode *And the Band Played On* (1993). In the non-fictional book, social suffering is reported in the form of investigative journalism focusing on governmental negligence during the period from the outbreak of the epidemic until the death of actor Rock Hudson. In the TV adaptation, however, not only are we presented with facts and figures of the history of AIDS - similar to what the book does - but we are also presented with characters and their stories. In both works we are presented with the very same period of suffering. What is more, we are presented with the same period of suffering narrated from very similar perspectives; the creators' perspectives, if not agendas, about the representation of suffering seems to be more or less the same.

Chouliaraki (2006) writes that "[...] the semiotic code in which each medium inscribes the content of the event radically alters the meaning of suffering in it" (p. 73). How does the response to these representations, though, differ depending on the medium used? How are audiences invited to respond to this form of suffering when, in addition to the facts of the book, they are presented with characters they can recognise as their *own*? To engage in an analysis of the ways in which immediacy between the spectator and the spectacle of social suffering is to engage in multimodal analysis. As I discussed earlier, an essential principle of multimodal analysis is that image and language, what is shown and what is said, do not produce meaning

[81] The arguments presented here emerge from the semiotic tradition of de Saussure, Derrida, and van Leeuwen, among others. For an expanded discussion of the semiotic approach see Knowles (2014). Even though Knowles's work is primarily focused on the use of semiotic analysis in the analysis and practice of theatre, the first part of the book presents an excellent survey of theories of meaning. Knowles, R. (2014) *How theatre works*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

when analysed in isolation. Instead, a multimodal analysis allows for an examination of the interaction between the two. Chouliaraki further confirms that "[...] the image and language of suffering follow a systematic pattern of co-appearance and combination, which organises the potential for the representation of suffering into the generic conventions of the [medium of representation]" (p. 74). Therefore, focusing on specific generic features can provide a detailed analysis of how a relationship between the spectator and the spectacle of social suffering is created.

The three generic features that Chouliaraki focuses on are: the mode of representation, the correspondence between verbal narrative and image, and the aesthetic quality of each medium of representation. I also wish to focus on these three features as I take them to be potentially significant in the construction of feelings - often feelings of pity - between spectator and spectacle.[82] The first feature, *mode of representation*, refers to the point of view that is used to communicate instances of social suffering, as well as the choice of medium that is used to mediate such suffering. Let us consider the following *scenarii* to better illustrate the significance of mode of representation as a generic feature. Scenario 1 refers to a narrative of HIV/AIDS as social suffering which is the main theme of a movie and is narrated from the point of view of a white, healthy looking, heterosexual man. Scenario 2 refers to a narrative of HIV/AIDS as social suffering which is the main theme of a documentary that follows the hardships of a black, drug-addict, homosexual and homeless man. The difference in responses to HIV/AIDS as social suffering each scenario can evoke to the spectators is what makes the mode of representation a significant point of analysis.

The second feature, the *correspondence between verbal narrative and image*, is equally important because, as Chouliaraki explains, "[...] each semiotic mode has its own logic of producing meaning, its own meaning-making affordances, and, thus, its own mechanism for mediating suffering" (p. 76). Analysing images can offer an insight into how suffering is portrayed, while an analysis of language reveals how suffering is narrated. Examining the interrelation between the two allows a deeper analysis into the possible responses a cultural product can elicit from spectators. When, for example what is said *is* what is shown, the

[82] As mentioned earlier, I have adapted Chouliaraki's methodology to cater for the generic features of the media of representation that are relevant in this study. Chouliaraki focused exclusively on news reports; I have a broader focus that examines cultural productions including films, TV series, works of fiction and non-fiction, among others.

narrative creates a sense of factual representation of social suffering which is often regarded by spectators as authentic and, therefore, it is unlikely that they will challenge it. To produce a more emotional relationship between spectators and spectacle, representations often use language of storytelling while the visual depictions of it are less factual and more sensational. Finally, to elicit an ideological response to spectators and, therefore, call for action, the relationship between verbal and visual creates associations that are based on "[...] conventional knowledge and value, such as the doxa of 'us' as humane and 'them' as savages" (p. 80, emphasis in original). Needless to say, that this last relationship between verbal and visual semiotic modes is the most significant one in that it contributes to what I discussed in chapter II as *hegemonic othering*.

The last generic feature that is the focus of a multimodal analysis is the *aesthetic quality* of the medium of representation. While referring to Boltanski's (1999) topics of suffering, Chouliaraki (2006) advises that the "[...] aesthetic quality describes the overall semiotic effect of the [medium of representation] in terms of [...] *pamphleteering*, *philanthropy*, and *sublimation*" (p. 81, emphasis in original). Pamphleteering refers to the emergence of feelings of anger against the one who inflicts suffering on others, philanthropy refers to the identification the spectators feel with the one who helps the sufferers, and sublimation refers to the generation of "[...] reflexive contemplation of the conditions of human misery" (*ibid*.). By analysing these generic features, by applying in other words, multimodal analysis on representations of suffering, we are enabled to identify how single representations of suffering can present, or even invoke, universal values toward suffering. To examine, though, what these values are, as well as the processes that allow spectators to make these values their own, we must apply critical discourse analysis and examine what was earlier termed as difference *outside* the semiotic.

III. D. 2. Critical Discourse Analysis

Other than the differences *within* the semiotic that are responsible for the generation of meaning within the mode of representation that is focused on, there are differences *outside* the semiotic which can shed light to the socio-political structures of our world. Chouliaraki (2006) argues that this difference "[...] lies in the asymmetries of power that traverse the social world and the historical and political relationships within or between social groups" (p. 83). Echoing the work of Foucault on the relationship between discourse analysis and critical research as well as the work of Volosinov and Bakhtin on the relationship between meaning and power, Chouliaraki

is preoccupied with analysing how mediation of suffering contributes to establishing the values of the West as *universal* values.[83] What discourse analysis allows scholars to achieve is to combine the study of mediation, how representation happens, with the study of power, what the role of representation is in the workings of power.

Here, I cannot avoid mentioning the contribution of Foucault (1972, 1982) in understanding meaning and power as one unified entity. According to Foucault, because the social positions that allow meaning to occur are formed by power, meaning-making comes from a position of power. As such, meaning is not only created but also affirmed by power which is what transforms meaning to truth. Chouliaraki (2006) clarifies that this "[...] is not the truth but always a truth *effect* - a truth that seeks to reconstitute and re-establish power in meaning" (p. 83, emphasis in original). This is important because it allows us to clarify that the meanings communicated through representation cannot cause social, economic, political inequalities; rather, they can reflect and reinforce them. It validates, in other words, scholarly investigations of representation as a means of doing social and cultural studies.

Finally, before proceeding with a discussion of the features of critical discourse analysis that are relevant to this study, I should mention the principle of the multi-functional perspective (Hasan, 2000) and its relationship with critical discourse analysis. This principle suggests that semiotic modes effectuate more than one function. These functions include semiotic functions, social functions, and textual functions. Semiotic and textual functions refer to differences *within* the semiotic and were discussed as features of multimodal analysis in the previous section. Social functions refer to the *ideational* and *interpersonal* functions: the need to "[...] name and represent the world [...]" as well as the need to "[...] interact and relate to other people [...]", respectively (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 84, emphasis in original). These two functions constitute the essence of critical discourse analysis as they emphasise the role of mediation in representing reality and orienting audiences.

By critical discourse analysis, in this study, I refer to the study of mediations of suffering and their ability to signify relationships of power that govern our societies. In particular, I focus on

[83] Howarth (2000) provides a detailed discussion on the poststructuralist's position on discourse analysis and critical research. Howarth, D. (2000) *Discourse*. Buckingham: Open University Press. Fairclough (2003) offers an in-depth study of the Russian tradition of Volosinov and Bakhtin regarding examining meaning and power from a semiotics perspective. Fairclough, N. (2003) *Doing discourse analysis: Textual analysis for social scientists*. London: Routledge.

"[...] the power of [media of representation] to classify the world into categories of 'us' and 'the other' and orientate (or not) the spectator towards this suffering 'other'" (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 84, emphasis in original). As I discussed above, differences *outside* the semiotic serve two functions: the ideational through representation and the interpersonal through orientation. With regard to representations, critical discourse analysis focuses on the construction of narratives in relation to a specific space-time that signify the difference between safety and danger as well as between action and indifference. Spatial proximity and distance, for example, relate to danger, whereas temporal proximity and distance relate to action. Within this framework, if the narrative locates suffering in a remote area, spectators are less likely to feel danger, while suffering located in close spatial proximity to the spectators is likely to create feelings of danger. Similarly, if the narrative presents suffering in the past tense, it is unlikely that spectators will feel an urge to take action; however, if suffering is presented in the present tense, spectators are likely to feel for the sufferers or even take action on their behalf.

According to Chouliaraki, semiotic choices regarding the representation of space involve "[...] *visual* editing, *camera* position, *graphic* specification, and *linguistic reference* [...]", while choices regarding the representation of time involve "[...] *visual intertextuality,* and *linguistic reference* [...]" (p. 86, emphasis in original). Because the cultural products that I focus on in this study are all produced and concerned with the anglophone global North, the typology of semiotic choices regarding the representation of space are not relevant to this study. However, both visual intertextuality and linguistic references with regard to the representation of time are important given that representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering are either concerned with the past, in what is known as retrovision genres, or with the present, in the form of documentaries or narratives that concern the present time. With regard to the second function of differences outside the semiotic, the interpersonal functions, I should focus on orientations, and in particular, the category of agency. In establishing social relationships of suffering, there are two aspects of agency that should be considered. These refer to the agency of the sufferers themselves and the agency of those who are in contact with the sufferers, but do not experience suffering. Chouliaraki explains that the two aspects of agency "[...] come to shape how the spectators themselves are invited to relate to the suffering - that is, if they are supposed to simply watch, feel for, or act in a practical way on the 'other's misfortune" (p. 85, emphasis in

original).[84] Here, rather than focusing on the relationship between space-time, we are concerned with the relationship of those who are *our own* in contrast to those who are Others. The former do not have a fixed identity; rather, they are those with whom we identify as similar.

When one examines the role and significance of agency, they ought to consider both the agency of the sufferers as well as the agency of those participants who are present at the scene of suffering but do not experience physical suffering themselves. Chouliaraki confirms that the action with which the category of agency is preoccupied is, what she calls, "[...] action at a distance - that is action associated with the practices of the agora and the theatre" (p. 88). Action of the agora, here, refers to the spectator's reflection and final judgement over the sufferer's condition, while action of the theatre refers to the degree of participation of the spectator in the mediated suffering. In "[...] the agora model of action at a distance, the what to do *vis-à-vis* the sufferer depends on the representation of the sufferer as properly humane [...]" (p. 90). Spectators are less likely to switch off if the sufferers are represented *like us,* while it is less likely that they contemplate suffering that involves *Others* as sufferers. What is of significance, therefore, in the methodological analysis of representation, is "[...] a process of identity construction that endows sufferers with the power to say or do something about their condition, even if this power is simply the power to evoke and receive the beneficiary action of others" (p. 88). Chouliaraki terms this process humanisation. The sufferer whose condition is more likely to maintain the interests of the spectator is a sufferer who is active in that they speak, if not *do* something, about their suffering.

Both Butler (2004) and Spivak (1998) discuss the significance of the sufferer's ability to actively engage the spectator with their suffering. Butler argues that this creates a didactic effect on the spectator, while Spivak suggests that those who are unable to act on their own suffering are bound to be regarded as Others. Both the verbal and the visual modes of representation, Chouliaraki (2006) advises, contribute to the humanisation of sufferers. Personal narratives that focus on the experience of suffering are regarded more engaging than narratives full of numbers and statistics. Similarly, generic visual representations where the sufferer is placed among the public are less engaging than shots that are well-focused on the sufferer's gaze. In

[84] We should not forget, here, that the term Others signifies a shifting and graded category. It ranges from those whom audiences might believe deserving to suffer and for which we, spectators, should not feel pity to those who appear to be similar to us and for whom we could take practical action to help them with their suffering.

> [...] the theatrical model of action at a distance, where the witnessing of suffering occurs via emotions, the what to do has a different twist. The witnessing of suffering is now mediated by the dynamic of social relationships that are already at play in the scene of suffering [...] (p. 90).

Here, we should consider a scene of suffering comprising of two actors: the sufferer and one who either benefits or persecutes the sufferer. The significance of the latter is reduced in their function is to regulate the emotion of the spectator towards the represented suffering. Encouraging the spectator's feelings to identify with the ones of the benefactor can lead to acts of care. On the other hand, encouraging the spectator's emotions to identify with the ones of the persecutor can often lead to demands for civil rights. Neither of these responses can occur, though, unless the spectator identifies the sufferer as *one of us*.

In this section, I presented an adaptation of Chouliaraki's (2006) *analytics of mediation*. In doing so, I provided a methodological approach for the analysis of representations of suffering in cultural productions. This methodological approach focuses our attention on meaning making through differences that occur *within* and *outside* the semiotic. It allows us to investigate three questions: Firstly, how representation is produced within the medium of representation. Secondly, how the result of this representation can relate (or not) to the spectator and, lastly, how representations of suffering result in the development of a *universal* morale toward suffering. Through multimodal and critical discourse analysis, this methodological approach

> [...] enables us to ask questions about the ways in which [representations of suffering] are put together in language and image and about how the visual and linguistic articulations of news construe the space-times and forms of agency that connect spectators and sufferers in relation to specific [representations] of suffering (p. 93).

To examine how representations of suffering are put together, we have to analyse the modes of representation, the relationship between the verbal and the visual, as well as the aesthetic quality of the representation.

To examine how representations of suffering connect spectators and sufferers, we must examine the relationship of space-time between the spectator's reality and the represented situations of suffering. Also, such a study can only benefit from analysing agency as a feature of both the sufferer and the other agents present in the scene of suffering. In the case of the former, active sufferers tend to elicit stronger connections with the spectators than sufferers

who do not speak about or act on their suffering. Regarding the agents who interact with the sufferers, based on the type of interaction - benefactors or persecutors - spectators are likely to respond by means of philanthropy or by demanding justice respectively. Central to the concept of agency is the humanisation of the sufferer which is achieved via verbal and visual modes. Storytelling and focused *en face* camera shots are more likely to evoke a likeness between spectator and sufferer while reporting narratives and generic camera shots are more likely to establish the sufferer as the Other. Why is it, though, that spectators often do not develop feelings of pity toward the sufferers? Why is it that so many representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering have not achieved to subvert social stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS? To address these questions, one needs to take into account not only the mediation of suffering, but also the audiences of spectacles of suffering.

III. D. 3. From Reader Response to Viewer Response Theory

Within the tradition of literary criticism, Stanley Fish (1982) worked on what is termed social reader-response theory. Fish argued against the existence of individual responses to literature. Instead, he suggests that individuals belong to communities and, as such, their responses are products of the interpretive community they belong to. This has also been a recurring argument within media studies (Cohen, 1991). In particular, scholars such as Fiske (1988) support the notion of meaning-giving being closely related to one's social context. In particular, Fiske argues that "[the] viewer makes meanings and pleasures from television that are relevant to his or her social allegiances at the moment of viewing" (p. 247). Here, Fiske supports the view that although there is no fixed meaning attached to a cultural product, individuals do not assign meanings to such works independently from one another. Rather, Fiske highlights the importance of one's sociocultural context and its impact on meaning making. Cohen (1991) further works on the issue of polysemic interpretation and analyses the significant of relevance, that is the relevance of one's identity or social position in determining interpretation/reading of text. Relevance, for Cohen, becomes "[...] the meeting place of the viewer's experiences with and knowledge of [...]" (p. 445) the focus of representation which, in turn, enables what Fish (1982) discussed as interpretive communities to form.

According to Fish (1982), readers are not necessarily aware of the fact that they activate specific interpretive strategies, nor are they necessarily aware that such strategies are shared among other people as well. In other words, *interpretive community* refers to strategies that are deployed when attacking a text by an individual; yet these strategies are not subjective, but

shared by the group of people with which the reader identifies. Tyson (2014) explains that "[these] interpretive strategies always result from various sorts of institutionalised assumptions [...] about what makes a text a piece of literature [...] and what meanings we are supposed to find in it" (p. 176). By means of analogy, we can argue that spectators of suffering also deploy certain interpretive strategies based on assumptions about what constitutes suffering for them, as well as about what meanings are to be attached to the sufferer. This approach could indeed help us answer the questions with which the previous section ended. Perhaps spectators do not develop feelings of pity towards PLWHA because the interpretive community they belong to do not recognise PLWHA as, indeed, sufferers.

Tyson further notes that "[...] interpretive communities aren't static; they evolve over time. And readers can belong, consciously or unconsciously, to more than one community at the same time, or they can change from one community to another at different times in their lives" (*ibid*.). This cannot but remind us the discussion in section II. C. There, I used Bourdieu and Duggan's theories to explain the ways in which hegemony creates power relations between the one exerting power and the one over whom power is exerted. Therefore, the fact that a PLWHA who also happens to be an assimilationist gay rights activist does not develop feelings of pity toward other PLWHA is also not surprising, according to social reader-response theory. This is because, as we saw in the discussion about hegemonic homonormativity (section II. C. 3), one can identify as HIV positive, non-heterosexual, and still assume a dominant position over another HIV positive, non-heterosexual who does not feel the need to repent for their sexuality and sexual behaviour. When this is applied to spectacles of suffering, it results in situations like *Queer as Folk*, which not only did it not contribute to the elimination of HIV-related stigma, but on the contrary, it can be argued that it contributed to the intensification of stigmatisation of HIV positive people. In III. D. 4. c. below, I provide a detailed analysis of *Queer as Folk*, applying the adapted version of Chouliaraki's *analytics of mediation*. For now, though, suffice is to argue that social reader-response theory - or in this case, social viewer-response theory - provides an understanding as to why so many representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering have not achieved to subvert social stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS.

Fish's (1982, pp. 322 - 329) experiment adds another layer to the discussion in this project. To prove his argument, he ended one of his classes by writing on the board the names of some

linguists his students were studying at the time. The board at the end of the first class looked like this:

Jacobs-Rosenbaum

Levin

Thorne

Hayes

Ohman (?)

When students from the second class arrived, Fish explained that they were looking at a religious poem, written in the 1800s, and he asked them to analyse it then and there. Indeed, the students analysed in great detail what they believed to be a poem. They identified all the biblical references, as well as the hidden meanings of the 'poem'. Fish's argument was illustrated: a poem becomes a poem when its readers engage interpretive strategies which are relevant to poems. Once again, by means of analogy it emerges that what differentiates fictional from factual suffering is not a set, predetermined universal quality; rather, this depends on the interpretive strategies the viewers activate when they encounter the spectacle. In turn, if the interpretive strategies are dependent on the interpretive community the viewers belong to, it is clear that what two people identify as suffering will not be the same; their view will depend on their schemata which, in turn, are shaped by their socio-cultural context.

Social viewer-response theory, much like social reader-response theory, is not yet another map to guide our understanding of narratives of any form or medium. By arguing that there is no one meaning to be discovered, the process of meaning-making is reversed. Rather than identifying the meaning that is attached to a given narrative, it allows us to examine the interpretive strategies a viewer might use, when they attach meaning to a narrative. In turn, this gives us an insight into the interpretive communities that viewers belong to. In other words, by analysing cultural products and the possible meanings that are attached to them, we get a better understanding of the audiences' communities. Chouliaraki's methodological approach focuses on both the medium of representation and the spectator. With social viewer-response theory, we can now examine the relation between the two. In the section that follows, I examine how the representation and mediation of HIV/AIDS as social suffering contributes to the *hegemonic othering* of PLWHA.

III. D. 4. Hegemonic Othering and Mediation of Suffering

In chapter II, I concluded that *hegemonic othering* with regard to HIV/AIDS is exercised by three groups: firstly, by heterosexual individuals who believe that their lifestyle is such that the possibility of them experiencing HIV/AIDS-related suffering is minimal; secondly, by non-heterosexual individuals who are HIV negative and also believe that their lifestyle is such that they are in no danger of experiencing HIV/AIDS-related suffering; and, thirdly, by HIV positive individuals who, post-HIV diagnosis, live a homonormative life, a life that celebrates heteronormative ideals but is lived by non-heterosexual ones. In this chapter, so far I have situated HIV/AIDS within the context of social suffering by focusing on the way HIV/AIDS has been represented and mediated as social suffering. I have also adapted Chouliaraki's (2006) *analytics of mediation,* and I have presented a methodological approach which combines multimodal and critical discourse analysis in the examination of social suffering as represented and mediated through cultural products.

The question that I am about to focus on in this section is how representation and mediation of HIV/AIDS as social suffering contributes to the *hegemonic othering* of PLWHA by the three groups of people that I mentioned above. Here, in other words, I investigate what the conditions are, both *within* and *outside* the semiotic, that encourage audiences to assume a position of power over PLWHA and promote social discrimination against them by *othering* them. To do so, I have organised this section into three parts. The first part examines HIV/AIDS as social suffering in *The Hours* (2002), the second in *Chemsex* (2015), and the third in *Queer As Folk* (2000-2005). Each of these parts assumes a different group of audiences. The first one assumes heteronormative heterosexual audiences, the second one homonormative HIV negative non-heterosexual audiences, and the third one homonormative HIV positive non-heterosexual audiences. In doing so, I do not aim to suggest that each cultural product was specifically produced with a particular type of audience in mind; nor do I suggest that the audience of each of these productions belongs to a particular category by sharing common characteristics. Such a claim would require a different type of research, one that would be appropriate for an audience studies project. Rather, the rationale for doing so is related to the way in which suffering is represented in each one of these works. As it will be discussed in the subsequent sections, in *The Hours* (2002) scenes of HIV/AIDS as social suffering involve an HIV positive man and a heteronormative heterosexual woman, *Chemsex* (2015) involves HIV positive men within the context of gay men's culture, and in *Queer As Folk* (2000-2005) HIV/AIDS as social

suffering is presented through the relationship between two HIV positive men, one who is very much assimilated into mainstream culture and another one who is not.

By combining the methodological approach of this chapter with the theoretical framework of chapter II, I argue that representation and mediation matter and are instrumental in the establishment and promotion of *hegemonic othering* against PLWHA. For each one of the three cultural products in focus, I conduct a multimodal analysis of the mode of representation, of the relationship between the verbal and the visual, as well as of the aesthetic quality of the production. I also analyse each work from a critical discourse analysis perspective by focusing on the space-time relationship between the spectator and the spectacle, the levels of agency of the sufferer and the other actors who are present in the scenes of suffering, as well as the degree of humanisation of the sufferer.

III. D. 4. a. *The Hours* (2002): The End of Suffering is Death

The film adaptation of Michael Cunningham's Pulitzer prize-winning novel *The Hours* (1998) premiered in 2002 as a psychological drama film, received many international awards and was nominated for even more. The plot centres around three women of different generations whose sole connection is the novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) by Virginia Woolf. Both the book and the movie have received critical acclaim for bringing intergenerational problems women face in our societies to the fore. My focus here is the plot concerning one of the three main characters of the movie, Clarissa Vaughan whom we follow while she is getting ready to host a party in honour of Richard, a poet and author, who appears to be Clarissa's former lover and current friend, and who is the recipient of a major literary award. Richard, who lives with AIDS, tells Clarissa that he is not interested in receiving this award as he believes that it is given to him because of his illness rather than his talent. The next encounter between these characters finds Clarissa going to pick up Richard to take him to her place for the ceremony and subsequent party she has been preparing for him, but she finds him determined to end his life. After he delivers the famous "but I have to face the hours" line, referring to all the time he has to live with AIDS, he throws himself out of the window in front of Clarissa.

By applying the methodological approach I proposed earlier, we can observe that, at the multimodal analysis level, the relationship between verbal and visual, as well as the overall aesthetic quality of the movie contribute to the emergence of feelings of pity toward the PLWHA, but the mode of representation does not. The filming of the two scenes of Clarissa

and Richard's encounters allow the spectators to focus on the suffering of the latter. Both visually, through close up-front shootings, and verbally, through focusing on him sharing his story of suffering rather than being presented with statistics about AIDS and death, spectators are more likely to focus on Richard's suffering. Similarly, with regard to the aesthetic quality of the film, spectators are not only given the opportunity to connect emotionally with the sufferer, but they are also encouraged to identify his suffering as authentic. Clarissa's story is embedded in layers of mediation. We watch a film about the life of Clarissa who is the main character of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). However, the cinematography of the scenes with Richard and the fact that they are both set in the present day - their story is set in the year 2001 - makes their story believable. Indeed, Richard and Clarissa could be two contemporary New Yorkers. So far, it seems that the film creates the conditions for spectators to create a connection to HIV/AIDS.

However, reflecting on the mode of representation, we can notice that Richard, as the embodiment of HIV/AIDS, is not the only character who is affected by HIV/AIDS. The way Clarissa's day is presented in the movie suggests that HIV/AIDS has affected not only Richard's life but also her own life as well as the lives of the ones near her. Her relationships with her partner and friends are affected by Richard's suffering, as well. The significance of this is that even though we, as audiences, have the chance to learn about life with AIDS from the person who experiences suffering, we are also directed to see HIV/AIDS as a condition that affects the sufferer's social environment, as well. In turn, we are made to believe that Richard's death will, ironically, have a positive influence on the life of everyone else. The HIV/AIDS hardships of the one, in other words, is presented as a burden for the lives of the many.

Although it should be highlighted that this is a subjective reading of the film and that one ought to be wary of extrapolating that the dynamic between Richard and Clarissa is suggestive of a broader framing of PLWHA and their friends and family, it should also be noted that shifting sympathy is not a pattern found only on this occasion, nor is it a pattern restricted in fictional narratives. Zipperstein (1995) analyses criminal law defences and explains that shifting sympathy - or blame - toward the person in focus is a widely used technique in criminal law narratives. With regard to fiction, Moody (2006) focuses on nineteenth-century narrative techniques and identifies shifting sympathy as a pattern impacting the judgement of audiences with regard to what is right or wrong, ethical or necessary, socially just or illogical. Perhaps a more relevant analysis is this of Kaplan (2011) who, while analysing media coverage of the

war in Iraq, observes "[...] a deliberate shifting away from empathising with Iraqi citizens in favour of a support for the sacrifices made by U.S. troops stationed in Iraq" (p. 265). With regard to HIV/AIDS, shifting suffering is a pattern that is observed as early as in the movie - or its theatrical adaptation - *An Early Frost* (1985) whereby the attention of the movie moves from the suffering of the HIV positive character, Michael Pierson, to the suffering experienced by his lover and his family whose lives are turned upside down as a result of Michael's illness. In other words, although critics may suggest that *The Hours* is simply depicting one character and his experience of the disease and, as such, it cannot be taken as a generalised depiction of the way HIV/AIDS is regarded by society, it is equally important to acknowledge that the approach of shifting sympathy to Clarissa rather than Richard is a pattern that is found across works of fiction and non-fiction alike.

Conducting a multimodal analysis on the representation of suffering in *The Hours*, helps us reach a better understanding as to why seemingly realistic and emotional representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering might not induce feelings of pity, let alone ideological change. From a critical discourse analysis perspective, a similar conclusion can be reached. It is true that the way Richard's suffering is presented achieves him being portrayed as a humanised character.[85] Both the fact that he shares a personal story and the way his scenes are filmed, that is, sensational background music and slow pace, ensure that he is presented as authentic, real character with whom spectators are likely to identify. Set in 2001 in New York City, the story of Clarissa and Richard does not aim to provide a vision into how life was at a distant time and/or at a distant place. Given that the film was released in 2002, this story can be perceived as an authentic possible rendering of contemporary life. This, inevitably, creates a link between audiences and spectacle. Therefore, whatever the outcome with regard to audiences' emotions toward the sufferer and their suffering, these are going to be intensified given the close space-time proximity they have with the story. However, what can be considered as problematic with situating this story in 2001 is that medical advancements with regard to HIV/AIDS, and in particular the introduction of ART which started in 1996, have been completely disregarded

[85] Those who watched the film or read Cunningham's book and were familiar with Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* would also recognise the analogues between Cunningham's Richard Brown and Woolf's Septimus Smith. Both characters suffered an illness that kept them isolated from society. Septimus suffers from combat-induced PTSD, while Richard suffers from AIDS. They both jump out of a window as a means of escaping societal oppression. A superficial reading of this analogue supports the humanisation of Richard; someone who is afflicted PTSD is paralleled to someone who contracted AIDS and can, therefore, elicit the audience's sympathy.

from the narrative of the movie. In an age when life with HIV is a reality, the film eternalises an anachronistic image of life with AIDS suggesting that the only viable solution is death.[86]

On the aspect of agency, here I focus on both the sufferer, Richard, and the people who are present in his suffering but not physically suffering themselves. Richard can be perceived to be a passive agent who, rather than fighting through his condition, he has succumbed to it and, in the end, commits suicide. The opposite is true for Clarissa. She is presented as a more active agent who neglects parts of her own life to offer Richard the care and support she believes he needs.[87] As I discussed earlier, audiences tend to disassociate from passive agents; they tend to identify more with active ones. Therefore, while presented with a passive sufferer, it is less likely that they will identify with him. On the contrary, spectators are more likely to connect with Clarissa which might further alienate them from the PLWHA. If we accept that Clarissa represents mainstream society (by being part of it), and follow her narrative whereby she sacrifices parts of her life to try and help the passively suffering Richard who not only does not take advantage of her help but takes his own life, it appears unlikely that spectators would develop any feelings of pity for the suffering Richard; it is more likely that they would develop such feelings of pity for the non-physically suffering Clarissa whose life suffers because of Richard's suffering. Both the fact that the movie perpetuates an anachronistic imagery of death related to PLWHA and the fact that Richard has been presented as a passive agent do not provide spectators with opportunities to identify with the sufferer, let alone reflect on how their actions can contribute to other people's suffering. As such, *The Hours* appears not to have managed to address the issue of HIV/AIDS as social suffering in a manner that fully engages spectators. By providing them with more opportunities to identify with Clarissa, they can be made to perceive HIV/AIDS as a burden to society as a whole and view death as both the only option to end suffering and a way to alleviate the burden of society.

[86] Now, a further problematisation comes into play: Cunningham's choice of HIV/AIDS as an analogue to combat-induced PTSD. As I argue in note 85, such an analogue can be read as Cunningham's attempt to present AIDS as the contemporary equivalent of soldiers' PTSD. However, the fact that AIDS is culturally perceived as a self-inflicted disease resulting from personal pleasure while combat-induced PTSD is the result of noble actions militates against sympathy.

[87] Here, the divergence with regard to the relationship between Septimus Smith and Clarssa Dalloway and the one between Richard Brown and Clarissa Vaughn is also significant and further contributes to the audience's identification with Clarissa Vaughn. Not only do Woolf's characters never meet, but their roles in terms of their agency are reversed. Clarissa Dalloway is the one who appears to be a passive agent, absorbed in her own world, while Septimus Smith has actively experienced the world. The contrast between Woolf's passive Clarissa - active Septimus and Cunningham's active Clarissa - passive Richard further contributes to the audience's disassociation with Richard's suffering.

III. D. 4. b. *Chemsex* (2015): HIV/AIDS as Deviance

A collection of confessional interviews, footage from the London 'underground' scene where men have sex with other men while on drugs, as well as voice over journalistic-type of narration, *Chemsex* (2015) is a VICE media documentary film that "[...] tells the stories of gay men whose lives have been affected by the crisis" (VICE, 2015). *Chemsex* has received controversial responses partly because it is directed by two straight men, and partly because it situates chemsex, the sexual activity in which individuals engage under the influence of stimulant drugs, within a narrative of crisis. I am interested in focusing on *Chemsex* because it claims to discuss gay men's lives under contemporary social, cultural, political, and financial situations and, thus, promotes a certain image of gay life as established commonplace. HIV/AIDS is also depicted as part of contemporary gay life commonplace. Hence, I am analysing the representation of HIV/AIDS as social suffering in the documentary by applying multimodal and critical discourse analysis and exploring what kinds of responses this documentary film may induce from audiences. Taking all three features of multimodal analysis into account, it emerges that HIV/AIDS is represented as a symptom of deviant behaviour. HIV/AIDS is represented both by means of confessional narratives from PLWHA and through the narrator's voice over. Therefore, HIV/AIDS is presented not only as a real condition in some people's lives, but also as a condition that merits journalistic investigation. Also, the way HIV/AIDS is introduced in the documentary may lead audiences to believe that it is the inevitable dead-end for any gay man who engages in non-monogamous sex. The documentary begins with the narrator telling us that if we use Grindr,[88] "[...]within four conversations we will be introduced to chemsex, and within eight conversations we will be introduced to slamming [...]."[89] Soon after, we are introduced to figures related to new daily HIV diagnoses in the UK, and later on we are introduced to the concept of bug chasing, HIV negative men actively asking HIV positive ones to infect them.

The mode of representation of HIV/AIDS as social suffering in *Chemsex* is undoubtedly one of sex panic and moral hysteria. The verbal and visual components of the documentary further attest to that. The combination of actual footage from the London gay chemsex scene with particular emphasis on drug use and the confessional interviews of users who are under the influence of drugs while being interviewed distorts HIV/AIDS from a condition of social

[88] Grindr is a widely used dating app for gay men.
[89] Slamming refers to the act of injecting methamphetamine.

suffering to both the cause and effect of illicit behaviour. The creators explain that they wanted to show the effects of homophobic societies in the lives of gay men and, therefore, to elicit feelings of anger from the audiences toward the heteronormative structures of our societies. However, reviews of the film reveal that the opposite has been achieved. Tim Robey (2015) writes in *The Telegraph* that "[...] many promiscuous gay men would prefer to know they have HIV than worry about getting it. Some even seek it out. This is a reckless strain on national health resources, of course [...]". Robey's review is not surprising coming from the right-wing *Telegraph.* However, Paul Flynn (2015) of *The Guardian* also proves a rather *othering* account of the documentary, despite the fact that he is a gay man writing for a liberal press. Although these are two subjective responses to the documentary, they agree that the overall aesthetic quality of this film did not create the conditions for social suffering, to be mediated in a manner that would elicit a connection between audiences and spectacle. Suffering in this case is presented as Other. Although it may not be part of the audiences' reality, it appears to be close enough to have the possibility to affect them in an indirect manner. Both the sufferers and their suffering are represented in a manner that further promotes stigmatisation and social discrimination against them.

Examining *Chemsex* from a critical discourse analysis perspective further confirms the disassociation between audiences and spectacle. It also confirms the alienation of the sufferers and their appropriation from victims of societal discrimination to reckless individuals whose suffering is not only self-inflicting, but it is also causing damage to the life and resources of the many. The fact that this is a documentary film situates it within the viewers' immediate reality. Both in terms of space and in terms of time, the film portrays a reality that is in close physical and temporal proximity to the viewer. In this case, this means that the viewers are invited, purposefully or not, to confront the fact that illicit behaviour, including the reckless spreading of HIV/AIDS, is near their doorstep. This can only heighten, rather than supress, the moral and sex panic that surrounds HIV/AIDS. With regard to the agency of the sufferer and the actors that surround the sufferer, the film also fails to present PLWHA in a manner that would make audiences feel for them. PLWHA are presented as passive agents in relation to their suffering. Not only do they not do something to address their situation but, much worse, they engage in further *dangerous* activities such as using drugs and engaging in *risky* sexual behaviours.

Kagan (2018) notes that

> [the] nebulous category of 'risky sex' is not really defined, having a kind of obfuscating effect on people's actual understandings and perceptions of risk; 'risky sex' becomes a euphemism for sex that is morally bad and to be avoided, or sex that inevitably leads to HIV seroconversion" (p. 129, emphasis in original).

Therefore, HIV/AIDS is transformed into the inevitable result of *risky* behaviours; behaviours that are *chosen* by the actors. Not only are audiences not guided to develop feelings of pity toward the PLWHA but, in a manner that reminds us of the social morale of the early 1980s, they are made to identify PLWHA as people who deserve to live with the disease as a means of punishment for their choices. Also, in the scenes where HIV/AIDS narratives of suffering are presented, the only other actors present are the narrators who, we can safely assume from the way they describe the scenes we watch, do not belong to any of the *risky* groups that are represented. As actors, the narrators appear to be active in that they investigate the subculture of chemsex.[90] In doing so, they become the only active agents in the scenes and, as a result, audiences are likely to identify with them. In turn, this creates the impression to audiences that individuals who engage in chemsex are - or should be - an object of examination. This further adds to the old-fashioned belief about the medicalisation of homosexuality which, in turn, views non-heterosexuals as deviant. Given the fact that HIV/AIDS is presented as a characteristic of the chemsex subculture, HIV/AIDS is also perceived as the result of deviant behaviour. Where does this leave the PLWHA in relation to the rest of the society? This documentary film suggests that non-monogamous gay relationships are bound to engage in group sex and drug use which eventually lead to HIV/AIDS. As such, PLWHA are further *othered* by and excluded from both heteronormative and homonormative society. In a period when gay political agendas are pushing for marriage equality and family rights, PLWHA cannot but be presented as deviant. In doing so, *good gays* can prove their allegiance with a society of norms, family values, and Christian ideals.

III. D. 4. c. *Queer As Folk* (2000-2005): Some HIV+ men are better than others/Others

The American edition of *Queer As Folk* (2000-2005), based on the British series of the same title, is the first drama series to portray the lives of gay men and lesbian women that became part of mainstream culture. In chapter II of this study, I focused on *Queer As Folk* when I discussed the portrayal of serodiscordant relationships in Western culture. Here, though, I focus on the portrayal of HIV/AIDS narratives of suffering and, in particular, I focus on how this

[90] Tim Dean (2009) in *Unlimited intimacy: Reflections on the subculture of barebacking* provides a detailed account about how sexual practices, including chemsex, provide a framework for the emergence of subcultures.

suffering is portrayed through the representation of two HIV positive individuals, Ben and Hunter, as well as their challenging relationship. Ben is a university professor of gay studies who appears in the second season of the series and starts dating Michael. At the beginning, the fact that Ben is HIV positive and Michael is HIV negative becomes a central theme of the series, and we follow their attempts to make their relationship work. In season three of the series, Ben finds out that the person who gave him HIV has died. The news finds Ben upset and scared about his own future. Ben, who is already a healthy, very well-built man, begins using steroids and exercises excessively to ensure he remains healthy and strong. Soon, and after Michael's intervention, he stops using steroids but, overall, he continues being obsessed about health and fitness. Not many episodes following Michael's intervention, the couple encounters Hunter, a teenager who is also HIV positive. Hunter, unlike the healthy and affluent Ben, lives on the streets as a male prostitute. Ben develops a special, father-like bond with Hunter and convinces Michael to take Hunter in their house and offer him shelter. During this and the next two seasons, we follow the troubles that the couple faces both as a result of Ben's own insecurities but also because of Hunter's difficult personality. Ben and Hunter are presented in opposing terms, and their relationship is undeniably a difficult one. What messages does this antithesis communicate to the audiences and how might this affect their understanding of and response to HIV/AIDS as social suffering? By examining all three features of multimodal analysis, we understand that the contrasting relationship between the two characters portray two different approaches to HIV as social suffering from the point of view of the sufferers' themselves.

With regard to the mode of representation of suffering, we are presented with a fictional story of two PLWH, and we learn more about how the virus affects them as their relationships with others and between them unfold from episode to episode. However, by the time Hunter appears in the series, Ben has been presented as a martyr-type of character. He is very well educated, has a respectable job, looks healthy and attractive, and lives a fairly normative and quiet life. When the other HIV positive man, Hunter, appears, spectators are bound to contrast him to Ben. Both visually and verbally, these two men appear to be very different. Hunter seems to be maintaining the stereotype that is associated with PLWHA. He looks very thin, appears to be ill all the time, engages in sex work to make a living, sleeps on the streets, and based on the language he uses, audiences can infer that he has not completed basic education, and that he comes from a deprived background. Ben, on the other hand, appears to be completely the opposite. Not only is he an intellectual who knows how to use language elegantly, but his

presence would not suggest he suffers from any health-related condition. Given the socio-political references of the series, referring to real events, all characters, including Ben and Hunter, appear to be realistic. Thus, Ben and Hunter's hardships are also perceived as authentic. Taken these three features of multimodal analysis into account, we can conclude that the conditions around the representation of HIV/AIDS as social suffering in *Queer As Folk* are such that audiences are offered the conditions to create a connection with the sufferers. However, it is also clear that Ben is presented in a more favourable manner. The fact that audiences had more time to connect with him, and that he appears to be - as another character in the series says about him - "perfect, except for one thing" makes him a potentially more likable character than Hunter who embodies all the stereotypes that are associated with PLWHA.

The conclusions that emerge from analysing HIV/AIDS as social suffering in *Queer As Folk* from a critical discourse analysis perspective are not significantly different. Ben is presented as hero while Hunter as a disruptive character who lets his being HIV positive affect not only himself but also the ones around him. As a result, audiences are presented with two versions of PLWHA: one that achieves social recognition and respect by fighting through his condition and living what seems to be a normative life; and another who does not need to conform to a particular lifestyle but embodies a more opportunistic approach to life. One of the main significant features of the series that allows audiences to identify or connect with the characters, including the ones experiencing HIV/AIDS, is the fact that it is set in contemporary time and place. For example, one of the main issues that the series focuses on is Proposition 14, a fictional legislative move that aimed at reducing gay rights and in particular outlawing same-sex marriage, adoption, and other family civil rights which represented a real life proposition that was about to take effect at the time. The campaign against proposition 14 that was part of the storyline of the series coincided with similar political campaigns that were taking place in the US at the time. This created an even stronger connection between audiences and spectacle.

With regard to the sufferers' agency, though, it seems that spectators would be inclined to identify and respond to Ben instead of Hunter. Ben is an active agent who does not let his HIV positive status define his life. We see Ben actively involved in teaching and writing at his position as university professor. We also see him working out regularly and taking care of his nutrition and health habits. On the contrary, Hunter seems to perceive life after infection as worthless of trying. It is clear that he does not have a life-long plan; rather, he has a day-by-

day approach to life. Audiences are more likely to identify with active agents and, therefore, Ben's portrayal stands for a heroic approach to life with HIV. The possible disparity between audiences' reception of the two positive characters becomes maximised when we see how Ben's life becomes unstable as a result of Hunter's passivity. Not only is Hunter presented as someone who has succumbed to his condition, but we also watch his behaviour putting Ben's life in jeopardy. This alienates Hunter even further since Ben's life is a seemingly normative one. If audiences did not know of his HIV status and sexuality, we would assume that he is a very successful heterosexual man living a quiet but fulfilling life. The fact that he has achieved this despite his HIV status is what gives him hero status, a token for homonormative politics. To bring in another character that embodies all the opposite characteristics to the ones Ben stands for could be perceived as an attempt to present audiences with the other side of HIV. However, it does not effectively achieve this. Audiences are likely to appreciate Ben's hardships and are given opportunities to respond to it in a supportive manner, but their response to Hunter is likely to be a negative one. This results in categorising PLWHA into the binary *good gays - bad queers* that I discussed in detail in chapter II.

So far, by conducting a multimodal analysis on three cultural productions, *The Hours* (2002), *Chemsex* (2015), and *Queer as Folk* (2000 - 2005), one concludes that HIV/AIDS-related social suffering is not represented as a socio-medical condition which requires attention. Instead, the way HIV/AIDS is represented suggests that it is a significantly broader issue; one which negatively affects, if not infects, society - meaning heteronormative and homonormative society - at large. In *The Hours*, for example, HIV/AIDS is not only the cause of Richard's misery and suicide; it has also affected all aspects of Clarissa's life. Similarly, in *Chemsex*, HIV/AIDS is situated within a context of sex and moral panic, suggesting that the indecencies of the London underground scene could be a possible threat to mainstream societal structures. Finally, in *Queer as Folk*, audiences are presented with different types of PLWHA, indicating that non-normative lifestyle choices post-HIV diagnosis can negatively affect the lives of other PLWHA as well as those around them. Performing, therefore, multimodal analysis on these works suggests that the PLWHA is not only represented as a marginalised Other, but they are also represented as potentially harmful for society as a whole. Critical discourse analysis, on the other hand, allows us to focus on the communication between what is represented, the spectacle, and the audiences. Here, I focus on the ways in which power relationships between the ones who watch narratives of suffering and those who experience it emerge as a result of representation. Taking *The Hours* as an example and based on the analysis I provide above, it

arises that audiences are more likely to identify not with the sufferer, Richard, but with Clarissa. It is, therefore, anticipated that their response might be one of sympathy toward Richard's HIV/AIDS. However, the fact that Clarissa's life - here we should not forget that Clarissa herself is not HIV positive nor does she appear to live a non-normative life - is also affected and it could lead to audiences believing that by exercising power over PLWHA, they can protect themselves. If, in other words, audiences are HIV negative and live a normative life, they are more likely to identify with Clarissa. In turn, they can spare themselves from experiencing the adverse consequences of HIV/AIDS by *othering* PLWHA and, in extension, those who are likely to contract the virus.

Social discrimination and isolation appears to be a possible response of audiences of *Chemsex*, as well. Here, however, I focus more on the non-heterosexual but normative part of society. In doing so, I do not wish to exclude heterosexual viewers, but given that its release date coincides with political struggles for marriage equality and family rights equality, as well as its theme, I assume that, for the most part, it appealed to non-heterosexual audiences. In *Chemsex*, there are no specific scenes of suffering. As the multimodal analysis I provide above suggests, the entire documentary is a collection of scenes of suffering which associate HIV/AIDS with carelessness, reckless behaviour, and drug use. Here, audiences are more likely to identify with the active agents in the scenes of suffering who, in this case, are the narrators in the form of voice overs. As such, not only are audiences not led to develop feelings of pity toward PLWHA but, quite the contrary, non-heterosexual audiences are led to recognise HIV/AIDS as a result of a behaviour that can potentially marginalise them. We could argue, therefore, that *Chemsex* assumes a didactic role; it teaches non-heterosexual people what they should not do, should they wish to become members of mainstream normative society. It creates, therefore, a dichotomy of *good gays - bad queers* whereby the former should *other* the latter so that they can benefit the merits of being members of mainstream society. The same binary relation of power is created through the representation of HIV/AIDS in *Queer as Folk* with the exception that here this relates to *good HIV positive people - bad HIV positive people*, leading PLWHA to isolate other PLWHA who do not wish to conform to a normative lifestyle.

All three examples above attest to my earlier argument about *hegemonic othering* which, as a symptom of power relationships, is enabled - if not promoted - through representations of suffering. The examples above also support my argument that *hegemonic othering* is not only exercised by heterosexual normative society but also by non-heterosexual HIV negative and

non-heterosexual HIV positive normative society. Such representations, I wish to further argue, are not limited to works of cinema or television but include publicly available meaning-making products that are related to social suffering, in a direct or indirect manner. Examples of such representations include campaigns of political and activist nature that focus on HIV/AIDS *per se* or on aspects of life that are affected by HIV/AIDS. From posters, flyers, and TV ads to political campaigns that include actions to stop HIV/AIDS, my adaptation of Chouliaraki's (2006) *analytics of mediation* can be applied to any form of creation that involves a narrative and is addressed to an audience.

In subsequent chapters, for example, I use the multimodal and critical discourse analysis models that I presented earlier in this chapter to analyse the implications of U=U, a campaign that aims to educate the general public about the fact that HIV cannot be transmitted sexually by a HIV positive person whose viral load is undetectable (Prevention Access Campaign, 2016). In particular, I focus on the narratives used by Bruce Richman, founder of the Prevention Access Campaign, and the person responsible for the U=U message. I also explore activist narratives deployed by celebrities, such as Jonathan Van Ness, from *Queer Eye* (2018 - present). Van Ness has also committed to spreading the U=U message. The adapted version of the *analytics of mediation* I discussed earlier in this chapter allows for a systematic comparison between the way the same message was disseminated to the public. Both Richman and Van Ness communicate meanings and truths in relation to HIV/AIDS using a variety of media. As such, it becomes possible - and as I argue, significant - to examine them from multimodal and critical discourse analysis perspectives so as to better understand the kinds of responses they elicit from their spectators. These, along with representations of HIV/AIDS in television, will be the main focus of the chapters that follow. It is, therefore, important to discuss next the context within which these works were produced. Since they were produced and consumed mainly in the global North, I now turn the discussion on the recent political event that shaped contemporary Western thought and society: the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States. I also need to highlight here that I do not claim to offer a political discussion on matters related to his election, nor do I wish to offer a cultural studies analysis of the conditions that led to his elections.[91] The purpose of the next section is to create a link between the socio-

[91] For a thorough analysis of these, see Brabazon, T., Redhead, S., and Chivaura, R. S. (2019). Reference details in the reference list.

political climate that dominates the West as we move from the second to the third decade of the 21st century, and the ways in which HIV/AIDS as social suffering is represented.

III. E. Mediation of HIV/AIDS as Social Suffering in Post-Trump Culture

In relation to the events of 9/11, Chouliaraki (2006) notes that both representations of suffering and the way spectators respond to these changed after the attacks. After 9/11, suffering was no longer represented in a distance of safety. News reports stopped recycling images of suffering in places where Western spectators may have never even visited which provided them with a sense of safety. Up until that time, suffering was to be experienced by the Other, the savage, the non-Westerner. 9/11 changed this. Representations of suffering involved representations of what was perceived to be *home*. In turn, the West felt the need to respond to those images of suffering, and a sense of togetherness started developing. In reference to the *we are all Americans* headline in the front page of *Le Monde*'s on September 12, 2001, one day after the attacks, Chouliaraki notes that it "[...] is an act of identification made possible by the fact that these attacks were mediated as attacks in what is normally a zone of safety" (p. 11). I have deliberately used the term 'post-Trump culture' in the heading of this section not to mark the historical period following the end of his term. Trump personifies the transition from *we are all Americans* to *make America great again*. Therefore, I identify the transition from a West that feels united and the strength of which lies on the fact that it faces fear and threat as a united whole to a West of separation and disintegration as a symptom, a result of Trump's ascension to the White House. As Brabazon, Redhead, and Chivaura (2019) note, Trump happened. What I am interested in exploring in this study is how representations of suffering changed in post-Trump culture, how the society that brought Trump to power responds to suffering, and how representations of suffering affect those responses.

Trump is a result of, what Brabazon, Redhead, and Chivaura call, a "[...] 'values-driven' movement. These values are nostalgia, nationalism, and colonial order" (p. 121, emphasis in original). These values were established through the promotion of "[r]acism, misogyny, xenophobia, and homophobia [...as] othering strategies to tightly align whiteness and nationalism" (*ibid*.). A quick look into Trump's *Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America* further attests to this climate of *othering*. What appears to be a progressive initiative that

contributes to the end of HIV/AIDS is, in fact, one more instance of the medicalisation of sexuality. The socio-cultural dimensions of HIV/AIDS are not addressed in Trump's plan (Hiers, 2020). The medicalisation of the PLWHA inevitably leads to shame and stigma being associated with PLWHA. The take-away message is as follows: not only is HIV/AIDS presented as a medical condition/result of non-normative lifestyle, but American society will now have to spend American dollars to solve their - the Others' - problems. What is observed here is a deliberate victimisation of mainstream society which, inevitably, leads to the further *othering* of minorities.

The question I explore in the next chapters is whether representations of suffering support or challenge what Samuels (2016) terms "[...] fantasies of victimhood" (p. 7) referring to political strategies of victim identification as a means of promoting conservative paradigms. Referring to Samuels' work on the relationship between victimisation and conservatism, Brabazon, Redhead, and Chivaura argue that "[neoliberal] conservatives apply a reified, twisted, and eugenicist mode of evolutionary theory, whereby the free market - rather than nature - selects winners and losers" (p. 123). The question we need to ask here is who *believes* to be - or is led to believe that is - the victim and who actually *is*. In her discussion on the significance of the 9/11 news reports, Chouliaraki (2006) suggests that

> [...] the description of news discourse becomes, at the same time, a description of acts of identity. The spectators of the news are themselves part of the news narrative, in so far as it puts spectators in the position of voyeurs of the pain of the 'other' [...]. Similarly, sufferers enter the news narrative in various forms of identity, ranging from a number without further specification to a human being almost like 'us'" (p. 11, emphasis in original).

It is through the mediation of suffering that in 2001 the American sense of identity became stronger and further led to a sense of togetherness. By portraying sufferers who look like *us* instead of the Other, suffering reminds Americans of their identity. In turn, it situates them within a unified society that has to be protected not from the suffering Other this time but from the Other who inflicts suffering.

Similarly, the earlier discussion on recent representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering confirms that such representations can create *fantasies of victimhood* whereby audiences are the potential victims of a disease. What makes this even worse for them is that this disease is presented as something that one's actions bring to themselves. Therefore, not only do they have

to suffer from it, but they have to suffer from it without being the ones who have brought it about. My argument here is that the victimisation of the not-really-suffering audience leads to the development of a sense of common identity of the many whose common goal is to banish the actual sufferer. "The majority constructs minorities in a way that is suitable to the powerful, thereby blocking structural change" (Brabazon, Redhead, and Chivaura, 2019, p. 123). The minority, in the case of HIV/AIDS, are PLWHA, who are represented in a way that poses a threat to the well-being of the majority. In turn, the majority is constructed through their common identification and unification under the threat of suffering which can potentially be the result of the Others' real suffering. In other words, false fantasies of victimisation lead to the creation of majorities who, in an attempt to evade suffering, use their power over the ones who actually experience suffering to further ostracize them.

Morris (1997) confirms that when sufferers fall outside our moral community, we treat them as suffering Others but when they fall within our moral community "[...] we employ names like *martyr* or *hero* and inscribe the suffering of our own people within narratives of hallowed sacrifice and epic achievement" (p. 40, emphasis in original). I wish to further Morris's argument and suggest that specific representations of suffering create those moral communities whereby martyrs or heroes are distinguished from suffering Others. Those who suffer in a distance are comfortably situated outside the moral community of those who watch the suffering. Those, though, whose suffering is in close proximity to the audiences' lives and whose suffering can potentially harm or affect the audiences' lives are anxiously situated at the margins of the moral community of those who watch their suffering. The tension that is created between those in the main and those in the margins of these communities is what generates a common cause for those in the main to fight for. The one who experiences suffering appears to be in a position of inflicting suffering to or imposing their suffering on those in the mainstream of society.

III. F. Notes on Methodology

The discussion provided so far in this chapter, as well as the conclusions drawn from the discussions in chapter 2 confirm that cultural representations of HIV/AIDS in visual mainstream media tend to either focus on the early days of the epidemic - what Kagan (2018) terms as 'retrovision' genre, or they focus on a more contemporary representation of how life with HIV/AIDS is at the time these are produced and released. In the present chapter, I briefly

used the methodological approach that I adopt in the analyses that follow to illustrate how multimodal and critical discourse analysis are deployed in this study as well as to argue that recent (that is, from 2000 to 2015) cultural representations of HIV/AIDS insist on depicting PLWHA within narratives of suffering, ignoring the affordances provided by post-1996 medical advances. The chapters that follow provide analyses of contemporary representations of HIV/AIDS and PLWHA in popular culture. In particular, chapter 4 focuses on two TV series and chapter 5 focuses on TV appearances of two activist figures. The decision to divide these two chapters as such is in line with the observation offered above with regard to the two different categories within which representations of HIV/AIDS and of PLWHA fall. Chapter 4 focuses on works of the retrovision genre, while chapter 5 focuses on narratives that discuss life with HIV/AIDS at the present time.

It is also important to note that the decision to select these particular works was driven by availability. In particular, Chapter 4 focuses on the only two anglophone series produced and released in the global North from 2017 until the time of writing the present project. In mainstream media, following the documentary Chemsex (2015) which was discussed in section III. D. 4. b. of this chapter, there has not been another project discussing HIV/AIDS and PLWHA in the present time except for activists who used mainstream media to talk about the U=U campaign. It is for this reason that in chapter 5, an analysis of the narratives offered by two activists is offered. The first part of the chapter provides an analysis of narratives offered by Jonathan Van Ness; the second part focuses on Bruce Richman. For this chapter, the choice of sources was made in such a manner so as to provide a more comprehensive analysis. It acknowledges the potential of celebrity activism in reaching and influencing wide audiences (Majic, 2021), but it also considers important to study narratives provided by grassroots activists. Since 2017, Jonathan Van Ness has been one of the five leads of Netflix's *Queer Eye*, and since 2019 all his public appearances outside the airtime of *Queer Eye* are dedicated to his advocacy work with regard to eliminating stigma against PLWHA. At the time of writing, Van Ness is the only celebrity who addresses HIV/AIDS stigma in every public appearance of his, and this is why his work is included in this project. On the other hand, Richman is the founder of the U=U campaign which made it imperative to include his work in the project. The fact that Chapter 5 includes analyses of the narratives offered by these two activists allows for a deeper understanding of the possibilities offered by the ways in which media affordances can be used.

With regard to applying the methodological framework analysed in sections III. D. 1. and III. D. 2. of this chapter - that is multimodal analysis and critical discourse analysis, the research process was as follows: each episode of the *Pose* (2018 - 2021) and *It's a Sin* (2021) as well as each TV appearance of Van Ness and Richman were treated as one unit of analysis. Here it is important to note with regard to TV appearances of Van Ness and Richman that only the ones that are publicly available (on youtube) were used in this project. These were downloaded in advance to ensure possibilities for future viewing in case they would become unavailable online. Also, print interviews are not included in the analysis in line with the focus of the project on visual media. Each episode and each TV appearance were viewed multiple times. While viewing, notes were taken in light of the relevant aspects of multimodal and critical discourse analyses as per the adaptation of Chouliaraki's (2006) methodological framework that was presented earlier in this chapter. This means that notes were taken with regard to the ways in which the mode of representation (point of view and choice of medium), the correspondence between verbal narrative and image, and the aesthetic quality (from the point of view of multimodal analysis), as well as the spatial and temporal proximity between PLWHA and audience, and the agency and humanisation of PLWHA (from the point of view of critical discourse analysis).

When relevant moments were identified, transcripts were produced which are incorporated in the analyses that follow in chapters 4 and 5 to illustrate the relevant points that are made. Further to this, the presentation of the analyses follows a systematic way whereby each one of the above-mentioned features are analysed in order. In other words, each of the following chapters are divided into two sections, and each section is dedicated to one work. For example, section IV. A. provides an analysis of *Pose (2018 - 2021)*, while section IV. B. provides an analysis of *It's a Sin (2021).* Similarly, section V. A. analyses TV appearances of Jonathan Van Ness, while section V. B. analyses TV appearances of Bruce Richman. Each section has six sub-sections, each focusing one area of analysis, starting from analysing the mode of representation, moving on to an analysis of the correspondence between verbal narrative and image, then to analysing the aesthetic quality, and continuing with an analysis of the spatial and temporal proximity between PLWHA and audience, then an analysis of the agency of PLWHA, and finally an analysis of the degree of humanisation of PLWHA in these work. Finally, each section concludes with a short discussion, bringing together the findings that are presented in the preceding sections.

The process undertaken in this project is in line with Denzin's (2004, pp. 241-242) suggestion about effective steps in conducting a film analysis. Although the following two chapters do not provide analyses of films, Denzin's stages are applicable to the analysis of television. The four suggested stages include: a. watching the works as a whole and noting general comments and impressions about them, b. focusing on specific *foci* while watching each episode again based on the research questions that the study attempts to address, c. conducting a structured microanalysis whereby specific scenes, dialogues, or images are analysed in depth, and d. collecting and presenting the findings of the analyses in a systematic manner. Among others, Denzin (2004) and Mikos (2014, 2018) identify problems in conducting this kind of analysis as well as limitations of this method. With regard to problems, they argue that researchers often have to make a choice between interpreting at the level of the image or interpreting at the level of the text. Although this is a commonly cited problem (Flick, 2018), using the adapted version of Chouliaraki's *analytics of mediation* allows this project to focus on both image and text analysis as well as the way these two relate to one another. With regard to the limitation of using visual media as data, Gillespie and Toynbee (2006) note that they have observed lack of specific methods for analysing visual data. To address this, three features for multimodal and three features for critical discourse analysis have been identified and are used throughout this project. In doing so, the analysis provides a clear framework whereby visual data are analysed systematically and in detail.

III. G. Conclusion

Representation creates a *simulacrum* where roles are reversed and spectators appear as victims of the ones who suffer. The need of neoliberal politics to sustain the development of moral communities through *fantasies of victimhood* enables the further discrimination against the ones who actually suffer. With regard to HIV/AIDS as social suffering, in particular, the one who suffers is discriminated against for their disease attests to a non-normative lifestyle and secondly for the possibility of transferring their suffering to mainstream society. Representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering, therefore, are not passive signifiers of society's response to PLWHA. Representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering actively produce distorted relations of suffering between sufferers and audiences which result in the creation and allocation of positions of power. It is through representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering that *hegemonic othering* is being enacted. What remains to be examined is how post-Trump representations of HIV/AIDS as social suffering support or challenge *hegemonic*

othering against PLWHA. The following chapters aim to answer this question by focusing on and analysing in detail post-Trump cultural products and, in particular, the way HIV/AIDS is mediated. In particular, the following chapters aim to address the following questions:

How is HIV/AIDS as social suffering represented in contemporary cultural productions?

What possibilities do such representations offer to audiences with regard to eliminating HIV/AIDS related stigma?

IV. Queering Hegemony in Contemporary Fictional Narratives

So far in this study, a theoretical framework and a methodological approach for the analysis of HIV/AIDS suffering have been proposed. This chapter focuses on applying the methodological approach that was presented in chapter III on the mediation of HIV/AIDS suffering in FX's *Pose* (2018-2021) and Channel 4's *It's a Sin* (2021). Both sections of the chapter are organised around the six main features of analysis. Three of these features - mode of representation, correspondence between verbal and visual narrative, and the overall aesthetic quality of suffering - are characteristics of multimodal analysis that were presented previously. The other three - spatial and temporal proximity, degree of humanisation, and agency - are characteristics of critical discourse analysis. Not only does the analysis of these features enable the examination of the degree to which emotions and feelings of action-taking can be elicited from audiences; it also allows for an examination of the type of emotions and the kinds of responses that audiences might be compelled to experience as a result of watching the shows. Both shows were selected because they mediate HIV/AIDS suffering as a retrovision genre focusing on the early days of the global epidemic.

IV.A. Mediating HIV/AIDS Suffering in FX's *Pose* (2018-2021)

FX's *Pose* (2018-2021) is one of the most praised contemporary television series which, after the final episode of season 2 aired and until season 3 was broadcasted, it remained a point of reference for its novelty in casting, as well as for the way it narrativised queer history (Stout, 2020). Not only did the series cast the largest number of transgender people in a mainstream TV show to date (Real, 2018; Walsh, 2018), but there was also provision for transgender people to be involved in its creation and production stages.[92] The main premise of the series is to present a dramatised account of the '80s ballroom culture that had previously been documented in *Paris Is Burning* (1991), the influential documentary that shed light onto the black and brown

[92] Episode 6 of season 1 was the first ever episode to have been written and directed by a transgender woman of colour, Janet Mock, who is also one of the executive producers of the show. See Gemmill, A. (2018) 'Janet Mock wrote and directed an episode of 'Pose' and made TV history', *Teen Vogue*, 9 July. Available at: https://teenvogue.com/story/janet-mock-wrote-and-directed-an-episode-of-pose-and-made-tv-history (Accessed: 20 December 2020).

transgender subculture of the 80s.[93] The two works differ with regard to the level of fictionalisation involved. *Paris is Burning* is a documentary whereby those who were part of ballrooms are interviewed; thus, the documentary focuses on their stories. *Pose* is a TV show where the characters are not the actual people who participated in ballrooms but actors.

Pose is of significance for this project not only because of its achievements in relation to representation, but also because of the way it treated the outbreak of HIV/AIDS. Richard Lawson (2018) of Vanity Fair situates the success of the series in the realistic depiction of the lived experiences of people who, at the time, lived with HIV/AIDS. This, Lawson (*ibid.*) argues, was achieved by maintaining a balance between tragedy and joy, hardships and kinships. This representation of suffering, one that presents spectators with a balanced view of the life of the sufferers, is new in mainstream television. Unlike the works that were analysed in the previous chapter (see section III. D. 4), *Pose* provides spectators with a new dimension of sufferers, a more humane and whole depiction. The sections that follow provide a systematic analysis of *Pose* by using the adapted version of Chouliaraki's (2006) *analytics of mediation* that was presented in chapter III. In doing so, both multimodal and discourse analyses are deployed. This allows for detailed understanding of the values toward HIV/AIDS suffering that the series promotes, and the extent in which the series allows spectators to make these values their own. It is important to note here that whether audiences make these values their own or not is not the focus of this analysis; rather, the focus is on the possibilities it offers to audiences.

IV. A. 1. Sufferers' Voices Take Centre Stage

One of the main features of *Pose,* which makes it different to other popular media productions that dramatise HIV/AIDS suffering, is that audiences are presented with the point of view of either the sufferers or those who are spectators of suffering, yet belong to the same non-mainstream culture with the ones who suffer.[94] Contrary to previous works, like *The Hours*

[93] After its release, *Paris Is Burning (1991)* was praised by both mainstream and independent media. Hilderbrand (2013) provides a collection of all the accolades of the picture. Among others, he documents Terrence Rafferty's (1991) review in *The New Yorker* that the success of the picture is mainly due to the fact that Livingston, the director of the documentary, was "[...] smart enough not to reduce her subjects to the sum of their possible meanings [...]" (p. 72). Hilderbrand, L. (2013) *Paris is burning: A queer film*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press. Also, Kornstein (2020) identifies *Paris is Burning (1991)* as the starting point that aided the inclusion of transgender people and drag art into mainstream media. Kornstein, H. (2020) 'Drag performance on screen', in *The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication*. doi: 10.1002/9781119429128.iegmc315.

[94] In this chapter, 'spectators' is used to describe the characters who are present in a scene of suffering. Both the spectator and the sufferer are portrayed in a spectacle of suffering. 'Audiences' is used to describe the consumers of such a spectacle, those who watch this spectacle (both sufferers and spectators) at home.

(2002) which were analysed in section III. D. 4. a., in *Pose* both sufferers and spectators are all part of the ballroom culture.[95] This is significant because "[...] ballroom provides a family and community for those who are otherwise routinely denied such relationships and experiences due to family rejection, sexism, transphobia and homophobia" (Glover, 2020, p. 7). As such, not only are there no normative characters for mainstream audiences to identify with, but also HIV/AIDS suffering is presented as one of the many forms of suffering, like "[...] transiency, poverty, and violence" (*ibid.*) among others, that members of the ballroom scene often face. In *Pose*, the *us versus them* binary, which was often established by other works whose subject matter has been HIV/AIDS, is subverted by the exclusive presentation of the Other as the only character-option through whom audiences learn about the realities of HIV/AIDS suffering. The spectator of HIV/AIDS suffering in *Pose* is always a marginalised person whose position in society is such that allows them to empathise with the HIV/AIDS sufferer. In doing so, audiences are also encouraged to identify HIV/AIDS suffering not as something detached and alien to them, but as something which is part of their society, something that could happen to anyone, not just to an Other.

One of the first scenes of HIV/AIDS suffering is presented in episode 3 of season 1 ('Giving and Receiving') when Pray Tell (Billy Porter), the emcee of the New York ballroom scene and father-figure of the series whom many young queer community members view as mentor, visits his AIDS suffering boyfriend Costas (Johnny Sibilly) at the hospital. In that scene, Pray Tell reminds Costas of their Christmas plans in an attempt to motivate him not to lose hope but to continue fighting the virus. Costas, on the other hand, appears to be more realistic about his condition, saying to Pray Tell that "[...] I do not believe that I will spend my last Christmas in this hospital", acknowledging that he is about to die. At this moment in the series, Pray Tell does not know his serostatus and believes himself to be HIV negative.[96] He is spectator to his boyfriend's suffering and ensuing death. However, similar to the scene where Clarissa meets Richard in *The Hours* (2001), the spectator of the suffering appears to be a sufferer, as well. In this case, Pray Tell is suffering from HIV/AIDS even though he is not HIV positive. He is about to lose his boyfriend and many of his friends to the virus. The scene also provides commentary for the poor conditions HIV/AIDS patients had to be in. The background to this scene shows nurses refusing to enter patients' rooms, a hospital which is understaffed of

[95] For a detailed account of the Ballroom scene of the time, see Baker, S. (2011) *Voguing and the house ballroom scene of New York city 198-92*. New York: Soul Jazz Books.
[96] He learns that he is HIV positive in the next episode (episode 4, season 1 'The Fever')

medical personnel, and rooms which are dirty because there is no cleaning staff. Unlike the scene in *The Hours*, here there is no room for audiences to empathise more with the spectator-to-suffering than with the one who suffers. In this scene, both spectator and HIV sufferer are suffering from the effects of the virus; as such, audiences are provided with opportunities to empathise with Pray Tell's desperation for living to see his loved ones being taken away by the virus and their dignity been taken away by governmental negligence.

One of the few instances in the series where a scene of HIV/AIDS suffering involves the person who suffers and a spectator who does not belong to the queer community is in episode 4 of season 1 ('The Fever') when Pray Tell takes Damon (Ryan Jamaal Swain), Ricky (Dyllón Burnside), and Lil Papi (Angel Bismark Curiel), three young men who have had unprotected sex and/or used drugs to the hospital for an HIV test. The built up to the episode leaves audiences to believe that the young men might test positive; however, they all test negative, except Pray Tell. The scene when he finds out about his diagnosis presents him and the doctor who is giving him the news. Despite the fact that we are presented with a white, healthy-looking doctor, who represents traditional institutions and normativity, audiences have not had the opportunity to get to know this character, thus it becomes more difficult to connect or identify with her compared to Pray Tell whom audiences have got to know over the past four episodes. By contrast, the camera goes closer to Pray Tell's face, and we are presented with one of Billy Porter's best scenes in the series where he admits that "[...] this is the moment that I dreaded most. Dodged it, for years. And now the son of a bitch has finally caught up with me." Porter gives audience a plethora of emotions ranging from terror, defeat, acceptance, and desperation to strength; the strength that he needs to find in order not to scare the boys that are waiting for him in the waiting room of the hospital.[97] In this scene, the mode of representation becomes a significant way to encourage audiences to develop what was described in chapter III (see section II. C.) as feelings of pity toward HIV/AIDS. This is achieved because of the fact that by that time we have gotten to know Pray Tell and connect with him; that he is the only one with whom we can identify; as well as because of the movement of the camera and his stellar performance.

[97] Billy Porter won the primetime Emmy award for outstanding lead actor in a drama series for his performance in season 1 of *Pose*.

Also important to the analysis of the mode of representation is the choice of medium. As discussed earlier, *Pose* (2018-2019) is a fictional re-telling of *Paris Is Burning* (1991). As a result, audiences are not clear as to whether what they watch is real or fictional. This ambivalence enables *Pose* to be more direct when it comes to establishing a connection with its audience. Messages become more relatable, and the distance between audiences and sufferers is reduced, transforming the series from fictional storytelling to an act of artivism.[98] Indeed, Janet Mock, one of the executive producers of the series, as well as writer and director of some episodes, quoted Ryan Murphy in one of her interviews with Jude Dry. According to her, Murphy said that "[...] the reason I'm doing this show is the internal thing that I've been saying to myself - show running as advocacy" (Dry, 2019). Parker and Igielnik (2020) argue that contemporary audiences are no longer just interested in the final product. Rather, they care about impact, principled social responsibility, and about investing time and energy on things that have positive results for the environment and the society (Young, 2019). Therefore, the fact that the creator and producer of *Pose* declares that the series is to be seen as a political and activist act is very likely to change the way audiences view it. In addition, the choice of medium becomes even more significant by the creators' decision to re-present *Paris Is Burning* as a mainstream TV product through *Pose*, instead of an independent and less mainstream one, while keeping the main premise of giving voice to the Others who have been denied the opportunity to voice their truth. As a result, the reach of the show and its potential influence become significantly stronger and wider.

IV. A. 2. Sufferers Are More Than Their Suffering

Another area of attention when conducting multimodal analysis of cultural products of HIV/AIDS suffering is the relationship between verbal narrative and image. As discussed in chapter III (section III. D. 1), a cultural product can elicit a factual, emotional, or ideological response from its audience, based on how the language that is used in the scene of suffering relates - or not - to its visual representation. A benefit of narrativising *Paris Is Burning* (1991), for instance, is that the response which *Pose* (2018 - 2021) seems to elicit from audiences is not a factual one. In *Paris Is Burning*, audiences are not presented with just fictional characters, but with the actual people who lived the HIV outbreak and are either HIV positive themselves, or whose lives have been affected by HIV. Audiences are also presented with language which

[98] A portmanteau word of art and activism. Ensler (2011) wrote about the significance of artivism in Ensler, E. (2011) 'Politics, power, and passion', *The New York Times*, 2 December. Available at: http://nyt.ms/2ZWwUpr (Accessed: 10 April 2020).

describes HIV/AIDS suffering in an authentic, factual, and non-sensational manner. In the documentary, ballroom queens explain ballroom culture and describe it as a sanctuary from the horrors of HIV/AIDS, among other types of suffering that they experience (Cunningham, 1998). In doing so, HIV/AIDS suffering is presented as just another one of the challenges that these people had to go through. It is expected that audiences might develop feelings of sympathy for the people who are depicted in the documentary. Yet, the fact that they appear as the sum of their suffering, and that there is nothing else other than their suffering which might enable audiences to connect with them, does not provide any alternative potential for audiences to be further moved and, thus, for change with regard to audiences' feelings and attitudes toward PLWHA to occur.

Pose was created to differ from *Paris Is Burning* in that it not only focused on highlighting the importance of ballroom for LGBTQI+ community members in the 1980s, but it also portrayed each character as a whole person whose life was not just about HIV/AIDS, poverty, violence, discrimination, homelessness, and other types of suffering. [99] Stout (2020) observes that *Pose* is "[...] making a point not only to show the hardships and tragedies but also to show the moments of joy and fellowship" (p. 42).[100] In presenting audiences with round, whole characters and by establishing a certain correspondence between what is said and what is shown, *Pose* can elicit emotional and ideological responses from its audience. Episode 6 of season 1 ('Love is the Message') illustrates the types of correspondence that invoke such responses. In one of the scenes of this episode, we see Pray Tell revisiting his dying boyfriend, Costas, at the hospital. The scene quickly becomes emotional as Costas's health has significantly deteriorated since last time we saw him in episode 3 of season 1. In this scene, Pray Tell tells Costas how he would like to teach the young ones about time before AIDS when "[...] we were truly free, free to love, free to fuck, free to be our gay ass selves in this beautiful shithole of a town [...] what it's like to love without worrying that you're gonna die, or worse yet, that you're gonna kill somebody." While saying this, Pray Tell is lying on the same bed as Costas, foreshadowing his own imminent death.

[99] Mj Rodriguez, one of the lead actresses of the series, gave an interview to Seth Meyers discussing further the importance of Ballroom culture and the contribution of *Pose* in ensuring that this culture will not be forgotten. For the complete interview, see Late Night with Seth Meyers (2019) *Mj Rodriguez explains underground ballroom culture.* 16 August. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvsi6vJtXtQ (Accessed: 21 December 2020).

[100] Lawson (2018) in his *Vanity Fair* article also discussed the significance of maintaining a balance between tragic and happy moments. See reference list for full reference details.

The language that Pray Tell uses in this scene is one of storytelling. Not only does he talk about the past, narrating life before HIV/AIDS, but there are also didactic elements for the audience in that he ensures that we do not take for granted that HIV/AIDS is a given reality, that life was different prior to the outbreak of the virus, and in that the series presents us with the non-physical damages the virus is causing to people, HIV positive and negative alike. At the same time, the scene is visually rather sensational. The setting is an almost abandoned hospital, dirty bedsheets, and not enough personnel to take care of the patients. Costas appears to be very weak, unable to eat because his throat hurts so much that he cannot swallow anymore. Pray Tell starts talking to Costas and appears to be cheery and smiling, until he starts talking about how the young people will not know of, let alone live in a world without AIDS. The camera zooms in and we are presented with yet another *gros plan* of Pray Tell where he initially appears to be nostalgic and then desperate in the realisation that "[...] either way, ain't no going back now." At that moment, the camera captures him lying on Costas's bed where he is hugging him, illustrating how love, in the era of AIDS, is synonymous to death.

At the same time, the particular scene elicits an ideological response from audiences. As discussed in chapter III (section III. D. 1.), an ideological response can be elicited when the relationship between what is said and what is shown presents an in-group *versus* out-group reality in which the latter are presented as *savages*.[101] The antithesis that is created through the interaction between Pray Tell and Costas and the setting of the scene is such that audiences are likely to be compelled to identify with Pray Tell and Costas. In crude terms, they are gay men, one of them black and HIV positive, and the other one white and dying of AIDS, therefore arguably marginalised and not part of mainstream culture. However, in this scene, which is solely focused on love between two people and the effects HIV/AIDS has on love, both characters present a range of emotions, from anger to desperation, which make them appear humane. On the other hand, the setting works as a signifier of political and governmental negligence, a savage reality that these two humane characters are bound to spend their last days together; a reality that neither of them challenge because they take it for granted. This portrayal is dynamic not only in its affective potential, but most importantly in its potential to address the audiences' possible ideological norms and its potential to instigate an ideological conflict

[101] Here, *savage* is used in the same manner as in Chouliaraki (2006, p. 80) to describe the way in which Others are often viewed as by members of the mainstream, dominant culture.

which, in turn, can challenge established sociocultural norms. [102] The *us versus them* binary is subverted here in such a way that the potential of the PLWHA becoming *us* and society's overt discrimination becoming *them* can be realised.

IV. A. 3. Death As Vehicle For Empathy

The aesthetic quality of the series is the last of the three areas where multimodal analysis can be deployed. As discussed in chapter III (section III. D. 1.), an analysis of the aesthetic quality of a cultural product enables the examination of its overall effect " [...] in terms of [...] *pamphleteering*, *philanthropy*, and *sublimation*" (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 81, emphasis in original). In an interview with Evan Real (2018) for *The Hollywood Reporter,* Mj Rodriguez, the lead actress of the series, emphasised that "*Pose* gives me hope that we can change people's hearts and minds... at the end of the day, we're all human" (emphasis in the original). Therefore, to examine whether such a change was promoted through the series, one needs to examine closely its overall aesthetic quality. In the analysis that follows, it becomes evident that it is important for all three possible effects to be activated to ensure the possibility of provoking some form of social change. The effect of sublimation is significant in prompting audiences to contemplate the conditions of HIV/AIDS suffering. Of similar importance are the effects of pamphleteering and philanthropy. Pamphleteering enables feelings of anger to be generated from audiences against those who contribute to the HIV/AIDS suffering of others. It is important to note that such feelings are not necessarily directed to specific people; they could also be directed to institutions, societal structures, as well as cultural conditions that are instrumental in the augmentation, if not the initiation, of the HIV/AIDS suffering of others. Finally, philanthropy refers to the effect of the possible identification of audiences with the character who is presented to offer help to the one who suffers in a scene of suffering. The movements from sublimation to pamphleteering to philanthropy are significant in that while audiences watch these cultural products, they can experience contemplation, anger, and the need to offer help, which could encourage them to take action, and help those who suffer in their day to day lives.

[102] Additional to Chouliaraki's (2006) analytics of mediation which was discussed at length in chapter III, Chuck Hleinhans (1974) also provided a taxonomy of types of audience response in which ideological responses are presented as legitimate audience responses to cultural products. See Kleinhans, C. (1974) 'Types of audience response: From tear-jerkers to thought provokers', *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 4, pp. 21-23. Available at: https://ejumpcut.org/archive/onlineessays/JC04folder/AudienceResponse.html (Accessed: 22 December 2020).

The hospital scenes that were analysed in the two previous sections (see sections IV. A. 1 and IV. A. 2), come to an end with Costas's death. After Pray Tell's second visit at the hospital, the one where Costas's health has evidently deteriorated, and following his feelings of outrage with the inhumane conditions in which AIDS patients are bound to spend their final days, he decides to host a show that, he hopes, will make the patients lift their spirits. The particular scene opens with Pray Tell taking Costas to the part of the ward where the cabaret show will be hosted. He explains to Costas what this "AIDS cabaret" is, and despite the fact that he is aware that Costas can no longer eat because of an inflammation in his throat, he tells him that it "[...] is going to make you feel much better. I hung some streamers and gathered a buffet. We got crackers and cheese and punch." In the following scene, Pray Tell sings Donny Hathaway's *For All We Know* and dedicates it to Costas, "the love of [his] life". The setting is completely different to the one that we were presented with earlier in this episode as well as in episode 3 where the first hospital scene was shot. Rather than being presented with a deserted, dirty, and degrading hospital ward, we now watch a lightly decorated space which aims to remind patients that they are still human and they deserve to be treated as such. Immediately after this rather emotional scene, Costas dies. The time in which Costas's death is placed is significant in provoking an effect of sublimation. It is the first time that he was seen to regain his dignity as an AIDS patient, and he has just been reminded that he is loved. Having him die immediately after this allows audiences not only to be presented with, but also to ponder over the real conditions of HIV/AIDS suffering. This is particularly important when considering audiences who might not be familiar with the lived experiences of PLWHA.

Season 2 of *Pose* is significantly more clearly focused on the HIV/AIDS struggles of the LGBTQI+ community. In the opening episode of the season ('Acting Up'), Pray Tell and Blanca (Mj Rodriguez) visit the grave of Keenan, an ex-boyfriend of Pray Tell. The grave site at Hart Island seems not to be surprising to the two characters, but it might very possibly be surprising to the audiences of this scene. Rather than visiting a graveyard, they go on a boat to a place which Pray Tell refers to as "[...] out of sight, out of mind [...]" alluding to society's negligence in properly addressing HIV/AIDS suffering. The receptionist at the burial site of Hart Island does not welcome them or ask them questions verbally; instead she uses gestures to communicate with them, an action that hints to the belittling treatment of LGBTQI+, and potentially HIV positive, people by bureaucratic institutions. They do engage in conversation once Pray Tell asks her to show him where his partner's remains are only to find out that

> [...] names don't matter here. Just a bunch of pine boxes in a ditch. [...] Just a mass grave of people whose families couldn't afford a burial or unclaimed bodies from the morgue. [...] We quarantine the ones that died of AIDS, don't want them infecting anyone else, you know.

The scene becomes even stronger when Pray Tell and Blanca face what looks more like a rubbish dump than a burial site. Situating the particular site as a site of burial for not only those who died with AIDS, but also those who have been abandoned by their families can encourage a pamphleteering effect on the audiences whereby feelings of anger are directed to a number of directions: those who abandoned family members when they were most in need, the system which denies humane treatment to those who died with AIDS and the people who relate to them, and/or a society which chooses to take HIV/AIDS suffering "[...] out of sight, out of mind [...]" instead of addressing its existence and its adverse effects.

In the scene that follows, Blanca is at the doctor's (Sandra Bernhard) office where she is told that her T-cell count has dropped to 200. This is an indicator that her HIV has progressed to AIDS. After the initial shock and denial based on her believing to be of overall good health, Blanca asks the doctor whether this means that she is dying. The doctor reassures her that even though a cure has not been found yet, Blanca can start taking AZT, a medication that will help slow down the progression of the virus. In what follows, the creators of the series provide a commentary about how "[...] pharmaceutical companies are in the business of making a profit [...]" and therefore such medication is accessible only by "[...] rich folk [...]". However, the doctor explains how there are people in the community who care about helping those who are in need but cannot afford such medication. She tells Blanca that

> [...] when the wealthy white queens and their friends know that the end is coming close, they call us. [...] We pay our respects, we say our goodbyes, and then we collect the leftover meds. Their dying wishes are to make sure that the grief isn't the only thing they're leaving behind.

The emergence and role of kinship structures in the LGBTQI+ culture as a result of HIV/AIDS suffering has been discussed at length by a number of scholars (Arnold and Bailey, 2009; Bailey, 2011; Bailey, 2013; Glover, 2020; Phillips II *et al*., 2011; Shacklock, 2019). However, the significance of this scene is that audiences are presented with a scene of suffering whereby the HIV/AIDS sufferer is helped not by the societal structures that have come into place to offer this kind of help, but by others who have also been experiencing HIV/AIDS suffering themselves. This juxtaposition between governmental negligence and PLWHA as agents of

help contributes to the emergence of an effect of *philanthropy* through which audiences are inclined to feel sympathetic towards the one(s) offering help and, in turn, are encouraged to become themselves agents of help.

IV. A. 4. Queering Time and Space

So far in this section, a multimodal analysis has shown how creators of cultural products can use the mode of representation, the relationship between verbal narrative and visual representations, as well as the aesthetic quality of HIV/AIDS suffering to present, or invoke specific values toward suffering. All three generic features of multimodal analysis confirm that *Pose* is created in such a way that audiences are encouraged to feel sympathetic toward the HIV/AIDS sufferer while challenging those sociocultural structures which either inflict or maintain the suffering. It was also shown that the show offers the potential to motivate audiences and instigate a *call for action* type of response, whereby audiences assume the position of the one who either directly helps or indirectly contributes to the amelioration of any form of suffering caused by HIV/AIDS. In other words, by analysing the semiotic system of the representation of HIV/AIDS suffering, it has been shown that cultural productions have the potential to promote certain reactions towards suffering. Proceeding to a critical discourse analysis, though, can provide further insights as to how, if at all, these reactions are internalised among audience members, and the extent in which changes in socio-political structures can occur. From an analysis of the representation of suffering, by looking at how HIV/AIDS suffering is represented in the medium in focus, the attention now shifts to an analysis of the mediation of suffering, by examining how audiences are oriented toward or against the Other.

An examination of the spatial distance between audiences and the spectacle of suffering allows us to analyse whether audiences are provided with opportunities to develop feelings of danger or safety. As discussed in chapter III (see section III. D. 2.) close spatial proximity is said to be able to instil danger in audiences, while spatial distance is more often associated with generating feelings of safety. The premise of *Pose,* being a fictionalised account of the reality faced by many LGBTQI+ community members at the outbreak of the HIV global epidemic, situates it into the heart of the Global North, New York. The setting is both realistic and symbolic. It is realistic in that ballroom culture flourished in New York City, but also because some of the events that are represented in the series actually happened at that time in New York. For example, the first episode of season 2 dramatises the 'Stop the Church' protest at St. Patrick's Cathedral organised by ACT UP organisation, a real event that took place on

December 10, 1989. Activists had planned a staged *die-in* which quickly got out of hand.[103] *Pose* has been criticised for focusing too much on New York City, though. Glover (2020) argues that people watching series like *Pose* tend to believe that New York City was the sole epicentre of the struggles of the LGBTQI+ community. Indeed, he provides a very detailed account of other cities in all parts of the United States where similar issues occurred.[104]

Arguably, therefore, New York is also a symbolic setting, representing spaces of HIV/AIDS suffering in the global North. This double function of the setting creates a constant back and forth between spatial proximity and distance, and by extension, between audiences' possible feelings of danger and safety, respectively. From the earlier discussion on the analysis of the mode of representation, the relationship between verbal narrative and visual representations, as well as the aesthetic quality of HIV/AIDS suffering, it emerges that the absence of non-Others as spectators to HIV/AIDS suffering in a sense allows audiences the possibility to create a connection with those who suffer. In *Pose*, everyone is an Other. This allows us to redefine the meaning of safety and danger. Contrary to what was described in section III. D. 2., where safety and danger were used to describe audience's feelings in relation to the possibility of them being affected by the Others' suffering, *Pose* enables us to discuss safety and danger as a collective response to suffering. The interplay between feelings of safety and danger created by the symbolic and real function of the setting, respectively, allows us to consider possible that audiences are likely to experience HIV/AIDS suffering as something that might not be in spatial proximity to them. However, at a humane level, it allows them to realise that they are not so far from being affected, directly or indirectly, by it.

In other words, by understanding the setting of the series as being potentially any city in the global North, it becomes possible that audiences understand that HIV/AIDS suffering could be something relevant to their own lives. If a certain group of people, in this case those dying of AIDS and their loved ones, are treated in the most inhumane way possible, who is to say that audiences might not be treated as such one day for one reason or another? The temporal distance with the spectacle of suffering that is discussed below further contributes to this. The

[103] Michael O'Loughlin wrote on this particular event and its dramatisation in O'Loughlin, M. J. (2019) "Pose' revisits controversial AIDS protest inside St. Patrick's Cathedral', *America: The Jesuit Review,* 21 June. Available at: https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2019/06/21/pose-revisits-controversial-aids-protest-inside-st-patricks-cathedral (Accessed: 24 December 2020).
[104] A relevant study mapping the emergence (and disappearance) of urban LGBTQI+ spaces is offered by Amin Ghaziani in Ghaziani, A. (2015) *There goes the gayborhood?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

medical advancements that have taken place since 1996 have ensured that the danger of contracting HIV is minimal. As such, audiences are less likely to feel that they are in danger in terms of suffering from HIV themselves. However, the series presents HIV/AIDS suffering in a manner that is not exclusively focused on HIV/AIDS suffering in the narrow sense of physical suffering; instead, we are presented with a more global sense of suffering that allows audiences to see how HIV/AIDS suffering affects everyone's lives irrespective of their serostatus.

With regard to temporal distance and proximity, *Pose* is clearly set in the past. This raises the possibility of audience's indifference. As discussed in the previous chapter (see section III. D. 2.), when audiences are presented with spectacles of suffering which are set in temporal distance from them, they are more likely to remain indifferent. However, when suffering is presented in temporal proximity, it is possible that audiences feel the need to take action and address either what causes suffering to happen, or to contribute to helping those who suffer. Following this, one could argue that *Pose* fails to promote feelings of taking action and addressing HIV/AIDS suffering, as is common with works of the retrovision genre. Rather than encouraging audiences to feel the urge to do something to help ameliorate suffering, a fictional account of the distant past is more likely to leave audiences indifferent in terms of action.

However, despite the fact that *Pose* dramatises the outbreak and first years of the HIV/AIDS global epidemic, certain intertextual references, visual and linguistic, create a sense of temporal proximity with its contemporary audience. For example, one of the main preoccupations of episode 1 of season 2 of the series is the release of Madonna's song *Vogue* and its significance for the ballroom culture. Blanca says about this "Everything is about to change. I can see it as clear as day. [...] Madonna is shining a bright spotlight on us. We have been underground for [...] about 20 years. [...] Mark my words: 'Vogue' will make us stars". Candy (Angelica Ross), though, is more critical about this when she responds that Blanca's "[...] vision must be cloudy, 'cause ain't shit about to change for our black asses." The significance of this scene is that despite the fact that it discusses a very specific event of the 1990s, the release of Madonna's *Vogue*, it also alludes to pink capitalism[105] and the way in which mainstream society appropriates aspects of the LGBTQI+ culture to either gain more financial benefits from LGBTQI+ members themselves, or to achieve certain political ends (Drucker, 2015; Sears,

[105] Dr Justin Bengry (2019) offers an extensive discussion on pink capitalism(s) in a presentation at the University of Cambridge, part of the Methods in Question: Epistemologies of Gender and Sexuality seminar series. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qspjQuBXy5I&t=977s (Accessed: 20 August 2021).

2005; Yaksich, 2005). At the time of viewing *Pose,* pink capitalism, homonormativity in marketing and purchasing activities, as well as political pink washing are at their highest. From product marketing campaigns being directed at LGBTQI+ audiences, to politicians supporting legislation relevant to LGBTQI+ issues - as long as these do not interrupt normative structures and institutions - the end of the 2010s saw an increase in attempts from several governments and markets to appear LGBTQI+ friendly so as to broaden their influence planes (Wahab, 2021; Walters, 2021). As such, time and temporal distance, much like spatial distance discussed above, become relative. On one level, the series is set in the distant past, but its intertextual references to the present make it relevant to contemporary audiences and, therefore, can invoke feelings of action and non-discriminatory responses to HIV/AIDS suffering. What distinguishes this series, therefore, from *Paris Is Burning*, and other works that focus on similar themes, is that it provides the possibility for audiences to become moved from the HIV/AIDS suffering of Others, and to consider acting on it.

IV. A. 5. Humanisation of HIV/AIDS 'Sufferers'

The next two aspects for analysis - the degree of humanisation and the agency of the HIV/AIDS sufferer - are interconnected in that the more humane the sufferer appears to be, the more likely the audiences are to acknowledge their agency. The humanisation of the sufferer depends on the verbal and visual modes of representation that were discussed in section IV. A. 2. of this chapter. In particular, when audiences are presented with personal narratives that illustrate the sufferers' predicament, they are more likely to be engaged than when they are presented with impersonal or generic facts and statistics. Similarly, when the visual representation is focused on the sufferers themselves, for example by using focused shots on the sufferers' faces, audiences are more likely to develop an emotional connection with the ones who suffer than when visual representations situate the sufferers in generic shots that involve many people who are not connected to the suffering. In chapter III (section III. D. 2), the possible responses from the audience were discussed in relation to how, and if, the spectacle of suffering can manipulate the direction of their emotions. This is achieved by presenting them not only with the one who experiences suffering, but also by including another one present in the scene of suffering who, instead of experiencing suffering in terms of being HIV positive or having been diagnosed with AIDS, their role appears to be either of benefactor or persecutor. It was shown that audience responses were dependent on whom they were encouraged to identify with, the benefactor or the persecutor. Identifying with the benefactor can instigate acts of care, while identifying with the persecutor is more significant in that it can lead to demands for civil rights. However, it

was also shown that neither acts of care, nor demands for civil rights can emerge unless the sufferers are presented in a humane manner.

The scenes that have been analysed so far in this chapter illustrate how *Pose* achieves the presentation of all its characters as humane and, most importantly, how it achieves to subvert the *us versus them* binary that can often emerge in cultural products of social suffering, especially HIV/AIDS suffering. Stout (2020) highlights how audiences

> [...] follow multiple community members as they negotiate their places within and outside the community, bringing to the fore discussions of transphobia and racism within the LGBT community, conceptions of what womanhood engenders, and the importance of a chosen family in light of oppression (p. 42).

She continues highlighting how the series functions not only as a platform of remembrance of often forgotten histories, but also as a platform for celebration of queer people as well-rounded people who experience a range of emotions, situations, instances of joy, sadness, discrimination, but also empowerment. HIV/AIDS suffering is the central theme of the series, but it is not its *sole* theme. The characters have dreams and aspirations - many of which they achieve - failures, and personal victories which enable us to identify them as similar to us in that they are not unrealistic characters, but they share similar characteristics with real people who have dreams and goals. Despite the fact that they are *othered* by their sociocultural context, in the universe of *Pose*, Otherness is mainstream.[106] As such, audiences are encouraged to identify with the characters, perceive them as humane, and create emotional connections with them. This, as it was shown earlier, is the main prerequisite for the motivation of audiences and the subversion of *hegemonic othering*.

In relation to types of emotional response, *Pose* has the potential to elicit both acts of care and demands for civil rights. To elicit the former, there are two conditions that need to be met. The first refers to the existence of two parts in a scene of suffering: a sufferer and a spectator. The second refers to the function of the spectator who should act as benefactor to the sufferer. In the scene that was analysed in section IV. A. 3. of this chapter, episode 1 season 2, audiences are presented with an act of help that transgresses social, financial, and racial differences. When rich white people realise that the condition of their suffering loved ones is irreversible, they

[106] This is in line with what the ballroom culture stood for: the celebration of Otherness, and the subversion of established sociocultural norms, among others. Glover (2020) provides a detailed account of the ballroom culture and its function for otherwise marginalised groups of people. See list of reference.

donate medicines to those who cannot afford to pay for them. In this case, the ones who do not physically suffer from HIV/AIDS themselves act as benefactors to the ones who suffer and are in need of help. Similarly, throughout the episodes of the series, the concepts of helping those who are in need and of being there for them are punctuated by the structure of the ballroom house system whereby a *house* is a group of people who not only compete together at the balls but also live together and form each other's chosen family. Each house has a *mother* the role of whom is to offer guidance and support to the younger members of the house. Audiences follow Blanca, mother of the house of Evangelista, educating, guiding, as well as supporting financially and emotionally the members of her house, her *children*.

Presenting the spectator of a scene of suffering *only* as benefactor, though, does not seem to be enough to encourage audiences to challenge established sociocultural norms and demand civil rights on behalf of those who suffer. Audiences must also be presented with spectators who function as persecutors, instead. In Season 2 of *Pose,* we are presented with the character of Frederica Norman (Patti LuPone), a real estate mogul. Frederica is the owner of a storefront that Blanca rents to turn into a nail salon. Since episode 2 of season 2 ('Worth It'), when Frederica finds out that Blanca is transgender, she tries to evict her. Blanca, claiming squatter's rights, successfully resists eviction. However, what follows from this episode until the end of the series is a sequence of horrifying actions initiated by Frederica aiming at terrorizing Blanca out of her property. From boarding up Blanca's nail salon to burning it down, Frederica, who in episode 6 of season 2 ('Love's in Need of Love Today') claims that she "[...] love[s] gays; it's AIDS that [she does] not like," deploys all available legal and illegal means she has to ensure Blanca is not associated with her, solely based on the fact that she is transgender, and therefore, according to her, a possible AIDS threat. Frederica's prosecution of Blanca is another symbolic representation of the hardships queer people had to go through as a result of society's fear of HIV/AIDS. As if having to suffer the virus and its aftermath was not enough, audiences experience how all facets of the lives of queer people were affected because of HIV/AIDS suffering. By watching the cunningness of Frederica and the pain she caused to Blanca, audiences are likely to disapprove of Frederica's behaviour, but most importantly, to challenge behaviours like this when they occur in their daily lives.

IV. A. 6. From Individual Agency to Collective Action

Of similar significance to the degree of the sufferers' humanisation is the role of agency in relation to the spectacle of suffering. Analysing agency allows for a detailed look into social

relationships of suffering. To do this, both the agency of the sufferers themselves, and the one of those who are in contact with the sufferers but do not experience physical suffering need to be examined. The latter was discussed in the previous section (section IV. A. 5) where the analysis focused on the spectator-as-benefactor, the spectator-as-persecutor, as well as their function as means of possibly eliciting certain emotions from the audience. As it was discussed in chapter III (section III. D. 2), an analysis of the sufferers' agency illustrates whether audiences watch the spectacle of suffering in a passive or an active manner. What is of interest, therefore, is an analysis of what Chouliaraki (2006) terms as "[...] a process of identity construction that endows sufferers with the power to say or do something about their condition, even if this power is simply the power to evoke and receive the beneficiary action of others" (p. 88). It becomes clear that the audiences' interest is more likely to be maintained when presented with sufferers who are active in that they speak, if not do something, about their suffering; they are, in other words, active agents. Therefore, looking at whether PLWHA in *Pose* are presented as active agents, taking charge of their own suffering, and actively striving to improve their condition will highlight whether or not the series offers audiences the potential to be motivated and become active agents of care and social change themselves.

Both when it comes to their own suffering, but also when their friends' suffering is involved, *Pose* characters appear to be consistent in addressing it actively, trying to improve their situation or the situation of their loved ones. An example of the latter is in episode 6 season 1 when Pray Tell decides to host the AIDS cabaret. Despite the government's negligence toward HIV/AIDS sufferers, Pray Tell decides to put on an event that aims to help the hospital inmates be treated like human beings and for a moment forget about their condition. Similarly, in episode 2 season 1 ('Access'), after Blanca is diagnosed as HIV positive, she takes it up to her to educate her *children* about safe sex. In particular, when she realises that Damon is about to go out on a date with Ricky, a romantically and sexually experienced dancer, she discusses with Damon issues not only related to romantic love but also safe sex, something that the government should have done at the wake of the HIV global epidemic but did not. In the same episode, audiences follow Blanca being denied entry to a gay bar for being transwoman; however, she keeps returning to this bar, gets arrested for not leaving the premises, and returns back until she is granted entry to the bar. These are just three examples where the characters appear to be fighting for what they feel is right for them, instead of allowing the circumstances dictate how they should live and what is socially acceptable for them.

The second season of the series is significantly more focused on group action compared to the first one. The first episode of season 2 finds Pray Tell attending an ACT UP meeting which inspires him, Blanca, Blanca's *children*, and Judy, the nurse who works at the HIV/AIDS ward of the hospital, to participate in the *Stop the Church* protest. This protest actually happened on the 10th of December, 1989, when members of ACT UP demonstrated against Bishop John Cardinal O'Connor whose political efforts were focused on inhibiting gay rights legislation, on advocating against safe sex education, and on having an overall negative stance against gay people. According to O'Laughlin (2019), this has been the largest protest to date that was against the Roman Catholic Church.[107] Desrosiers (2020) reports that demonstrators protested "[...] outside the cathedral church during a Sunday Mass, and some entered the church with the intent of staging a "die-in" [...]. Some protestors chained themselves to pews, while others lay "dead" on the floor of the church" (p. 16, emphasis in original). Including this protest and having the main characters of the show take part in it not only does it set the scene for a season which is heavily focused on political engagement and grassroots activism by and for HIV/AIDS sufferers, but it also establishes the main characters as active agents who care not only about their own suffering, but they also focus on helping the community. As they realise that nobody will stand up for them, they take charge of the situation and they show up for each other.

A similar act of agency is repeated twice in season two. In episode 6, and after Frederica has boarded up Blanca's nail salon, Blanca decides to organise a protest. Her aim is to create some noise, attract media attention, and show Frederica that she is not giving up. What appears to be an insignificant protest of 5 people shortly becomes another major demonstration when Lulu (Haillie Sahar) and Elektra (Dominique Jackson) mobilise members of the ballroom community to join Blanca's protest against Frederica's actions. In the subsequent episode ('Blow'), after Blanca's attempts to provide her younger *children* with purpose, her friends decide to set up an action by creating a giant condom and placing it outside Frederica's house. In doing so, they aimed to protest against Frederica's financial exploitation of Blanca. At the same time Pray Tell and Blanca use the publicity of the action to send a message to the public about ways to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS. Once the media arrive, Blanca gives an interview to a TV network where she accuses the church and the government for not informing the people appropriately. "It's the government, it's churches, they refuse to tell the people the truth, that condoms are the most effective way to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS", she

[107] More than 4,500 people participated in the protest, and about 100 of them were arrested by NYPD.

says to the camera taking over the role of governments, the church, and schools who should be providing the public with such information. Montex and Khubchandani (2020) observe that "[...] pedagogy seems to be happening everywhere in the lives of these queer and trans of colors characters. "Pose" insists on the value of kinship and pedagogy amidst the AIDS crisis [...]" (p. ix, emphasis in original). Indeed, here we see how pedagogy and kinship are used in a manner that empowers the characters of the series which, in turn, renders possible for audiences to assume agency and demand civil rights for those who suffer. At various points, the series presents audiences with characters who refuse to give up and conform to sociocultural injustices; rather, defying the consequences, they show up for themselves and for one another in a shared understanding that for suffering to end, people should fight together.

IV. A. 7. Discussion

By applying multimodal and critical discourse analysis to *Pose*, it becomes clear that this cultural product differs from its predecessors in that rather than reinforcing what was earlier termed as *hegemonic othering* (see chapter II), it subverts it. The multimodal analysis conducted in previous sections focused on the mode of representation, the relationship between verbal and visual narratives, as well as the overall aesthetic quality of HIV/AIDS suffering. By analysing these three aspects, it was possible to see how audiences were provided with an opportunity to identify with HIV/AIDS sufferers and empathise with them. The critical discourse level of analysis provided an in-depth focus on the types of responses that were generated as a result of the mediation of HIV/AIDS suffering in *Pose.* What was shown was that audiences are led to feel an array of emotions, each one of which with the potential to encourage them not only to develop feelings of care toward those who suffer from HIV/AIDS, but also to actively demand civil rights for them. By focusing on the spatial and temporal proximity, the degree of humanisation, as well as the aspect of agency, it emerges that *Pose* addresses social stigmatisation and marginalisation in a manner that promotes sociocultural change. The *us versus them* binary is reversed in such a manner whereby it becomes possible that those who contribute to the stigmatisation of HIV/AIDS sufferers are the ones who become the Others.

IV.B. Mediating HIV/AIDS Suffering in Channer 4's *It's a Sin* (2021)

Situated at the very early days of the outbreak of the HIV global epidemic, *It's a Sin* (2021) does not initially represent HIV/AIDS suffering. Rather, audiences are introduced to the sociocultural context of 1980s Britain with regards to what it meant for men - and the society at large - to be gay at that time. Audiences primarily follow the narrative through the stories of Ritchie (Olly Alexander), Roscoe (Omari Douglas), Colin (Callum Scott Howells), and Jill (Lydia West). Coming from different backgrounds, these young people leave their homes and move to London where they have opportunities not only to follow their career-related dreams, but they can also be who they want to be and live a life of their own. The first episode of the series also introduces audiences to gay life in London in the early 1980s. What is shown might seem rather strange to contemporary audiences with regard to the portrayal of the relationship between gay men and sex, but Russell T. Davies, the creator of the series, has highlighted the spirit of the time whereby sex was not an object for people to pass moral judgments on. Sex is shown as a casual activity, not exclusively attached to romantic relationships, not as something very intimate between necessarily only two people, and without the need to use condoms. There is no judgment or linkage between sex and morality in the way Davies portrays gay sex life in the early 1980s. Using condoms is presented as an interest of only heterosexual people as an attempt to avoid pregnancy. This is highlighted in the opening scene where Ritchie and his father (Shaun Dooley) are on the boat from the Isle of Wight to the British mainland. His father, not knowing that Ritchie is gay, gives him a package of condoms which Ritchie throws away immediately when his father is not looking. It becomes clear from Ritchie's look that the reason he throws them away is not because he does not like using them, but because he cannot imagine he will have a use for them, given that their sole connotation at this point is protection against pregnancy.

IV. B. 1. Queering the Retrovision Genre

It's a Sin has already been criticised by some for underrepresenting women, trans, and non-binary people (Roche, 2021). Yet, comparing the main characters of *It's a Sin* to the ones of *Pose*, one might consider that *It's a Sin* offers a wider range of character *types* to the ones of *Pose*. This range of characters reflects a variety of sociocultural backgrounds, enabling more people from the audience to identify with them. Ritchie comes from a middle-class family

living on the Isle of Wight. Contrary to his parents' wishes, he changes his subject at university to English and Drama because his dream is to become an actor. Roscoe's working-class family is from Nigeria. Initially, we see him staying with them and working as a builder, but after realising that his father wants to send him to Nigeria to "become a man", he dresses in women's clothes, escapes home, and starts working at a gay bar. Colin comes from a middle-class family in Wales. He comes to London to work as an apprentice tailor. He is more reserved than the others who tease him for still being a virgin - at least that is what they believe him to be. The early episodes do not tell us much about Jill's background, the only female main character of the series; however, audiences get to know her much better toward the end of the series. What all four have in common, which is one of the key themes of the series, is that they are young, full of dreams, ambitions, and aspirations for the future. They live their lives in a manner that appears to be celebratory, something that today's world would perhaps view as reckless behaviour, and they are unaware of the fact that their innocence is about to come to an end because of AIDS.

The first time audiences are presented with HIV/AIDS suffering in *It's a Sin* is through Henry's (Neil Patrick Harris) story. Henry is Colin's colleague at the tailor shop, and Henry's partner had been sick for quite some time. Henry is being temporarily - at first - replaced by another shop assistant. Despite Colin asking about Henry's absence, nobody seems to know, or to *want* to discuss his situation. A neighbour tells Colin that Henry is in the hospital, and he finally pays him a visit. At the hospital, he is not allowed to see Henry unless he is a family member, and he lies saying that he is his nephew. To see him, he has to wear protective clothing, gloves, and a face mask. At this stage, it is unclear whether this is to protect Colin or Henry. Henry is in a ward on his own. Colin wonders how come and the two partners ended up sick at the same time, but Henry does not seem to make the connection. What we now know was AIDS was not always clearly understood by people at the time. People were uncertain about the transmission of the virus. This created uncertainty which by those in the medical profession was translated as a need to take extra caution and by those without much medical knowledge as no need to pay any particular attention to it. A few moments later, the nurse brings Henry's lunch. She does not enter the room. Instead, she leaves it outside the door. A similar scene was presented in *Pose* where hospital personnel would not approach AIDS patients (see section IV. A. 1) accentuating the inhumane treatment AIDS patients were offered. The sense of fear attached to AIDS is further punctuated in the same episode of *It's a Sin* when, toward the end, Henry

dies, the nurses put his body into a box, and then they disinfect his bed and the room very thoroughly.

Significant for the contextualisation of the point of view of the series is also the way non-heterosexual individuals are perceived by society. This is an important portrayal, because it allows audiences to understand why AIDS was framed as the gay plague by dominant culture. In section II. D. 2. of this study, I discussed my scepticism in relation to the effectiveness of the retrovision genre as a means of representing HIV/AIDS mainly because good quality of life with HIV has been achieved, and representations that focus on the horrors of AIDS can contribute to further spreading ungrounded fear and discrimination against PLWHA. However, perhaps one of the most significant features of *It's a Sin* is that it paints a picture that allows its audiences to understand the conditions within which both AIDS and its significance came to be. In the first episode of the series, we observe all representatives of normative institutions, that is medical personnel, family members, businessmen, and the society at large, disapproving of, or even resenting, non-heterosexuals not yet because of fear in relation to the new 'gay cancer' that has taken over the US - this will come soon, but for not conforming to what is deemed appropriate, prudent, and normative.

Davies's choice to document societal responses to those who were perceived to be queer fills in a gap both in the history of HIV/AIDS but also in the history of (homo)sexuality. Popular media became interested in the virus long after it had already started killing thousands of people. Some speculations with regard to the spread of the virus had been made in the US, but these were not shared in Europe. For media this was not an important issue. For gay people, it was a matter of life and death. Davies (2021) comments that " [...] it's hard to look back and reconstruct how information was spread in those early days, '81, '82, before the tabloids got hold of the story. Rumours. Mutterings. Whispers from America. Chat in the dark corners of pubs." By documenting the climate of the time in relation to (homo)sexuality, Davies does not provide audiences with yet another tragic story of the outbreak of AIDS. Instead, he makes us pause and wonder how it all started, why it started, how it spread so quickly, and why nobody did anything to stop it. Ironically, Davies chose a corporate mainstream medium to challenge mainstream society to think harder and consider not only what happened, but also what the conditions were for this to happen to such a scale.

As I briefly noted earlier, one of the criticisms against the mode of representation of *It's a Sin* has been its negligence in focusing on the experience of women and non-white populations. By situating the link between AIDS and sex within society's abjection of gay men, the series fails to promote a need for thorough reconsideration of AIDS media cultures. Roche (2021) reviewing *It's a Sin* observes

> [...] it should have gone the extra mile and included the women who from the beginning died from Aids [*sic*] too. They were there from day one. The women told they were selfish to get pregnant, the women who had their babies taken away from them, the women called whores for contracting the virus when they should have known better.

Indeed, the series fails to represent women and BAME populations, perpetuating the (re)traumatising framing, common to media landscapes, of AIDS narratives. Also absent from the series is the emergence of grassroots collective activism which was initiated as a response to HIV/AIDS (see section II. D. 2). Even though these are valid criticisms, *It's a Sin* attempts to depict AIDS suffering as social suffering. Despite the limited - and rather normative - variety in narrative points of view, the series succeeds in presenting AIDS suffering as a medically induced but socially preserved form of suffering.

IV. B. 2. Contrasts of Victimhood

From analysing the correspondence between verbal narrative and image, it emerges that *It's a Sin* elicits all three possible responses from its audiences: factual, emotional, and ideological. As discussed in chapter III (section III. D. 1), a factual response is achieved when what is said is in agreement with what is shown. This allows audiences to consider what is represented, in this case HIV/AIDS suffering, as authentic. Even though *It's a Sin* is a fictional product, it achieves a factual response by contrasting moments of sorrow and loss with moments of joy and freedom. Arguably, this summarises the definition of HIV/AIDS suffering as portrayed in *It's a Sin*. It does not refer solely to the pain and loss caused by HIV/AIDS, nor does it solely refer to political and societal negligence; rather, it emphasises the loss of innocence caused by AIDS in relation to both enjoying the here and now and dreaming about the future. This is highlighted when, toward the end of episode 1, we see Ritchie, Jill, Roscoe, and Colin having interviews where they discuss their future dreams and aspirations, while Ash is at home looking at the headings of a newspaper reading *mystery illness* in big black font. Since contemporary audiences know that this *mystery illness* refers to AIDS which, at that time, was not treatable, and the chances of surviving it were minimal, the series provides an element of factual suffering through irony. At the same time when we see the characters being excited about the life ahead

of them, Ash's looking at the newspaper reminds us of the recent history of HIV/AIDS and makes us realise that most of them will most likely not be able to realise their dreams.

When discussing the relationship between verbal narrative and image in *Pose* (section IV. A. 2), the focus was on Pray Tell and Costas's hospital scene. In that scene, Pray Tell, addressing the adverse effects of AIDS, talks about life before AIDS when "[...] we were truly free, free to love, free to fuck, free to be our gay ass selves in this beautiful shithole of a town [...] what it's like to love without worrying that you're gonna die, or worse yet, that you're gonna kill somebody." The first episode of *It's a Sin* focuses on this part of history when relationships, sex, and being gay were not overshadowed by the terrors of AIDS. This is rare for a cultural product that focuses on the outbreak of HIV/AIDS. Indeed, the series starts in a very optimistic manner where all the young characters are getting ready to live a life of their own. This is supported by pop music of the time that is playing in the background of every scene, contributing to its initial optimistic outlook. Halfway through the first episode, these depictions of optimism about the future are juxtaposed with imagery of fear, sickness, agony over the unknown, and death. This sharp contrast between a carefree reality of innocence to one of despair can elicit more emotional responses from audiences. Rather than just being presented with factual information or factual representations of suffering which, as discussed in section III. D. 1, are less likely to change audience's preconceptions about HIV/AIDS suffering, an emotional response is more likely to contribute to audiences' connecting or even identifying with the sufferers. This is significant because it allows audiences to move from a state of indifference to a state of compassion.

Another type of response *It's a Sin* can elicit from its audiences is an ideological one. Such a response is elicited when audiences are presented with an *us versus them* scene of suffering where *them* are presented as savages. This *us versus them* binary is presented both when the series accentuates societal discrimination against non-heterosexuals to contextualise the outbreak of AIDS, and in a number of scenes that involve AIDS suffering. Examples of the former are found in the first two episodes, where audiences see how Roscoe's family not only disapprove his not being heterosexual and want to send him back to Nigeria so that he is *cured*, but also so that the family get rid of the stigma that is associated with having a gay son. We watch similar, but less overt, reactions from Ritchie's family who both in the first and second episodes make pejorative comments about homosexuals, and they try to push Ritchie into being in a relationship with Jill. In episode 3, we observe Ritchie at a vulnerable moment. Right after

he finds out about Gregory's, aka Gloria, (Nathaniel Curtis) death and while he believes that he might have contracted HIV, he is talking to his mother and does not tell her the truth about him; instead, he does not deny the possibility of having an affair with Jill. A few moments later, we understand that he told her that because he wanted to ask her for money, suggesting that had he been honest with her, she would not have supported him financially or otherwise. These depictions, along with a few others where members of the society make side comments about or give disapproving looks to non-heterosexual characters, portray an *us versus them* society. However, neither those portrayed as *us* nor those portrayed as *them* are presented to be *savages*, as in Othered, at this stage. It is indeed ironic to write that being rejected by one's family for not being heterosexual is not a savage depiction, but arguably homophobia and violence toward queer people is a rather common, albeit heinous, phenomenon for the audiences of *It's a Sin*. Therefore, it is unlikely that such depictions would promote feelings other than disapproval at best.

However, when the series presents the *us versus them* binary in relation to AIDS sufferers and the rest of society, the depiction becomes less commonplace, and the attitudes revealed in the treatment of Colin become more odious. In episode 3, Colin returns to his mother's house in Wales after suffering a seizure at work. Following another seizure he suffers at her house, she takes him to the hospital. The next shot shows Colin alone in a hospital room and a nurse locking his door. He is not allowed to exit the room, not even to go to the toilet. Instead, a police officer, whose role is to guard Colin's room and ensure he does not escape, instructs him to use a commode located next to his bed. We, then, see Colin's mother at the doctor's office. The doctor is accompanied by a police officer, and they explain to her that Colin's seizures are caused by AIDS. She does not understand what AIDS is, and the doctor says that "it's the disease that ended the life of Rock Hudson [...] AIDS is associated with the homosexual male population." The police officer continues and explains to Colin's mother that because her son is infectious, they have been granted a court order under the Public Health Act of 1984, according to which Colin is not allowed to leave his room and that no-one is allowed in, either.

When the mother enquires whether her son is under arrest, the police officer highlights that "[...] none of this is our fault", referring to the police, the hospital, and arguably to 'proper' heteronormative society. He explains that "[...] AIDS is transmitted by sex with men. If he [Colin] chose to be part of that cesspit, well, who am I to judge? But my judgment is vital when his disease becomes a public menace. [...] Your son is dangerous to others." Despite the fact

that the police officer being aware that AIDS transmission is possible only through sex, he insists on not letting Colin get out of the hospital and go to live with his mother. By referring to his disease as a public menace, the police officer foreshadows the moral panic that is about to manifest itself. Most importantly, though, for this analysis, his apathetic demeanour and pejorative language in contrast with shots where Colin is using his room's commode for toilet while crying and being alone encourage audiences to perceive the police officer, and by extension traditional institutions, as *savage*, vulgar and unacculturated. In turn, this enables audiences to identify Colin as one of them and, therefore, develop feelings of pity and compassion for his suffering.

IV. B. 3. Promoting Acts of Care

An analysis of the aesthetic quality of the series with regards to the effects of pamphleteering, philanthropy, and sublimation (see section III. D. 1) enables a closer understanding of the possibilities for action that the series promotes. Strudwick (2021) notes on *VICE*

> [...] it [the series] demands so much more of us than to mourn the dead, or to reach the mere first rung of the ladder and empathise. It makes us stand back and think about the sanctity of human life; and about the type of society needed to protect not just "us", but everyone (emphasis in original).

The action Strudwick refers to is deeper and arguably more significant than empathising with the sufferer, offering help next time someone needs it, or acting in a manner that prevents suffering from happening. Strudwick alludes to reflexive contemplation, or what Chouliaraki (2006) terms *sublimation*, that can be elicited from audiences through representations of suffering. Strudwick (2021) continues "[...] beyond individuals, beyond behaviour that you might wish to blame, who or what really has the power to enable disease to flourish? Whose is the real sin?" Indeed, *It's a Sin*, especially the first two episodes, but also the series as a whole, offers commentary with regards to the ways in which society enabled the spread of the virus which in turn puts the audience in a position to contemplate the human condition. Perhaps, the significant success of the series is partly due to its use of HIV/AIDS suffering as metanarrative for the corruption - at all levels - of society.

Another effect of the aesthetic quality of a cultural product is this of pamphleteering which refers to feelings of anger the audience can feel toward those who inflict or contribute to the suffering of others. One of the first stories that contribute to this effect is the story of Gloria in

episode 2. After having agreed to attend Ritchie's birthday party, Gloria does not show up. The next day, Jill is worried, Gloria calls her and asks Jill to help with the shopping. Jill goes to see Gloria at her house, and Gloria tells her about her experience at the hospital. Gloria was given a questionnaire that was only "for people like [him]" and one of the questions asked whether he had ever had sex with animals. Episode 2 comes immediately after the carefree, unapologetic, and liberating atmosphere linked to gay life that was built in episode 1. Situating this scene in such a way enables a deeper understanding of how society at large viewed homosexuality. The reference to sex with animals as being on a par with homosexuality is significant for its absurdity but also because it is not a rare tactic from homophobic polemics. It alludes to medieval societies which is when the comparison of bestiality to homosexuality seems to have first appeared (Wade, 2020), but it is also relevant to contemporary societies given that six months before the release of *It's a Sin*, pamphlets comparing homosexuality to bestiality were dropped into UK homes (Kelleher, 2020); also about a year earlier similar comments were made by a lawmaker in Wyoming (Fitzsimons, 2019). Therefore, audiences are prompted to react not only to the cruelty with which Gloria was treated by the medical personnel in the series, but also to the continuous dehumanisation of non-heterosexuals by society.

Another example of the pamphleteering function of the series can be found through Colin's story. After almost being sexually assaulted by his boss, Colin is assigned to accompany him on a business trip in New York where the two of them would work with a high-end client of the tailor shop. When his supervisor tells him the news about the trip, the camera gives audiences a close-up of Colin's face, allowing us to read the fear in his eyes. During their first night in New York, his boss invades Colin's room with the pretext of tasting a new wine as a means of celebrating Colin's first business trip abroad. His boss is ready to make a move, but he sees all the newspapers and magazines Colin had bought. All the headlines are about AIDS which makes his boss believe that Colin suffers from it. At that point, he leaves Colin's room, leaving Colin and audiences relieved. However, once they are back in London, Colin is told that his apprenticeship has come to an early end, and that he should leave. Colin seems confused because right before the trip he was made to believe that the company is very happy with his progress - which is why they sent him to that important business trip in the first place. However, when he requires an explanation and later on to be given a second chance, his boss pretends to be very busy going through his documents and does not even look at him. It becomes apparent that the reason for him being fired is his boss's assumptions about Colin having AIDS. Up until

this point, the series has portrayed Colin as a very reserved young gay man. There have been no scenes of him being sexually involved with another man, and all the other characters of the series as well as audiences are led to believe that Colin is a virgin. On the one hand, we observe a young man focused on being the best employee they can be, but at the same time, this same young man is fired on the assumption of having AIDS. This illustrates not only the moral panic that developed in association to AIDS and gay men at the time, but also promotes feelings of anger toward Colin's boss. Indeed, the latter, rather than helping Colin, further contributes to his suffering by leaving him without a job and the benefits that are associated with work.

The series also includes characters who are supportive of those who experience HIV/AIDS suffering. Such representations contribute to the series' philanthropic function and can encourage audience members to identify with those who help and, possibly, become themselves agents of help in similar situations. Examples of such characters include Colin's mother, Jill's parents, and some bystanders at the *die-in* protest of episode 4 (analysed in section IV. B. 6 below). Perhaps one of the most significant representations of acts of support and help is the one in episode 3 when, after Colin's mother has been told that Colin is not to be let out of his room and nobody is allowed to visit him because "he is dangerous to others" (see section IV. B. 2.), Jill and her activist friends recruit a lawyer to handle the case. Elizabeth, the lawyer, goes to the hospital with her associates, accuses those in charge for misusing the law, and threatens to take them to court unless they let Colin leave and go to his mother's house. The presence of Elizabeth is significant because she is not related in any way to Colin or his friends. She is, therefore, offering her help not because she is biased but because this is the right thing to do. As such, audiences might be reminded that no matter what their personal beliefs might be, it is important to put the sufferers and their best interests first. Further to this incident, when Colin is released from the hospital, his mother tells him that it would be best to send him to a hospital in London so that he is near his friends. This is a rather altruistic move on her part, especially when compared to Ritchie's mother (discussed in section IV. B. 5). Despite the fact that she knows that the next days will probably be his last ones, she does not keep him at her house to spend as much time as she possibly can with him. Instead, she prioritises his emotional well-being and acknowledges that it would be best if he were with his friends during these last days. This further adds to the philanthropy function of the series which can possibly encourage audiences to imitate such acts and assist those who suffer.

IV. B. 4. Reducing The Distance: From One Virus To The Next

The three previous sections provided a multimodal analysis of *It's a Sin* and showed the contribution of the mode of representation, the relationship between verbal narrative and visual representations, as well as the overall aesthetic quality of a cultural production with regard to HIV/AIDS suffering to the promotion of certain values toward suffering. It appears that *It's a Sin* encourages its audiences to develop feelings of sympathy toward HIV/AIDS sufferers. At the same time, it encourages them to challenge established structures and institutions which inflict and/or maintain such suffering. The last section, in particular, described the possibility of the series to encourage its audiences to become active agents of help toward those who suffer. The analysis of the semiotic system of the representation of HIV/AIDS suffering provides a better understanding into the series' potential to encourage certain reactions from its audiences toward suffering. A critical discourse analysis can provide a further understanding into how, if at all, the series provokes audiences to react to suffering, not only as it is represented on screen, but in a manner that extends beyond the medium of representation. The analysis that follows, then, does not focus so much on the ways in which HIV/AIDS suffering has been represented, but it focuses on how it has been mediated. In other words, the discussion focuses on how audiences are prompted to respond to the suffering Other.

A first area of analysis is distance, both spatial and temporal. As discussed in section III. D. 2, spatial distance provides audiences with a sense of safety, while spatial proximity encourages feelings of familiarity and danger. Even though *It's a Sin* is a work of fiction, both its setting/location and the major events that are dramatised are real. The series highlights its realistic aspect by incorporating well known historical events in its storyline such as Princess Diana's well known handshake with an AIDS patient on April 19, 1987 (Praderio, 2018), and the staging of a *die-in* protest which was a common means of peaceful protest employed by ACT UP London and other activist organisations (Curzon, 2018). London, the main location of the series, was and still is an epicentre with regards to HIV infections (Terrence Higgins Trust, 2018). Being situated there, then, the representation of suffering is presented as something relevant to the lives of audiences, not only from the UK but also from the global North. Watching the characters of *It's a Sin* experience not only the physical suffering associated with HIV/AIDS but also social discrimination and stigmatisation attached to the virus while living in one of the biggest metropoles of the global North enables audiences to consider danger not with regard to themselves but with regard to those who suffer from

HIV/AIDS. In other words, audiences are not prompted to feel threatened by HIV/AIDS suffering; rather, the series offers audiences the possibility to consider the dangers that HIV/AIDS sufferers experienced at the time when the events of the series took place, as well as at the time of watching.

Similar to *Pose*, *It's a Sin* is set in the 1980s. According to what was discussed in section III. D. 2, temporal distance between the spectacle of suffering and its audiences can make it less likely for a need to take action to be promoted. Indeed, it was shown that temporal proximity can encourage audiences to take action since they might feel that the suffering they watch might be directly relevant to their lives, and as such it can affect them. However, when suffering is presented in the past, as is the case with most works of fiction, feelings of action-taking are less likely to emerge. In section IV. A. 4., a similar issue was discussed in relation to *Pose*. It was argued that time and distance become relative as a result of certain instances of recognisable references to popular culture, such as Madonna's *Vogue*. However, another point that could be added with regard to temporal distance and which is true for both *Pose* and *It's a Sin* is that despite the fact that they are set in the past, they are not set in such a distant past that would make it impossible for members of the audience to identify with it. Quite the contrary, most of the viewers would have been alive in the early 1980s and they can not only identify with, but also relate to HIV/AIDS suffering as it is portrayed in the series. On this point, Roche (2021) comments "[...] when I watched *It's A Sin* I fell into a pit of darkness. I thought, can't you wait until we're dead? Us survivors who did not die, but had to exist in stigma, and who are now triggered by this show and the enormity of what we went through?" In doing so, she further highlights not only the fact that the atrocities associated with HIV/AIDS suffering have not been forgotten, but also that members of the audience relived the horrors of the first two decades of HIV and AIDS while watching the series. Therefore, the fact that the series is not set in the here and now does not seem to have affected its possible impact.

Another point that needs to be addressed, perhaps in much greater detail, is that at the time *It's a Sin* was released, the world was experiencing yet another pandemic. There are many topics for analysis with regard to comparing societal responses to COVID-19 and those to HIV/AIDS. However, for the purposes of this study, such an analysis will be limited to identifying that audiences of *It's a Sin* experience a somewhat similar fear to the one people of the 1980s experienced with HIV/AIDS. They are also confronted with an unknown virus the effects of which extend beyond the physical and toward all aspects of society and culture. The two viruses

are very different both in biomedical terms, as well as in the way they were perceived by society. Yet, it is important to recognise that such a condition results in the diminishing of any temporal distance between audiences and the series. Audiences are able to identify with the ways in which the lives of the main characters changed as a result of HIV/AIDS, because their own lives changed as a result of COVID-19. Russell T. Davies observes in an interview with *The Guardian* referring to the similarities between COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS that "[...] we can get as embarrassed about sex now and we did then [...]," but he also notes that "[...] if coronavirus was a sexually transmitted disease, it would be much more hidden, still" (Wise, 2021). Indeed, this is what makes the relationship between the time of the events of the series and the time audiences get to watch the series so significant. The fact that audiences live in fear of another virus, one that is not hidden, one that affects the whole society and not only marginalised minorities, encourages them to reflect on the different conditions between the two viruses and, in turn, understand the contribution of society to the aggravation of HIV/AIDS and possibly decide to make a step toward changing this.

IV. B. 5. Humanising The Suffering

One of the most significant factors with regard to the responses of the audience to portrayals of HIV/AIDS suffering is the degree of humanisation of the HIV/AIDS sufferer. As it was discussed in earlier sections of this project (see section III. D. 2 and IV. A. 5), audiences are more likely to engage with the sufferers' agency (section IV. B. 6) if the sufferers appear to be humane. This involves the presentation of personal narratives instead of impersonal facts and statistics that describe the sufferers' situation. Similarly, the way these narratives are presented to audiences, by means of shooting techniques for example, can contribute to the humanisation of the sufferers. Audiences are likely to be more engaged when they are presented with close-ups, rather than generic shots that involve many people, some of whom might not be related to suffering at all. The significance of the degree of humanisation is important in that it can enable certain audience responses not only with regard to suffering or the sufferers but, more importantly, with regard to who they can identify with and, potentially emulate when and if they find themselves in similar situations. This is especially pertinent when scenes of suffering involve the one who suffers and someone who is not directly related to the suffering but acts as benefactor or persecutor. Identifying with the benefactor can instigate acts of care, while identifying with the persecutor is more significant in that it can lead to demands for civil rights.

Similar to *Pose*, the portrayals of the characters of *It's a Sin* are not centred around HIV/AIDS suffering. Despite the fact that the series dramatises the initial years of the global epidemic and its effects on primarily gay and queer people, it offers audiences characters who are fully round in that they exhibit a number of emotions, and they go through a number of situations that are not all related to HIV/AIDS. This is significant in that it does not limit the representation of these characters to that of victims. In the initial two episodes of the series, we watch all of them fight, each one as best they can, for an authentic and truthful life in which they can be allowed to explore their potential. They are happy, sad, scared, alone, with friends, optimistic, pessimistic, and the list goes on. This multidimensional portrayal enables audiences to identify them as whole humans rather than just as victims of HIV/AIDS or of a society that enabled HIV/AIDS to spread. In turn, when in the next three episodes we follow the characters trying to navigate their lives through this virus, it is easier for audiences to identify with them and, possibly, empathise. One powerful example that illustrates the degree of humanisation of the characters can be found in the last episode when Ritchie is about to die with AIDS. His friends and family are gathered at the hospital, and both them and probably many members of the audience feel sorry for seeing a young man dying like that. At that moment, Davies decides to have Ritchie tell his friends that even though he knew he was positive, he had sex with others.

> I knew and I kept having sex. I thought I'd stop, and I did a lot of times, I stopped a million times. [...] But there were nights with too much booze, actually, nights when I was stone cold sober, and if a boy just looked at me in the right way, a boy with that look in his eye, I'd fuck him. I would fuck him hard and he could fuck me all night, any way he likes. I wonder how many I killed? [...] I knew it was wrong, and I kept on doing it. Do you hate me now?

In a powerful cataclysm of shame, Ritchie's confession renders him human. He is not just a victim of AIDS that should be pitied. He is raw and flawed like we all are.

Another powerful moment that illustrates the degree of the characters' humanisation is in episode 4, when Roscoe decides not to participate in the *die-in* protest Jill and fellow activists are organising, only to escort a man he has been seeing for the past few weeks to an important business occasion. This man is a Conservative MP who has been seeing Roscoe for some time and has asked him to go with him to an exhibition his party has put together for Margaret Thatcher. Jill tries to convince Roscoe telling him that this protest is about Colin. He responds by telling her that

> [...] Well, I've lived with Colin in this room. I lived with him and I loved him and I watched him get up and go to work and phone his mum and behave. All his life, all he ever did was behave and what happened? He died. So, I'm getting out of here, Jill. You can wave your flags all you like, but I'm moving up.

Roscoe's refusal to attend the protest is not a sign of indifference; it is a sign of fear and an attempt to escape an inevitable future by using any means available to him. Yet, a few scenes later when Roscoe confronts the MP for having "[...] a hard-on for Thatcher instead of him," the MP says "Good God, I'm not gay." Roscoe wonders why the MP is with him if he is not gay, and the MP responds "Well, every so often one has to shove one's face in the shit just so you can lift your head up and smell the sweet roses afterwards" leaving Roscoe shattered not because he had feelings for this man, but because he realised then and there that it is not somebody else that will help him "get out" of this situation, but his own self. Roscoe decides to leave the exhibition and joins the protest, leaving audiences to reflect on what they would have done to survive an unpromising future and how they would react when everyone kept reminding them that all exits are blocked.

Davies ensures that not only those suffering from HIV/AIDS are presented as humane, but also those around them too. In the last episode, when Ritchie is in the hospital and after his situation becomes irreversible, his parents, who were not informed about his condition or about him being at the hospital, storm in. Initially they are in denial accusing the hospital personnel for not taking care of their son. Then, they accuse Jill for not telling them anything about Ritchie being sick, and finally they come to terms with his imminent death. One would expect audiences to be angry with Ritchie's parents. From the first episode, they were not supportive of Ritchie's dreams and aspirations. They kept making homophobic comments every time he was around, and they overtly avoided any discussion that would trigger uncomfortable topics and situations. Every time Ritchie would visit or call them in an attempt to confide in them, instead of giving him space to do so, they offered him money; as if his only problems had to do with money or, most likely, in the hopes that he would not proceed with telling them what his actual problems were. Yet, the way they are presented in the last episode makes it less likely that audiences might feel anger against them. Despite being cruel toward everyone at the hospital, and despite taking Ritchie back home and not allowing his friends to come over, we can see that what they do is out of despair. In all these scenes, we are presented with numerous close-ups of Ritchie's mother (Keeley Hawes), obviously trying not to break down and

pretending to be strong for Ritchie. As cruel as her actions might initially appear to be, Davies makes sure to portray her as if she does not know any better.

The humanisation of the characters in *It's a Sin*, both HIV/AIDS sufferers and those who function as spectators to suffering, renders possible for audiences to be encouraged to proceed with acts of care and acts of civil rights. The series does not present HIV/AIDS as the unknown cause of everyone's suffering. This is where its success lies. In a sense, HIV/AIDS is portrayed as a manifestation of society's insistence on denying the opportunity for non-heterosexual people to dream a future in which they are fulfilled and happy. Davies tells us that there are no sides to choose from. One might physically suffer from HIV/AIDS, another one might help emotionally those who suffer in any way they see fit, another might choose to protest and demand society's attention, and another might choose to look the other way. *It's a Sin* shows that irrespective of people's chosen role or response, HIV/AIDS has affected society as a whole. As such, the series leaves no room for audiences to stay indifferent. By not pointing the finger at certain individuals or behaviours, for instance Ritchie's parents, Davies invites us to consider each and every one as humans, and therefore, stand for one another. Whether in the role of benefactor or persecutor, audiences are shown that taking action matters. Strudwick (2021) observes "[...] beyond individuals, beyond behaviour that you might wish to blame, who or what really has the power to enable disease to flourish? Whose is the real sin?" It is therefore important to understand that all actors in a scene of suffering act as humans. Some suffer, some help, some freeze, and some do not know what to do. The series shows that it is not blaming that is important; rather, what matters is reflecting on the origins and perpetuation of a disease and on each one's role in this.

IV. B. 6. Beating The Virus Through Humane Actions

An examination of the relationship of agency with regard to both those who suffer from HIV/AIDS, as well as to those present in scenes of suffering but not directly experiencing suffering themselves both expands the analysis of the previous section and enables a deeper understanding about whether audiences are encouraged to engage actively or passively with the spectacle of suffering. As discussed in section III. D. 2., for active engagement to be promoted, audiences need to be presented with sufferers who respond to their suffering by fighting it until the end. This makes it possible for audiences to become active agents to other people's suffering. To further increase this possibility, spectacles of suffering can also portray those who are spectators to the suffering of others as active agents of help. This can not only

encourage feelings of sympathy toward the ones who suffer, but it can also encourage feelings of identification toward the ones who help those who suffer. Perhaps this is the most significant feature of a cultural product that engages with suffering. All other features that were presented earlier relate to the possibility of engaging audiences and encouraging them to contemplate those conditions that enable suffering to occur. Agency, though, and the way it is used is the feature that can affect audiences' inclination toward action or inaction. Agency is not only a feature of *It's a Sin*, but it is also one of the major themes of the series. Most, if not all, characters, sufferers or otherwise, are active agents toward HIV/AIDS suffering. Audiences might agree or disagree with the way in which some characters act, but the series itself does not take a stance. Rather, it portrays agency as is, without judgment, transforming it into a catharsis for characters and audiences alike.

One of the scenes that was discussed in the previous section (IV. A. 5.), the one with Roscoe leaving the conservative MP to join the *die-in* protest is a very significant example of how agency was portrayed in relation not only to HIV/AIDS suffering *per se*, but the overall sociocultural conditions that surrounded the outbreak of the virus. Initially, Roscoe chooses not to participate in the die-in, so that he can escort the MP to the conservative party exhibition and allow himself the possibility for a better future. "I am moving up" is what he says to Jill to justify his absence from the protest. It becomes clear that Roscoe does not avoid the fight. Rather, he is ready to give one, but he wants to give a *different* one; one that does not involve any more anger, let down, or death. He has had enough of it already. In choosing not to go to the protest, Roscoe chooses to believe that there is a way out of their predicament, a bloodless way out, literally and metaphorically speaking. Soon he realises that there is no such an escape, and without second-guessing he joins the protest, and he fights to be seen and heard by a society that chooses to look the other way. Also, at the end of the series, Roscoe decides to go back to his family home and fight for a working relationship with his parents. Earlier in that episode, Roscoe sees his father blessing one of the patients in the AIDS ward of the hospital. His father talks to him about the hypocrisy he saw when he went to Nigeria where people with AIDS were left to die because the hatred of the people against those who engage in sex with people of the same gender was more important than trying to save their lives or comforting them. Admitting his mistakes, also an act of agency, his father asks for Roscoe's forgiveness. Roscoe's visit to his father's house toward the end of the series suggests that he chose to forgive him and give him a chance to address the mistakes of the past.

Another character who has been an active agent with regard to his own HIV/AIDS suffering is Ritchie. Whether audiences agree with Ritchie's decisions and actions or not, it is certain that he is never passive when it comes to his life. At the early stages of the outbreak of HIV/AIDS, when fear of the unknown was spreading among members of the queer community, Ritchie resisted giving up the freedoms he had fought for in light of an unknown disease that was looming over everyone's life. Then, again, following his AIDS diagnosis, he started looking for medication, nostrums, and other home remedies to ensure he can continue working as an actor and chase his dreams. We see him participating in TV productions and theatrical plays, a sign of someone who does not give in but fights as much as they can. A few scenes later, when Ritchie is at the hospital because of a new lung cancer that has developed, he decides to disregard his doctor's advice not to undergo chemotherapy. "I am not gonna not have treatment, am I?" he asks Jill and his doctor, despite the fact that they had just explained to him that the chemotherapy might complicate his condition. Later in the episode, we see Ritchie at his parents' house talking to his mother about his imminent death. "What do people know?" he asks his mother.

> Do they know what's wrong with me? [...] I don't wanna be a secret. [...] Boys die in London, and they say it's cancer or pneumonia, and they don't say what it really is. [...] They just lie and I don't want that. [...] Do you know why? I had so much fun. I had all those boys. I had hundreds of them. [...] I can remember every single one of them. Some boy's hair or his lips, the way he laughed at a joke, his bedroom, the stairs, his photographs, his face as he cums. [...] Some of them are bastards, but they were all great. That's what people will forget, that it was so much fun.

Ritchie stands unapologetic to the way he chose to live his life. He does not consider HIV/AIDS to be a consequence of a series of what others thought to be reckless choices. He owns his choices, and he decides to own his HIV/AIDS and upcoming death by asking his mother not to lie about his disease. This is something that was also discussed in *Pose* when Pray Tell tells Costas that he is afraid that there will be a new generation of people who will not know how fun life was before AIDS. Ritchie's stance reminds audiences that remembering is a choice, and no matter how difficult or painful it might be, it is the only way for people not to let their suffering win.

The one character who does not experience HIV/AIDS suffering directly, as she does not have HIV or AIDS but understands the significance of the virus for her friends and does everything she can to help them is Jill. The fictional character of Jill is inspired by Jill Nalder who, while

studying in London, "[...] noticed young men were leaving and not coming back" (Lawthom, 2021). In the series, Jill is the first one to start gathering as much information about the new virus as she can. She understands that in order for her to protect her friends, she has to comprehend the virus, its effects, and its possible routes of transmission. In each episode, we see Jill helping her friends and the queer community by providing emotional, material, and physical support to those in need. As early as in episode 2, when none of her friends are infected by the virus, she joins a group of activists and volunteers who form a helpline. Perhaps, one of the most powerful scenes of the entire series is the scene where Ritchie's mother meets Jill to tell her about Ritchie's death. When Ritchie's parents found out about his condition, they took him from the London hospital to their home on the Isle of Wight. The mother, noticeably jealous of Jill for having spent time with Ritchie, and for knowing him better than her, keeps Ritchie isolated and does not allow his friends to visit him. Jill and Roscoe decide to go to the Isle of Wight, rent a room near Ritchie's house, and wait until his mother invites them in. After a couple of weeks, Ritchie's mother gives Jill a call and asks to meet her by the sea. Jill goes believing that they are going to visit Ritchie, only to find out that Ritchie died the day before.

> This is your fault, Mrs Tozer. All of this is your fault. [...] right from the start, 'cause I don't know what happened to you to make that house so loveless. But that's why Ritchie grew up so ashamed of himself. [...] And then he killed people. [...] He was ashamed, and he kept on being ashamed. He kept the shame going by having sex with men and infecting them and then running away. 'Cause that's what shame does, Valerie. It makes him think he deserves it. The wards are full of men who think they deserve it. They are dying, and a little bit of them think, 'yes, this is right. I brought this to myself. It's my fault because the sex that I love is killing me.' I mean it's astonishing. The perfect virus came along to prove you right. So that's what happened in your house. He died because of you. They all die because of you.

Confronting Ritchie's mother, Jill provides audiences with an empowering moment where she verbalises the premise of the series which is to highlight the significance of the sociocultural context for the spread of the virus. At no moment in the series are we under the impression that gay men's life is accused for spreading the virus; this is not a series that points fingers at gay men. Such accusations have been commonplace during the first four decades of the virus (see section II. D. 2), and Davies presents us with a character who responds to such claims. Jill does not only help those who need support; she achieves to stand up for those who cannot do so themselves. Her courage and commitment can prompt audiences not only to reflect about societal responses to HIV/AIDS suffering, but also to be empowered and address instances of

injustice, misinformation, and stigmatisation. In her last scene, we follow her back at the hospital where she visits an AIDS patient whom she does not know personally, but she knows that he is there alone with no friends or family. Personifying sympathy, empathy, and compassion, Jill's character can encourage audiences to take an active role themselves in becoming agents of help for the suffering of others.

IV. B. 7. Discussion

It's a Sin has marked new records in terms of numbers of viewers with more than 6.5 million having streamed it in the first month of its release, and it has been praised by many both on social media and on news reports (Storey, 2021). It has now become a platform for people educating audiences about HIV/AIDS and encouraging them to get tested for STIs (*ibid.*). Cashman (2021) also notes that the series has already become a platform for other problems relating to sexuality, such as transphobia and trans-related stigma, to be addressed. At the time of writing, a few months after the official release of the series, it is too early to determine the overall significance and/or impact of the series. However, with regard to the representation of HIV/AIDS suffering in the series, it is clear that it differs from previous representations such as those discussed in section III. D. 4, in that *It's a Sin* highlights life before the virus, presenting it to be fun, carefree, and innocent. It also portrays the initial years of the global epidemic in a manner that does not point fingers at individuals, nor does it employ a moralistic stance promoting the heteronormative and homonormative ideologies discussed in chapter II. Davies documents the loss of innocence that came along with the virus, but if there is anything that he teaches his audience is to own their dreams and desires, to fight for them, not to be quick in judging others or situations but to step back and consider who contributes to the suffering of others. In Strudwick's words, Davies makes us think "whose is the real sin?"

V. Queering Hegemony in Contemporary Non-Fictional Narratives

While the previous chapter focused on fictional narratives of HIV/AIDS suffering, this chapter focuses on non-fictional ones. In particular, it focuses on HIV/AIDS activist narratives and the ways in which they portray HIV/AIDS suffering. To do this, the chapter is divided into two sections. The first one examines the representation of HIV/AIDS suffering in celebrity activism. In particular, it focuses on the ways in which Jonathan Van Ness from Netflix's *Queer Eye* (2018 - present) has been using his platforms to educate audiences about HIV/AIDS, as well as to highlight the ways in which the Trump administration has contributed to the worsening of the quality of life of people living with HIV. The second section focuses on Bruce Richman and representations of HIV/AIDS suffering in non-celebrity activism. Richman is the founder of Prevention Access Care which launched the U=U campaign. The purpose of the campaign is to share widely accepted scientific evidence confirming that HIV positive people whose viral load is undetectable are not able to infect others. When the viral load is very low, it cannot be traced in the blood, and it cannot be passed on from one person to the next. The second section of this chapter focuses on the ways in which Richman has addressed HIV/AIDS suffering in his appearances on corporate television networks. Thus, it does not analyse the campaign as a whole. Similar to the previous chapter, each section is organised into the six features of analysis that were presented and analysed in chapter III. These are: the mode of representation, the correspondence between verbal narrative and image, aesthetic quality, spatial and temporal proximity, humanisation, and agency.

V.A. Mediating HIV/AIDS Suffering in Celebrity Activism Campaign Narratives

Queer Eye (2018 - present) has been one of the most acclaimed reality TV shows for the past four years. Since its first episode aired and until the time of writing, the show has won multiple national and international TV awards, including 8 Primetime Emmy Awards. Netflix's *Queer Eye* is a reboot of Bravo's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003 - 2007). The basic premise of the show is that in each episode, a team of experts, the *Fab Five* perform a makeover on someone who needs to change their lives. Bravo's show received mixed reactions by scholars with some arguing that it provided an opportunity for gay people to be seen and to be celebrated, and others criticising the show for promoting a stereotypical idea of gay men which

reinforced rather than challenged discriminatory behaviours. In particular, Ava Laure Parsemain (2019) argues that the show "[...] destabilised traditional power structures by presenting effeminate gay men as role models for heterosexuals. By depicting friendships between gay and heterosexual men, it also built bridges between gay and straight masculinity and reversed homophobic hostilities" (p. 28).[108] Indeed, creating a show with the five lead characters being openly and unapologetically gay was something new for corporate media.

With the exception of *Queer as Folk* (2000 - 2005), gay characters had rarely been given lead roles in mainstream cultural products. In chapter II (section II. D), I discussed a few examples where gay characters were included in TV series and films but only in supporting roles. In the decades prior to the 2000s, it was very unlikely to see the main character of a TV series or film meant for mass consumption to be gay. Also within the limited context of Bravo's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003 - 2007), we could observe a reversal of dynamics. Rather than seeing the gay character presented as in need of change (among others, their behaviour, their sexuality, their attitude) which was typical of earlier portrayals of gay characters in TV and films (chapter II, section II. D), the premise of the makeover show reversed that and it was now the straight guys who needed the help and knowledge of the gay ones so that they could change and better fit in. This had a lot of potential as it could allow for a representation shift whereby it is the non-heterosexual that has the power and knowledge to help the heterosexual one to change themselves in a manner that is more appealing to social expectations. However, it appears that the creators of the show did not attempt to use this possible dynamic in a manner that challenges established norms and addresses social inequalities. Papacharissi and Fernback (2008) write that "[...] the ability of the *Fab Five* is clearly limited to the confines of the show. [They] enter and exit the life of a straight guy as fairy godmothers" (p. 355) and conclude that "[...] political critique of class and gender distinctions" (p. 365) were lacking. The function of the *Fab Five* in the original series was - unfortunately - very limited to enforcing the stereotype of straight and gay men as a reality. Through the show, the idea that straight men do not know how to style their hair, what clothes to wear, or how to have good manners was reinforced. Knowing all these would challenge their masculinity which, one could argue, is why they went to the *Fab Five* for help. The series promoted the perpetual stereotype of the well-groomed and

[108] Similar views are expressed in Gamson (2005), Sender (2006), and Torres (2005). For full bibliographical details see Gamson, J. (2005) 'The intersection of gay street and straight street: Shopping, social class, and the new gay visibility', *Social Thought & Research*, 26(1/2), pp. 3-18. Sender, K. (2006) 'Queens for a day: *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and the neo-liberal project', *Critical Studies in Media Communication,* 23(2), pp. 131-151. Torres, S. (2005) 'Why can't Johnny shave?', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 11(1), pp. 95-97.

cultured gay man whose areas of expertise are limited to hair, design, food, fashion, and culture instead of using this platform to challenge such stereotypes.

Netflix's *Queer Eye* appears to be doing a better job in engaging its audiences in political issues, as well as in challenging normative expectations. Unlike Bravo's version, Netflix did not choose an all-white cisgender cast. The new *Fab Five* include a non-binary American expert (Jonathan Van Ness), a British-Pakistani fashion expert (Tan France), a Polish-Canadian food and wine expert (Antoni Porowski), an American design expert (Bobby James Berk), and a black American culture expert (Karamo Brown). Also new to this version of the show is that the people that receive help from the *Fab Five*, the subjects, are not necessarily straight men. Of the 47 episodes that have been released, there are many that feature gay men, lesbian women, non-binary and gender fluid people, trans people, as well as straight men and women. The show also addresses the turbulent political situation of the USA. In season 2, for example, the team had to work with subjects who were Trump supporters. While they were in the process of transformation, they would enquire their subjects about their political beliefs. Also, while talking amongst themselves, the *Fab Five* addressed the importance of maintaining a dialogue with people of different beliefs instead of shutting them down. Chaney (2018) attributes this to the challenging political divide that the USA was going through at the time of Trump's election. Also, the show does not encourage a particular stereotype for masculinity; rather, it presents various types of masculinities, each one of which being neither fixed nor mainstream. In doing so, it encourages audiences to reflect on gender expectations. In what follows, the mediation of HIV/AIDS suffering in and in relation to Jonathan Van Ness's celebrity activism will be analysed by following the same process that was followed in the analysis of *Pose* and *It's a Sin* in the previous chapter. Initially, the focus is on multimodal analysis, and it moves to discourse analysis.

V. A. 1. From Fictional to Authentic Suffering

Further to the innovative changes to the original version of the series, audiences can observe each one of the new *Fab Five* to emerge as a point of interest in their own rights outside the premise of the show. Some of them have already written autobiographies and self-help guides, and at the time of writing, more are in the process of being published. This has created an interesting dynamic with regard to how the show opens the possibility for the five lead stars to promote certain sociocultural and political messages if they wish to do so. At the same time their outside-of-the-show activities feed themes and debates back into the show. In other words,

as a cultural product, *Queer Eye* is not confined to the airtime of the show, but it encompasses all activities related to its cast ranging from their interviews, to their books, to their social media usage. When analysing *Queer Eye,* therefore, it is important not to focus exclusively on what is aired as part of the show, but also to examine the activities of the *Fab Five* independently. The reason this show is discussed in this project is because three days before the publication of his autobiography, Jonathan Van Ness gave an interview to Hawgood (2019) for the New York Times where, among other topics, he talked publicly about his HIV positive status. Since then, Van Ness has been actively trying to address social stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. Therefore, the following sections will focus on how HIV/AIDS suffering is mediated through the activism of Jonathan Van Ness of *Queer Eye.*

When examining the medium of representation and the effects it might have on its audiences, it emerges that it is very different to the one of *Pose* and *It's a Sin. Pose* and *It's a Sin* are fictional accounts of the outbreak of HIV/AIDS. Shot in 2018 and 2020 respectively, but set in the late 1980s, *Queer Eye* is a reality TV show. Its main characters are not fictional but real people, some of whom were already known to the public because of previous appearances on TV or other media, and others became publicly known as a result of their participation on the show.[109] The nature of the show allows for the creation of a connection with audiences, both locally and internationally. Therefore, cast members as well as their messages can become relatable and the show can act as a platform for activism. In turn, this feeds back to the success of the show. Nowadays, audiences are more engaged when TV shows incorporate impactful social topics (Young, 2019). People can follow the transformation of the people who need the help of the *Fab Five* not only while they are on the show; they can follow them on social media and see how, and if, their lives have been affected because of the show. The more people watch the show, the more people follow each one of the *Fab Five* and their off-show activities. The more off-show activities related to society and/or the environment, the more popular they become; and, the more popular they become, the more people watch the show. All these people are following the work of people who are real, they do not follow fictional characters from a TV drama. In turn, this is likely to enable audiences to relate more with not only the show but also the cast. Indeed research confirms that people "[...] have repeatedly indicated that one of

[109] Prior to the show, Porowski appeared in movies such as *Elliot Loves* (2012), *Daddy's Boy* (2016), *The Pretenders* (2018), in TV series *The Blacklist* (2014), and in the short docudrama *To My Father* (2015). Brown's TV debut was on *The Real World: Philadelphia* (2004). After that, he appeared in *The Next 15* (2016), and he made guest appearances in various shows of various networks. Prior to *Queer Eye*, Van Ness appeared in the web series *Gay of Thrones* (2013-2019).

the draws of these programs is that they promise the opportunity to observe real people" (Hall, 2009, p. 432). However, research is also contradictory with regard to whether people perceive the cast of reality TV shows to authentically portray themselves (Nabi *et al*., 2006), or they acknowledge that reality TV cast portray a persona which is neither completely fictional nor completely their real authentic selves (Lundy, Ruth, and Park, 2008). Therefore, although there is a certain element of fictionalisation with regard to the persona of Jonathan Van Ness, being able to follow his life outside the makeover show is likely to encourage audiences to perceive him as more authentic than fictional. As such, when they are presented with Van Ness's HIV/AIDS suffering, they are more likely to remain engaged than if he was a character of a show and not a real person.

Also significant to the analysis of the mediation of suffering is the point of view through which HIV/AIDS suffering is mediated. Again, we are not told about Van Ness's truth by anyone else but Van Ness himself. Similarly to the way *Pose* and *It's a Sin* give voice to those who would be otherwise *othered*, *Queer Eye* also gives space to its cast to voice their truths. Having someone who has been viewed as Other to be the sole character/person with whom the show's audiences can identify gives the show the potential to encourage audiences to get to know each of the *Fab Five* not only for what has contributed to their being *othered*, but as whole, complete persons. By the time Van Ness went public about his HIV/AIDS status, *Queer Eye* audiences had already gotten to know him. This allows audiences to contextualise HIV/AIDS and understand that it is neither the debilitating disease that it once was, nor is it something that should not concern them at all. Having created this connection with a real person encourages audiences to understand that HIV/AIDS suffering could be an aspect of contemporary life, albeit in a different manner to what it used to be in the past. In other words, by providing audiences with the point of view of the HIV/AIDS sufferer and not mediating their suffering through someone else, audiences are not only encouraged to be more engaged, but there is also the possibility for them to be educated about HIV/AIDS. How this is used by the show and Van Ness himself is something that will be discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Another important aspect to be considered here is that there is no actual scene of suffering. Contrary to *Pose* and *It's a Sin*, in *Queer Eye*, HIV/AIDS physical suffering is not part of the show's storyline, but it is an aspect of the life of one of the main members of the cast. What this means is that HIV/AIDS suffering is neither dramatised nor an object *for* dramatisation. On the one hand, this can be perceived as if one's HIV/AIDS suffering is not of social or public

concern. On the other hand, though, this might suggest that the implications of HIV/AIDS suffering for the functioning of the HIV positive person in the society should be of public concern which is why Van Ness opened up about him being diagnosed HIV positive. This is a new turn in the history of cultural productions and one can argue that it is a step toward the transfiguration of HIV/AIDS representation from a death-causing disease into a chronic medical condition which is regulated by appropriate medication. At the same time, the fact that Van Ness, and other celebrities of the time, felt the need to share this with the rest of the world suggests that there is still social stigma associated with HIV/AIDS which needs to be addressed. Hawgood (2019) writes that Van Ness

> [...] hopes to bring attention to what he calls 'gorgeous beauty moments' like that with his memoir, especially misperceptions about being HIV positive. He is healthy and now describes himself as an out-and-proud "member of the beautiful HIV-positive community (emphasis in original).

HIV/AIDS suffering is, therefore, presented here as a hybrid form of activism and pedagogy in that Van Ness seems to aim to raise awareness about what this virus means for the individual who has it as well as for society.

V. A. 2. Describing Suffering

In examining the correspondence between Van Ness's verbal and visual narrative, it becomes clear that lack of sensational language as well as lack of sensational imagery contribute to discouraging emotional responses from audiences. In sections IV. A. 2 and IV. B. 2, where analyses of the verbal-visual relationship of *Pose* and *It's a Sin* were conducted, it was evident that an emotional response was a significant step in preparing audiences for an ideological one. However, Van Ness is not a character from a fictional narrative that examines HIV/AIDS suffering in the distant past. He is a contemporary person whose HIV status does not pose a threat to his life. As such, eliciting an emotional response could have been anachronistic and, one would argue, inappropriate. In chapter II (see section II. D. 2), the negative effects of retrovision genres of HIV/AIDS suffering which elicit an emotional response from their audiences were discussed. In summary, reproducing a *faux* image of the HIV positive individual as someone whose life is in danger, conservative ideologies are promoted. Rather than focusing on medical progress which allows people to live with HIV, such narratives promote fear and social prejudice. To Van Ness's credit, he does not discuss his HIV status in any such terms. Rather, by going public about his HIV status, he promotes factual responses to

HIV/AIDS suffering, while at the same time, he raises audiences' awareness about the sociocultural context of living with HIV, which makes an ideological response possible.

In an interview with Jimmy Kimmel, Van Ness discusses what made him go public about his HIV status in the first place. Among other things, he talks about the importance of informing the public about the reality of life with HIV after 1996, the year when anti-retroviral therapy was developed and enabled people to live with HIV without allowing the virus to turn into AIDS and become life threatening. He explains that

> [...] when people who are HIV positive have access to ATR or Anti-Retroviral Therapy, we are able to achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load and there's been so many studies, the most recent one by the National Institutes of Health, and it followed like a lot of serodiscordant couples, which means one's negative and one's positive, for about 10 years, and not one transmission in the study was recorded. [...] So, undetectable equals untransmittable. [...] Basically when you are HIV positive you get access to this medication, you become undetectable, and you can live a gorgeous normal life [...] (Jimmy Kimmel Live, 2019).

Except for awareness raising, this part of the interview is significant in that it illustrates how a factual response from audiences can be elicited. Here, Van Ness's narrative suggests that life with HIV is possible, and that once a HIV positive person is on treatment, having HIV does not interfere at any level with their lives. This is compatible with the visual representation of Van Ness who appears healthy not only in this interview, but in every episode of *Queer Eye* and any other public appearance that he might give. As such, the symphony between verbal and visual enables audiences to perceive Van Ness's words as authentic and, in turn, it encourages them to respond to HIV/AIDS suffering in a factual manner.

In the same interview, though, Van Ness moves from talking about his personal experience with living with HIV to talking about the importance of ending HIV-related stigma, and the relationship between social stigma and, on the one hand, the emergence of new diagnoses, and, on the one hand, the fact that people do not get access to appropriate treatment because they are more afraid of being stigmatised than experiencing the possibility of HIV turning into AIDS. He explains that we

> [...] have to like end the stigma around STIs and around living with HIV. We have come such a long way in the medical community, and it's interesting because there is just no reason with what we know and the medical advances that we've had in the last 20 years

> for anyone to be contracting HIV now, especially with Truvada and PrEP [...]. What's crazy is the lack of attention to living with HIV in America right now (Jimmy Kimmel Live, 2019).

To elicit an ideological response, the relationship between what is said and what is shown presents an *us versus them* reality in which *them* are presented as savages, dangerous threats to *us*. Here, Van Ness does not fully achieve such a response because his verbal narrative does not describe the sociocultural context as a *savage* one that contributes to the progression, rather than the end, of HIV.

However, in a subsequent interview with James Corden, Van Ness focuses more on the implications social stigma has on the spreading of the virus, as well as on one's ability to ensure a healthy life with HIV. He says "I think what I've learned about opening up about my HIV status is that for way too many people it is still 1990." Corden adds "[...] and the fear that was placed into people at that point", and Van Ness continues

> [...] but the other thing on that same token is that for people that are really affected by the stigma and the inaccess [*sic*] to health care, it still can be 1990. People are still dying of HIV/AIDS, or people are still dying of complications of AIDS, there are new infection rates in certain countries as a result of the stigma, so it doesn't have to be a devastating anything. I don't feel devastating by my diagnosis whatsoever, I think what is devastating though is the continued silence and fear around something that really there is no need to be any silence or fear around (The Late Late Show with James Corden, 2019).

Here Van Ness is more direct in addressing the significance of ending social stigma. By telling audiences what uninformed opinions and prejudices might do to people in relation to HIV/AIDS suffering, he highlights the *savage* consequences of stigma. As such, audiences are likely to form an ideological response to HIV/AIDS suffering which, in turn, might have a positive effect in the way they understand what HIV is, and how to provide help, rather than criticism to those who are affected by it.

V. A. 3. Addressing Suffering By Talking About It

Examining the overall effect the mediation of HIV/AIDS suffering in and around *Queer Eye* can possibly have over its audiences is significant because it can confirm the type of responses they might have after they watch the particular cultural product. In other words, the aesthetic quality of the mediated suffering of a such cultural product can generate feelings to its

audiences; feelings that extend beyond the act of watching the suffering in question. Therefore, a possibility for action is enabled if the aesthetic quality of suffering is used in such a manner that audiences are moved. In section IV. A. 3, it was shown that the overall effect of the aesthetic quality of HIV/AIDS suffering in *Pose* is such that all three responses identified by Chouliaraki (2006) can be invoked: pamphleteering, philanthropy, and sublimation. HIV/AIDS suffering is framed in a very unusual position in relation to *Queer Eye* and the activism of Jonathan Van Ness. Rather than being mediated during the show's airtime, HIV/AIDS suffering is mediated through the show's by-products such as in the form of confessionals through the cast's memoirs, or as the main topic of their interviews. This unique framing of HIV/AIDS suffering in relation to a cultural product allows those who lead its mediation to assume an activist role in a more overt manner rather than those who mediate HIV/AIDS suffering through a work of fiction. At the same time, being able to speak directly to audiences, without the mediation of fiction, allows Van Ness to address specific types of audiences - depending on the platform he uses each time - generating different types of responses. This is discussed in more detail in the following part of this section.

One of the effects generated by the mediation of HIV/AIDS suffering through Van Ness's work is this of sublimation, feelings of contemplation about conditions of HIV/AIDS suffering. It is important to note that when referring to post-1996 contexts, the use of the word suffering does not allude to imagery of decay and death. HIV/AIDS suffering is used here to refer to the sociocultural suffering that accompanies a positive HIV diagnosis, or the physical suffering which can be caused in cases where HIV/AIDS-related stigma hinders someone from accessing appropriate treatment. As Van Ness has made clear on a number of occasions, people are living with HIV and once they are on treatment, they are able to both live a long healthy life and be sure that they cannot infect anyone else. However, in his interviews, Van Ness always makes a point about the social stigma attached to HIV and its adverse consequences. In his appearance on the BUILD Series, a live unscripted interview between a celebrity and their fans, Van Ness explains why there is more to be done in relation to HIV/AIDS. He says that

> [...] there is a sense of there is so much more work to be done and I really have just had so many people share so many stories with me but some of them have included people, young people dying of HIV/AIDS-related deaths all over the world due to lack of treatment, stigmatisation, [and lack of] access to facilities (BUILD Series, 2019a).

Van Ness creates a connection between stigma and lack of treatment ensuring that his audiences understand that the successful treatment of a HIV positive person does not only

depend on how developed healthcare is where one lives, but it also depends on how society treats people who are HIV positive.

To illustrate his point further, he presents audiences with the story of one person who contacted him on social media. This is significant because rather than talking about people who are positive in general terms, Van Ness is talking about a specific person. Using another person's story makes Van Ness's narrative even more authentic, and therefore, potentially more effective. He says

> I just had a story shared with me on Instagram a few days ago where this boy who was my age, by the time he was diagnosed, his HIV had progressed to a place where he had full blown AIDS and he had a case of pneumonia that was so severe that he developed so many infections and he ended up dying. And, this was last year. So, if you are in a place where you are exposed to stigma and lack of resources, if I was born in one of these places, there is a really good chance that I wouldn't be here. People are dying of this and it's so much bigger issue than a headline [...] (*ibid*.).

Once more, Van Ness makes sure that he mentions stigmatisation every time he mentions lack of access to treatment by people who would, otherwise, enjoy a healthy life. Also significant is the way he uses hypothetical speech to speculate about what would happen to him if he was not lucky enough to have accessed appropriate resources. Van Ness is showing his audiences that one cannot judge a situation from their own standpoint. For example, members of his audiences might enjoy good health, and they might believe that they should not be engaged at all in a discussion about HIV/AIDS or the responsibility of the state with regard to healthcare provision. However, by speculating about a possible alternative future for himself, Van Ness encourages audiences to consider how their life would have been different if they had not had the privileges that they might be having. In doing so, he invites them to reflect on HIV/AIDS suffering and the conditions that affect, positively and negatively, the lives of those who are affected by it.

Van Ness's interviews seem to be working at multiple levels. For example, the one that was analysed in this section, as well as those analysed earlier, have more than one function. The effect of sublimation was analysed earlier; however, arguably, his interviews also elicit effects of pamphleteering and philanthropy based on who they are addressed at. To illustrate this, one might need to consider the significance of the time when these interviews where broadcasted.

During the time of his interviews, the Trump administration has had a negative effect on LGBTQI+ rights in general and on HIV/AIDS matters in particular. Van Ness explains that

> Over the course of the time *Queer Eye* was coming out, we had an administration that fired the HIV/AIDS advisory council in 2017 and has launched a systematic attach on planned parenthood, [...]. As I've witnessed this demonisation of people who dare to be pregnant or engage in sex, I realised that I really need to speak about this because we have states in the US that have infection rates that are really alarming [...] (Jimmy Kimmel Live, 2019).

By highlighting how the negligence of the Trump administration contributes to, rather than addresses, HIV/AIDS suffering, Van Ness's narrative is likely to generate feelings of anger against politicians whose actions worsen HIV/AIDS suffering. Similarly, his words can contribute to the narrative's philanthropy effect by making sure people identify with him as someone who contributes positively to HIV/AIDS suffering, and in turn, they might be encouraged to take action and provide help and support to those in need. More specifically, it is likely that Van Ness might encourage other HIV positive people to go public and initiate a dialogue between themselves and either the general public, if they are celebrities with a wide audience reach, or their local circle of influence. On more than one occasions, Van Ness argues that to end HIV/AIDS-related stigma, people have to talk about it. He says that "I've been telling to a lot of people to speak truth to power [...]. We have to end the stigma around STIs and around HIV. So, let's talk more about it. Let's just talk so much more about it" (*ibid.*). In actively highlighting the importance of talking about HIV/AIDS, Van Ness's narrative contributes to the production of a philanthropy-type of effect whereby people might follow his example and initiate a dialogue that might raise the public's awareness about the virus in a way that HIV/AIDS stigma is addressed.

V. A. 4. Addressing Governmental Negligence

Through a multimodal analysis, it is evident that by using the mode of representation, the relationship between verbal narrative and visual representation, as well as the aesthetic quality of the HIV/AIDS suffering narrative in a particular manner, those responsible for the representation of suffering can *queer* the well-established *othering* that is typically produced by mainstream media and contributes to the stigmatisation of HIV/AIDS sufferers. Despite their differences, HIV/AIDS suffering through Jonathan Van Ness*,* like in *Pose,* is represented in such a manner that allows audiences to develop feelings of sympathy toward HIV/AIDS suffering, as well as to make them aware of those structures that contribute to the generation

or maintenance of HIV/AIDS-related stigma. Also, as a result of the way Van Ness shares his narrative with the public, it becomes possible that some of them might continue the conversation with their circles of influence, while others might interrupt those who inflict suffering on HIV positive people. Multimodal analysis of HIV/AIDS suffering in Jonathan Van Ness's activism further contributes to what the analyses of *Pose* and *It's a Sin* showed earlier: cultural products have the potential to promote certain positive reactions towards suffering and, eventually, contribute to its end. Critical discourse analysis that follows further illustrates how these reactions can be further internalised by audiences in a manner that can enable them to contribute to promoting change in established socio-political structures that feed HIV/AIDS suffering. In particular, the analysis that follows focuses on the ways in which audiences are oriented in relation to the Other. In other words, the following discussion examines whether audiences are oriented toward or against the suffering Other.

To examine whether audiences are prompted to develop feelings of danger or safety, it is important to focus on the spatial distance between audiences and the spectacle of suffering. Close spatial proximity is likely to create feelings of danger, while spatial distance with the spectacle of suffering is likely to generate feelings of safety. Van Ness discusses HIV/AIDS suffering in relation to his experience of it in the United States. In doing so, he can get people's attention by showing them that HIV/AIDS suffering should matter to them irrespective of whether they are directly affected by HIV/AIDS or not. When, for example, he discusses issues related to the closures of Planned Parenthood (Khazan, 2019) - an umbrella organisation running many different services and clinics, where he was tested positive, and where he found access to appropriate means of support - Van Ness explains that everyone is affected by it, some directly and others indirectly; as such, they should all be concerned about it, as it is something that is happening in their neighbourhoods, possibly affecting people they know. In the BUILD series interview that was analysed in the previous section (section IV. B. 3), he shared another person's narrative for whom lack of resources affected his access to treatment to such a degree that they ultimately died with an AIDS-complicated illness. Highlighting that HIV/AIDS suffering in the United States, and by extension in the global North, does not only depend on medical progress, but also on sociocultural responses and stigma, Van Ness ensures audiences are given opportunities to realise the danger that HIV/AIDS-affected people experience as a result of a reluctance on the part of society to understand what having HIV means for the individual and their environment.

With regard to temporal distance and proximity, Jonathan Van Ness's related public appearances are set at the time that follows Trump's initial election to the White House and up to the period that leads to the 2020 US elections. When audiences are presented with spectacles of suffering which are set in temporal proximity to them, they are more likely to feel the need to take action and either address what causes suffering to happen, or contribute to helping those who suffer. In his New York Times interview, Van Ness said that

> When 'Queer Eye' came out, it was really difficult because I was like, 'Do I want to talk about my status? [...] And then I was like, 'The Trump administration has done everything they can do to have the stigmatization of the L.G.B.T. community thrive around me' [...] 'I do feel the need to talk about this' (Van Ness in Hawgood, 2019, emphasis in original).

This is just one example illustrating the relevance of Van Ness's narrative in relation to the political situation of the United States, and the rest of the global North. It also exemplifies the unique positioning of the specific narrative of suffering in relation to encouraging and promoting change. In post-Trump's America, minorities and marginalised people are set to suffer lack of access to resources, increased social stigma, and multifaceted sociocultural exclusion. Van Ness does not forget to mention the shortcomings and injustices of the Trump administration in any interview he gives, ensuring that audiences not only become aware of the fact that politics can have a direct effect on people's lives, but also that they are encouraged to challenge the current political situation to the extent that this is not repeated in the upcoming-at-the-time 2020 elections.

In an interview with NowThis Entertainment (2019), Van Ness is even more direct in relation to the problems created by the Trump administration, as well as in relation to illustrating the importance of reconsidering elections and ensuring the current administration ceases from power. In his response to why he chose to go public about his HIV diagnosis, he says that

> [...] it felt more important than ever, since Donald Trump got elected, and just watching the Affordable Care Act and the constant assault that it was under in the first two years of the administration [...].[110] The stigma that surrounds HIV/AIDS is really intense [...].

[110] This is commonly referred to as 'Obamacare'. Under the 2010 reform, health insurance became affordable to more people, those with income below 138% of the federal poverty level got access to the Medicaid programme, and innovative medical care delivery methods were supported in an attempt to lower healthcare costs. For more information, visit: https://www.healthcare.gov/glossary/affordable-care-act/ (Accessed: 29 December 2020).

> HIV inequality and ignorance continues to prevail. Election 2020 is around the corner. What do we need to know to be better about that? (*ibid.*)

By referring continuously to the audience's contemporary time, instead of focusing only on the time of his diagnosis or the adverse consequences of the initial decades of HIV/AIDS, Van Ness makes it possible for audiences to become aware of the effects of stigma and stigmatising politics on HIV/AIDS sufferers. In doing so, he does not only provoke audiences to reflect on their current political situation, but he also invites them to consider ways of contributing to changing the current situation at both political and sociocultural levels. Van Ness's narrative situates HIV/AIDS suffering in the here and now, making it possible for audiences to feel the dangers HIV/AIDS-affected people might face despite the medical progress of our time. In doing so, it also becomes possible for audiences to consider taking a positive step toward contributing to the amelioration of HIV/AIDS suffering.

V. A. 5. The System as Benefactor and Persecutor

The next aspects to be considered in the analysis of *Queer Eye* and, in particular, of Van Ness's HIV/AIDS suffering and its mediation to audiences are the degree of humanisation and the degree of agency of the HIV/AIDS suffering as it emerges from its mediation. The degree of humanisation of the sufferer is linked to the verbal and visual representation of HIV/AIDS suffering, the ones discussed in section V. B. 2. of this chapter. For audiences to be provided with opportunities to be engaged and interested not only in the HIV/AIDS suffering, but also the sufferer as a person, the mediation of suffering should be enabled through personal narratives which are visually presented using camera shots that focus on the sufferer's face. This allows for an emotional connection between audiences and the ones who suffer. As discussed in chapter III (section III. D. 2), the spectacle of suffering has the potential to affect the way audiences can respond. It was also discussed that the emotions of the audiences can be affected by including another person/actor present in the scene of suffering who, instead of experiencing suffering, their role appears to be either of a benefactor or persecutor. Depending on whom they are guided to identify with, the benefactor or the persecutor, audiences are likely to experience emotions that can be predicted. Identifying with the benefactor can instigate acts of care, while identifying with the persecutor is more significant in that it can lead to demands for civil rights. However, it was also shown that neither acts of care, nor demands for civil rights can emerge unless the sufferers are presented in a humane manner.

In the interviews that have been analysed so far in this section of the chapter, it is shown how Van Ness is presented not only as *one of us*, but he also presents himself as actively attempting to subvert the *hegemonic othering* that HIV/AIDS sufferers experience as a result of sociocultural stigma and political negligence that surrounds HIV/AIDS. In each one of his interviews, Van Ness makes a point about how being HIV positive has not been an obstacle to his personal life. "As long as you're adhering to your medication, seeing your doctor every three months, and... I've taken up figure skating, I always say that I've done nothing but get cuter, and be able to work harder, and longer hours, and, I feel like I'm thriving" (ET Canada, 2019). In his interview with Roz Weston and Graeme O'Neil for ET Canada, Van Ness makes a point about the significance of having access to one's medication and appropriately trained medical staff, and how such access grants him a life where he can pursuit his interests, as well as a life where he can excel at what he does. Such an approach allows Van Ness to appear humane, having wishes, desires, and aspirations like the ones that his audiences might have. What is also important is that in most of his interviews, he appears to be vulnerable, both in relation to admitting having suffered from stigma-induced trauma, and with regard to various hardships that he has gone through in life. This is also significant in his portrayal as humane, because instead of coming across as a super-human who manages to thrive irrespective of his HIV positive diagnosis, he manages to show an array of emotions and feelings that make him more relatable to his audiences.

To explore the types of emotions that are likely to be elicited as responses to HIV/AIDS suffering, it is important that the relationship between the sufferer and the spectator at the scene of suffering be analysed. A spectator who helps the sufferer is likely to elicit emotions that might inspire audiences to proceed to acts of care toward the HIV/AIDS sufferer, while a spectator who persecutes the sufferer is likely to elicit emotions that might encourage audiences to proceed to demands for civil rights that will benefit the HIV/AIDS sufferer. Van Ness situates himself as an HIV positive man in a setting that does not involve anyone else but him. There are no specific scenes of suffering, but there is only him using his platform to address the public and explain why social stigma needs to end, and why political decisions that have adverse effects on HIV positive people need to be challenged. In his interviews, though, he does not share the stories about him getting infected, or being sexually assaulted, both of which are detailed in his memoir. He chooses to use his airtime to talk about things that concern the many, rather than sharing experiences relevant only to his personal story. The benefactor, in Van Ness's narrative, is the system that enabled him to be diagnosed, that provided him with

appropriate treatment that allows him to live a healthy and fulfilling life, as well as the system that provided him with the necessary support when he was in need. This is very significant because he presents the current sociomedical structures as the ones that allowed him to thrive. Therefore, even though audiences are not presented with someone with whom they can identify and who becomes an agent of help for Van Ness, they are presented with the significance of ensuring a system is in place to help those who are diagnosed positive to remain healthy.

However, during the time of Van Ness's interviews, the political terrain of the United States was very unstable. Any established structures that cater to those in need were being shut down by the Trump administration, leaving people who needed access to certain types of support and help helpless. In his 2020 interview with SELF, Van Ness notes

> [...] the general stigmatisation that the HIV positive community faces, and what other people who are dealing with the various bureaucratic hurdles in terms of accessing your health care depending on your state because the HIV social safety net is just so awfully imbalanced in this country and people that are living in poverty, people that are dealing with drug addiction, people that are dealing with a whole myriad of issues, there is just so many ways in which the HIV community is unfairly targeted that really bothers me now that I feel it's very important to speak about equality for people living with HIV (SELF, 2020).

This becomes just another occasion where Van Ness highlights the significance of certain support systems as well as the fact that these systems have been targeted. At the time of this interview, Trump is on his way out of the White House, and there is an overall feeling of optimism in the United States with regard to Biden's presidency. However, Van Ness highlights the importance of not only political change, which was very apparent in his 2019 interviews, but also the importance of social change in light of the correlation between stigma reduction and the effectiveness of HIV treatment. As such, anyone who contributes to the stigmatisation of the HIV positive community becomes a persecutor in Van Ness's narrative and, as it was discussed in the previous chapter (section III. D. 2), this might enable audiences to respond in a manner that makes it possible for them to actively seek out social change and civil rights for HIV positive people.

V. A. 6. Teaching to Speak Up

In terms of analysing the mediation of HIV/AIDS suffering, once the degree of humanisation of the HIV/AIDS sufferer is examined, the next aspect of mediation that needs to be discussed

is the role of agency in relation to suffering. In the previous section, the agency of those who are in contact with the sufferers but do not experience suffering was examined. In that section, the spectator-as-benefactor and the spectator-as-persecutor, as well as their function as means of eliciting certain emotions from the audience were analysed. To understand the potential of the spectacle to keep audiences engaged, it is important to analyse the agency of the sufferers. The more active a sufferer is presented to be, the more likely it is for audiences to remain engaged and interested in the spectacle. Similarly, if sufferers appear to accept their condition and not do anything to change it, they appear passive, audiences are less likely to maintain their interest. Therefore, looking at whether Van Ness is presented as an active agent in his own narratives, taking charge of his own suffering and actively striving to improve his condition allows for a detailed examination of whether or not audiences are offered the possibility to be motivated and become active agents of care and social change themselves. In essence, audiences are more likely to take the sufferer's lead once they are engaged. If the one who experiences suffering is active, they are likely to be active themselves.

Van Ness exhibits signs of agency at various levels with regard to HIV/AIDS suffering which could address different types of audiences and actuate them. One of these areas is self-care and self-love. In the SELF interview, Van Ness discusses the importance of taking care of himself, especially following his HIV diagnosis.

> Self-care can be just taking a bath, doing a mask, [...] turning on some music, turning my phone off for a day. So, whether it's that or yoga, or a fit-on class, or going to the skating ring [...]. Self-care for my body is [...] really about making the time so that I can play and explore and do things with my body that are fun for me (SELF, 2020).

In discussing these daily activities of his, not only does he further signal how being HIV positive does not deprive one of doing ordinary tasks, but also it possibly shows to other HIV positive people that they can take care of themselves, and they can have fun like any other person. He further highlights "I appreciate my body's ability to heal and my body's ability to bounce back and be able to learn new things. [...] I feel so grateful to be able to be in my body. Ageing is such a privilege and to be able to have the chance to be here is such an honour" (*ibid.*). This positive portrayal of life with HIV, which for reasons that were discussed in chapter II is not very common in popular media, is significant both for those who are and those who are not HIV positive. Van Ness is a positive and active agent of his own suffering, addressing his condition and actively trying to live life to the fullest. In terms of inspiring audiences, here there is the potential of actuating those who are in a similar position to him to

overcome any barriers they think they might have that hinder them from living their lives as they wish.

In the same interview, he shares information about how he evolved in terms of addressing his HIV status. Acting as an example for HIV positive and HIV negative audiences, he sheds light into how one can develop and grow while having the virus. Talking about his experience, he says,

> In my 20s, I was all about not dying. I was in a planned parenthood, I took a rapid test, so... I worked hard really hard to accept and to go to therapy twice a week for years and years. For my personal status, I feel great, I feel thriving, I feel healthy. I take a pill every day, I see my doctor every three months, my numbers are great [...]. (*ibid*.).

Once again, Van Ness opens up about the daily routine of an HIV positive person and how agency is what keeps him healthy and alive. Not only are audiences educated with regard to what life with HIV looks like, but also stigma around HIV/AIDS is addressed. The more one knows about a situation, the less likely they are to be afraid of it. Van Ness explains that HIV positive people are not a threat to themselves or to society in general. Their lives are as ordinary and extra-ordinary as the lives of all other members of society. Therefore, stigmatisation and marginalisation are neither necessary nor productive in any sense. He not only presents himself as an ordinary person, as *one of us*, but he also makes a point about how it is through agency that a good quality life with HIV can be achieved.

Moving from his personal agency to governmental negligence, he says that

> The homophobia that caused the inaction for HIV/AIDS to become the issue that it is now, because I really feel like if the American government would have treated this like the issue that it is and deserves back in the early 80s when this came up, I wonder if I would have even been able to have contracted it when I did because when you look at how far prevention and treatment has come since people started giving a fuck, you can tell that we have come far fast. And I wonder how far we would have come if we started in 1982 (BUILD Series, 2019b).

Shifting the focus from personal agency to the agency of the government, Van Ness addresses the audience and highlights their responsibility in the election of governments as well as in being involved with politics in general. He continues discussing contemporary political issues that have contributed to the stigmatisation of HIV/AIDS sufferers, which in turn have led to surge in the numbers of HIV diagnoses.

> In 2013, Clark county Indiana closed their own planned parenthood clinic that offered STI testing and screening and then you immediately saw one of the largest HIV/AIDS outbreaks in the last two decades. What really terrified me was when the Trump administration directed the Centres for Disease Control to not study seven words, and one of these words was trans, and we know that HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects the trans community. And to make it so that the CDC can't allow leading scientists to study the effects of HIV/AIDS on folks is really... We are in a dangerous times (*ibid*.).

Van Ness addresses how the agency of the government has negatively affected HIV/AIDS suffering. However, he explains that even when things like these happen, people should continue addressing injustices and want better for their society. He finishes his interview by advising his audiences about how to address Trump supporters, and he provides a suggestion as to how not to shut down those who hold different opinions to them. He says,

> When the headline says 'Trump administration is XYZ', click on the fucking article, read the entire thing. Figure who is voting on these issues, figure out the powers that are creating these issues to happen in the first place and then talk about it and then talk about it again. I have literally cussed my father out 300 days of 2016 to explain to him that it was so fucked up that having an HIV positive son, he could ever support Donald Trump. I told him 'How can you look at me in the face and want me to see you on Christmas and vote for this person? How could you do that?' At least I am willing to have the conversation. I don't write him off. So, we have to stop writing each other off, have really difficult conversations, and then have them again" (*ibid*.).

Addressing what he calls *headline war*, Van Ness explains the importance of agency not only in addressing HIV/AIDS suffering directly, but also in reacting to injustices and having difficult conversations with people. In highlighting the importance of dialogue and continuous efforts against unjust policies and politics, Van Ness sets an example of active agency, motivating his audiences to follow this and talk about the things that are not right.

V. A. 7. Discussion

The analysis of Jonathan Van Ness's activism differs to the one of *Pose* and *It's a Sin* in that HIV/AIDS suffering was not mediated through *Queer Eye* itself but through the platform that

Queer Eye created for its cast members.[111] As such, the analysis focused exclusively on Jonathan Van Ness who, after going public about his HIV diagnosis in his memoir *Over The Top* (Van Ness, 2019), he gave a series of interviews addressing HIV/AIDS suffering, HIV/AIDS-related stigma and political negligence. His interviews became narratives where HIV/AIDS suffering was mediated. This enabled the application of multimodal and critical discourse analysis, and the in-depth examination of how the mediation was achieved and the possible effects it might have had, and still has, on audiences around the world. Similar to the findings of the analysis of HIV/AIDS suffering in *Pose* and *It's a Sin*, the examination of Van Ness's narrative confirms that contrary to earlier mediations of HIV/AIDS suffering, he achieves to offer audiences an opportunity to understand what having HIV/AIDS after 1996 means for the individual and the society. Following a more didactic route than the one that was followed in *Pose* and *It's a Sin*, Van Ness addresses both social stigma and political negligence. He openly challenges the Trump administration, as well as earlier ones, for contributing to the stigmatisation of HIV/AIDS and those who live with the virus. As it was shown in the analysis of the previous sections, doing this at a politically critical period for the United States, Van Ness's narrative has the potential to motivate audiences not only to develop feelings of care toward HIV/AIDS sufferers, but most importantly, it can motivate them to act as agents of change and challenge socio-political structures which contribute to the stigmatisation of HIV/AIDS.

[111] It is important to note that Van Ness, as well as his fellow cast members, have been accused for being part of "[...] a growing cast of LGBTQ2 content creators generating monetizable content that prominently features their gender and sexual identities" (Green, 2019). Indeed, all members of the show engage in influencer marketing activities and often they combine content creation with issues related to gender and identity. Green (*ibid.*) argues that "visibility is the bread and butter of the LGBTQ2 content economy" and encourages his readers to reflect on the extent in which this form of *activism* - though he argues that it is not really activism - contributes to the improvement of "[...] those who are so often forgotten by the LGBTQ2 mainstream - sex workers, immigrants, those in prison and trans people of colour who don't have the kind of capital or status necessary to insulate themselves from the violence of racism and transphobia" (*ibid.*). Green's criticisms are valid and well supported. However, this study does not focus on the motives behind Van Ness's activism; nor does this study argue that celebrity activism in the form that Van Ness engages in is more important than grassroots activism. The focus of this study is the possible effects his public appearances on corporate media might have. See Green, A. V. (2019) 'Jonathan Van Ness' sponsored coming-out is not activism', *Xtra**, 3 July. Available at: https://xtramagazine.com/culture/jonathan-van-ness-sponsored-coming-out-is-not-activism-158911 (Accessed: 20 September 2021).

V. B. Mediating HIV/AIDS Suffering in non-Celebrity Activism Campaign Narratives

An analysis of the representation of HIV/AIDS suffering in celebrity activist narratives provides rather optimistic findings. In particular, it has been shown that such portrayals have the potential to engage audiences and to potentially motivate them to contribute to addressing HIV/AIDS related stigma and discrimination. Representations of HIV/AIDS suffering in fictional narratives, like the ones analysed in chapter IV, engage audiences and address issues related to sociocultural conditions that contribute to the perpetuation of HIV/AIDS suffering. Activist narratives also address social and cultural structures, but they also address governmental responsibilities and oversights with which audiences can relate to as these often refer to current affairs. This was significantly highlighted in the previous section and the analysis of Jonathan Van Ness's attempts to publicly address the issue of HIV/AIDS suffering. This section provides an analysis of non-celebrity activist narratives about the *Undetectable equals Untransmittable* campaign (U=U). I have selected appearances of activists on shows of corporate TV networks over other types of activism. The reason for this was because corporate TV networks have a broader reach both in terms of numbers and in terms of a plurality in types of audiences. Following the same systematic structure, the section is organised into the six areas of analysis: mode of representation, correspondence between verbal narrative and image, aesthetic quality, spatial and temporal proximity, humanisation, and agency. One of the most significant findings that will be discussed in this section is that non-celebrity activism is not as effective as celebrity activism in *queering* hegemonic narratives of HIV/AIDS suffering. This might partly be because the outlets available to non-celebrity activists are both more limited and limiting compared to the ones available to celebrity activists.

V. B. 1. Lack of Representation in Corporate Media

Reflecting on the point of view through which HIV/AIDS suffering is represented in such activist narratives, one cannot but notice a situation that is very different to both fictional narratives analysed in chapter IV and celebrity activism that was focused on in the previous section of this chapter. The majority of corporate media coverage of the U=U campaign centres around voices of cisgender white men. This is not to suggest that all activists supporting the U=U campaign are cisgender white men. There is a lot of activist activity online, through digital platforms such as Twitter and Youtube whereby people representing minority groups

contribute to the purpose of the campaign. Among others, people of colour as well as non-binary and gender fluid people use the U=U hashtag (#U=U) to spread the word in an attempt to fight stigma and discrimination against HIV positive people. Examples of such attempts where people who belong to groups or categories that are marginalised by mainstream society include Davina (Dee) Conner and Arianna Lint's public webinar for NLAAD (2000), as well as Mark's interview for the 'In Bed with U=U' series of The Institute of Many (2018).[112] However, instances where the U=U campaign reached mainstream popular media are limited in terms of range of representation to cisgender white men.[113]

One of the most prominent figures of the U=U campaign is Bruce Richman, founder of the Prevention Access Campaign (PAC), the organisation that launched U=U. In an interview with David Artavia (2020), Richman reflects on the progress and success of the U=U campaign. He explains that PAC collaborates with more than "[...] 1,000 official U=U partners in almost 100 countries that are seeking resources to get the message out in clinical, public health, and policy networks." It is noteworthy that there are not many references to successes with regard to mainstream outreach. Most of the undoubtedly significant work that has been done to date is focused on public health stakeholders as well as on groups of people who are likely to engage with people who are HIV positive. This is significant in that the U=U campaign addresses stigma and discrimination against HIV positive people, and viral masculinities in particular, that is coming not only from mainstream heteronormative society, but also from HIV negative men who have sex with men (MSM), as well as HIV positive men who live a homonormative life. In chapter II, I discussed HIV/AIDS-related discrimination and possible explanations about why different groups exhibit discriminatory behaviour toward HIV positive people (sections II. C. 3 and II. D. 2). Richman's work, when addressing the queer community directly and educating people about HIV/AIDS, is a significant step in reducing in-group discrimination. However, instances of mainstream publicity are far and few between. As such, opportunities to inform the general public about the benefits of undetectability are limited. In

[112] Mark is interviewed to share his experience as a HIV negative man who is also non-white and a migrant. In this interview, he discusses the fact that he does not worry about contracting HIV. In fact, he makes a case about how he worries over other issues, such as losing his phone, but not HIV. This is, according to him, because he understands science, which is the main message of the U=U campaign. However, the fact that he does not share his last name is telling in that his identity remains protected. This is in direct contrast to the main message of the interview about overcoming shame and fear.

[113] It is important to highlight that the U=U campaign is a very popular and impactful global campaign. Its limited representation in mainstream media that I discuss in this section does not reflect the success of the campaign as a whole. Rather, it only focuses on appearances on mainstream TV networks. The outreach of the U=U campaign is documented and can be found here: https://www.preventionaccess.org/news

turn, reducing stigma attached to HIV with regard to routes of transmission becomes difficult for the U=U campaign to achieve.

The choice of medium of representation is a very significant one. Arguably, working with non-corporate channels of communication cannot be said to be a decision of the Prevention Access Campaign for U=U. It is very likely that corporate media have not shown interest in covering this topic. This is a speculation based on the fact that the public appearances of Bruce Richman on corporate TV networks have been limited. Given Richman's very active presence on social media, one would expect him to appear on TV more often. As such, lack of frequent exposure could be interpreted as a sign of reluctance on the part of the media to cover the topic. The campaign launched in 2016. Since then, there have been two major appearances by Bruce Richman on corporate television networks, one in 2018 on the CBCNEWS network in Canada (LGBT Canada in the Media, 2018), and another in 2020 on the ABC news (U Equals U, 2020). It is worth mentioning that the message of U=U has made the news on a number of occasions. For example, the previous section (see section V. A.) focused on the ways in which Jonathan Van Ness used his public platform to inform people about the significance of undetectability. Another significant occasion was Mayor Pete Buttigieg's 2019 interview with CNN and Anderson Cooper (U Equals U, 2019). In the previous section, the importance of representation of HIV/AIDS suffering, and in particular the importance of allowing the voices of those who have experienced or are experiencing HIV/AIDS suffering to be heard, was discussed. This is one of the reasons why the previous section focused on the narratives of Jonathan Van Ness rather than the ones of Mayor Pete Buttigieg; having someone who is directly related to and affected by HIV/AIDS, or any form of suffering for that matter, can be more powerful than someone who represents established institutions.

The absence of non-celebrity activists from corporate media, though, creates a significant gap in what audiences are presented with. Indeed, enabling the voices of the less privileged to be heard and share their truth is not only empowering for those people and the communities they represent; it is also important in that they often provide audiences with a more realistic, less sanitised and stylised outlook. This is what makes the mode of representation a significant feature for analysis (Chouliaraki, 2006). The types of exposure audiences receive from representations of HIV/AIDS suffering can affect the ways they might respond to them. The absence of grassroot activists from corporate TV outlets is telling of the social and cultural reticence with regard to HIV/AIDS. This is not a phenomenon that is observed only in the way

in which corporate television operates; rather, it permeates the society of the global North at all levels. As it was discussed in chapter II (section II. D), in-group representation - representation of an issue that primarily affects a group of people, created by members of this group for members of this same group - is significant but its effectiveness might *plateau* when it reaches a stage where it preaches to the converted. A broader outreach is paramount in that it can provide the possibility of significant and noteworthy sociocultural change. The following sections focus on these scarce instances of mainstream representation of HIV/AIDS suffering in relation to the U=U campaign.

V. B. 2. Leaving Governmental Responsibilities Unchallenged

A close analysis of Richman's interview with Michael Serapio for the CBCNEWS network in Canada (LGBT Canada in the Media, 2018) allows us to consider the possible responses that can be elicited by audiences. Contrary to the effects of Jonathan Van Ness's activist narratives which elicited factual and ideological, but not emotional, responses from audiences (section V. A. 2), Richman's interview enables all three types of responses to be elicited. Both the verbal narrative as well as the imagery that accompanies his interview contribute to the creation of a range of responses, each one to a different effect. Seemingly, this is an effective way through which audiences are invited to engage with the message of the campaign and, depending on which part of the interview they might identify with, they can acknowledge the science behind U=U (factual response), develop a sense of compassion toward those who suffer (emotional response), or reflect on the sociocultural conditions that contribute to the suffering of HIV positive people (ideological response). However, an analysis of the discourse employed in this interview, as well as other subsequent instances of media coverage of the campaign, highlights a rather homonormative frame (section II. C) within which HIV/AIDS suffering is presented. One might argue that this is tactical so that conservative members of mainstream society are sensitised in relation to HIV/AIDS suffering. However, this does not exclude the fact that, as it was discussed in section II. C. 2, such representations contribute to, rather than ameliorate, the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS. The homonormative framing of the discourse employed by the U=U campaign is analysed in this and subsequent sections.

The interview (LGBT Canada in the Media, 2018) starts with Michael Serapio presenting facts and statistics about HIV/AIDS, both orally and visually. The information presented to audiences is about the total number of people living with HIV, the number of newly diagnosed cases per year, as well as an estimation about the number of people who are unaware that they

are HIV positive. These findings have the stamp of the Public Health Agency of Canada. There are a couple of things that are significant in the way the interview starts. Firstly, setting the scene by presenting numbers and statistics contributes to the elicitation of factual responses by audiences. So far, the message is not about what people should feel or how they should react, but the aim appears to be to inform the public that HIV/AIDS is not gone, but that it is still a virus that affects members of the population. Secondly, adding the stamp of an official governmental authority under the findings could suggest that it is not enough to have Richman, an activist, present findings and statistics. The assumption seems to be that audiences would respond better to news that appear to be more official and formal. At the same time, this also suggests that HIV is an issue that requires governmental attention and regulation. This is further accentuated by Serapio concluding that,

> [...] for these reasons alone, AIDS remains a public health threat, but one strategy many AIDS activists in Canada's public health agency are now backing is called the U equals U campaign. Now, we have to say it is controversial and to explain more about it, we're now joined by Bruce Richman [...].

There are three things that are of interest for this analysis from Serapio's opening remarks. Firstly, he uses the word AIDS rather than HIV when he says that "[...] AIDS remains a public health threat [...]." For one thing, the numbers and statistics he presented only seconds before this statement referred to HIV. Therefore, talking about AIDS only adds to the public's confusion between HIV and AIDS. Further to that, his statement situates the discussion within the context of "[...] public health threat [...]," alluding to discourses of moral panic that were attached to HIV/AIDS-related discussions of the 80's and the '90s. Not only is there treatment that prevents HIV from progressing to AIDS, but also medical advancements have ensured that HIV is not more of a public health threat than diabetes or other chronic conditions are. Adding to that, Serapio's decision to characterise the message of the U=U campaign as "[...] controversial [...]" both challenges the scientific evidence behind it and prompts audiences to consider what Richman is there to say with a pinch of salt. Therefore, the opening of the interview does not appear to be very successful in engaging audiences. As discussed in chapter III (see section III. D. 1), factual responses tend to result in more uninterested and unengaged audiences than emotional and ideological responses do. However, the introduction to this interview also presents HIV/AIDS suffering in a rather anachronistic manner, as something that audiences should be sceptical and, arguably, scared about.

In a follow-up question about the significance of the U=U message for him and his life, Richman warns that he might get emotional, and he explains that knowing that he cannot transmit HIV to anyone else changed his life. In particular, he says

> [...] Well, I learned in 2012 [...] that I couldn't transmit HIV to my partner and that changed everything for me. I hadn't been in a relationship for 13 years, because I was afraid of transmitting this disease that caused so much shame and pain for me to someone I loved. So, when I found this out, I was elated but of course I was outraged because millions of people living with HIV still don't know they can't transmit HIV to their partners.

Richman's response moves away from the factual language and imagery used at the beginning of the interview. Audiences are now presented with more sensational language, and they have the opportunity to listen to a person who is HIV positive talking about how important this message has been for his well-being. This can be successful in its potential to elicit an emotional response from audiences particularly because Richman's response is situated in a very normative frame. He addresses struggles that have to do with having a partner and sharing love, rather than stigma and discrimination in relation to sex, hook-ups, or dating apps. Richman appeals to the general public, audience of a mainstream TV news show the majority of which could be assumed to share characteristics of mainstream society. Even though this can successfully contribute to audiences engaging with the U=U message, it also runs the risk of contributing to society's stigmatisation of non-normative sexual and erotic behaviours. This brings to mind the divide between gay activism and HIV/AIDS activism that prevailed in the 1990s (section II. D. 2), where the former deployed a more conservative narrative than the latter. Richman's appearance on Canadian national television seems to cater more toward a hetero/homonormative audience which might be emotionally moved because his address touched on very central ideals of normative ideologies, like partnership and love. However, his decision to share his personal story is an effective one in that it has the potential to engage part of the audience with the U=U message.

An opportunity to elicit an ideological response from audiences comes toward the end of the interview when Serapio asks Richman about the fact that the science behind the U=U message has been around for quite some time, but audiences have not been aware of it. "[...] We have to say the science is not new [...]," says Serapio. He continues observing that "[...] there is pushback because there's [sic] public health agencies around the world that are not comfortable with this message." Richman responds that,

> [...] what we've heard was that Heads of clinics and medical associations would say that 'we know this, we agree with the science 100% but on an individual level and our clinics we will share this information but on a public health level this might be dangerous. [...] People living with HIV [...] might not understand that [...] 'stay on your medication to stay undetectable." [...] This is based on 35 years of fear of HIV and of people living with HIV and it is stigmatising us.

Richman highlights how stigmatisation prevents scientists from sharing facts with the world. Had there not been fear about HIV and about people living with HIV, scientists would have been able to share their findings with the public which, in turn, would have contributed to the reduction of fear and discrimination. Even though Richman addresses sociocultural factors that affect the quality of life of HIV positive people, he does not challenge the politics behind such factors. A comparison between Richman and Van Ness's narratives suggests that the latter appeared to be more overtly critical of politics of shame and stigmatisation (section V. A. 2). He did that by presenting an *us versus them* binary whereby *us* stands for citizens that are affected by HIV and *them* stands for the government who seem to deliberately attempt to alienate HIV positive people from mainstream culture. Richman's response, possibly because he does not have the public platform that Van Ness has, is milder in its potential for criticism. This does not mean that eliciting an ideological response is impossible. It is possible that audiences might wonder about the political and sociocultural conditions that affect medical advancements and, in turn, the effect this has on people. However, by being less overtly critical, Richman's narrative is more likely to address fewer, more sensitised members of the audience.

V. B. 3. Restricted Effects of Non-Celebrity Activist Narratives

So far in this study, analyses of the aesthetic quality in fictional (sections IV. A. 3 and IV. B. 3), as well as non-fictional (section V. A. 3) narratives of HIV/AIDS suffering have revealed that it is possible for such portrayals to encourage audiences to generate feelings of identification with the sufferers, feelings of anger toward those who inflict suffering upon others, and/or to generate the need to contemplate human condition with regard to the causes and maintenance of suffering. In other words, the examination of the aesthetic quality of portrayals of HIV/AIDS suffering focuses on whether they serve the purposes of philanthropy, when audiences identify with the one who suffers; pamphleteering, when audiences feel anger toward those who generate and/or contribute to the suffering of others; or sublimation, when audiences engage in reflective contemplation of the society they are part of. Similarly, this section examines the aesthetic quality of non-celebrity activism by continuing to focus on

Bruce Richman's appearances on national television networks. What emerges from this analysis is that the narratives engaged in his portrayal of HIV/AIDS suffering through the U=U campaign have the potential to generate feelings of anger toward social institutions and the way HIV positive people are treated. However, they appear to be falling short with regard to encouraging audiences to identify with the sufferers and with regard to promoting reflection and contemplation. This is not a criticism to Richman and his portrayals of HIV/AIDS suffering. Rather, these observations are meant to problematise activist campaign creators with regard to the choice of medium for their campaigns. It is possible that Richman's appearances on TV are not successful in achieving the aesthetic quality of philanthropy and sublimation because of the limited airtime allocated to his campaign.

In both the 2018 (LGBT Canada in the Media, 2018) and the 2020 (U Equals U, 2020) interviews, Richman highlights the fact that some medical professionals choose not to share the message of U=U to their HIV positive patients. In the 2018 interview to Michael Serapio (LGBT Canada in the Media, 2018) for the CBCNEWS network, Richman explains that one of the benefits of the U=U message is that it motivates people who test positive to HIV to go on treatment and stay on treatment "[...] in order to save [their] lives and improve [their] health, but also to stop the spread to our partners [...]." He continues by arguing that the benefits of spreading the message of U=U are important "[...] for our [HIV positive people's] health, but also to prevent the spread of HIV." At this point, Richman makes the case that U=U is important not only for the health of HIV positive people, but for the society as a whole. In doing so, he increases the possibility of engaging audiences and making them understand that the scientific breakthrough of the U=U message can have an indirect, or even direct, impact on their own lives irrespective of their own HIV status. Immediately after this, he informs people about the fact that clinics and medical professionals deliberately choose not to share this message. This fact is further supported by the Okoli *et al.* (2021) report. In sharing this fact, Richman expresses his anger, encouraging audiences to share his feelings. Initially he explains how the U=U message is significant for society as a whole, and that it is the only scientifically proven way to stop the spread of HIV. It is likely that audiences are engaged with this, especially when they are made aware of the fact that it has a positive impact on everyone's health. By contrasting this to data that prove that medical professionals and associations choose not to disclose these findings with the public because of ongoing stigma associated with HIV positive people, Richman makes it possible for audiences to feel anger toward those institutions and structures that obstruct the end of HIV/AIDS.

Even though the message of U=U is relevant to all people because it provides a solution to a public health issue that has been affecting society for four decades, the representation of HIV/AIDS suffering through the U=U campaign does not seem to be effective in enabling audiences to identify with the sufferers, nor does it seem to promote reflections on the sociocultural conditions that enable the spread of HIV/AIDS and the suffering of HIV positive people. In both of his interviews, Richman does not address governmental shortcomings, nor does he share his experience in light of social discrimination and stigma. In comparison, when the aesthetic quality of Van Ness's narratives was discussed (section V. A. 3), it was shown that Van Ness addressed the adverse effects stigmatisation has had both on him and on others who contact him to share their stories. He also establishes a link between stigma and one's refusal to undergo treatment. This provides audiences with an opportunity to understand that successful treatment is not dependent only on medication, but also on the way society treats HIV positive people. Addressing these issues enables audiences to identify with him not only as an HIV positive person and someone who has experienced HIV/AIDS suffering. It also enables audiences to identify with him as someone who uses his privileged position to talk about and help those who might be more vulnerable than him. This illustrates the function of philanthropy that a narrative of HIV/AIDS suffering can have. In turn, this can result in the identification of audiences with the person who helps those who suffer which can motivate them into becoming agents of help themselves. Such a function is not encouraged through Richman's narratives, though. His focus on repetitively referring to the scientific evidence behind the U=U campaign does not provide him with opportunities to engage audiences in the manner Van Ness's narrative does.

Similarly, Richman's interviews do not seem to contribute to the function of sublimation, the function that would enable audiences to reflect on the effects of societal responses to HIV/AIDS suffering and the marginalisation of HIV positive people. The moment when Richman opens up about his personal experience, the moment that elicits an emotional response from audiences (see section V. B. 2), has the potential to encourage reflection on and contemplation of the severe effects of stigma. This is because Richman discusses universally cherished aspects of life, like partnership, intimacy, and love. He presents these as aspects of life that he could not enjoy. However, the reason why his narrative does not seem to achieve the effect of sublimation is because he identifies lack of information as the sole cause of his missing out of these aspects of life. In other words, the fact that he does not point at being

socially excluded and marginalised as causes of his suffering makes it less likely that audiences will identify the ways in which society treats marginalised people as problematic. If he does not blame society and societal structures, why would audiences do so? So far, the multimodal analysis that has been presented in this section has highlighted the shortcomings of the ways HIV/AIDS suffering has been portrayed in non-celebrity activist narratives on corporate media. The discussion suggests that audiences are less likely to create a connection with someone whom they do not have enough time to get to know. It also appears that corporate TV networks are not the optimal modes of representation because of the limited airtime that they often offer to such activist narratives which, in turn, can result in activists deploying more conservative discourses - thus contributing to some form of discrimination - to appeal to an assumed normative audience. It should be noted that this is not true when the activist happens to also be a celebrity. It is also evident that non-celebrity narratives of HIV/AIDS on corporate media can elicit factual and emotional responses from the audiences, but they are less likely to promote ideological responses which would contribute to audiences feeling a need to change their attitudes toward HIV/AIDS sufferers. Finally, it has also been shown that these narratives encourage audiences to feel anger toward those who contribute to the suffering of others. Yet, they are not as effective in enabling audiences to identify with the sufferers, as well as in inviting audiences to reflect on society's contribution to the suffering of HIV positive people. The next three sections deploy a discourse analysis of these non-celebrity narratives and their role in addressing HIV/AIDS suffering.

V. B. 4. Homonormative Messages

This and the subsequent two sections focus on analysing audiences' orientation toward the Other; whether they are oriented toward or against the suffering Other. As it has already been applied to works that were analysed in previous sections (sections IV. A. 4; IV, B, 4; and V. A. 4), spatial and temporal proximity or distance are associated with feelings of danger and urgency respectively. Spatial proximity between audiences and the spectacle of suffering are often associated with feelings of danger. Conversely, spatial distance is more likely to instil feelings of safety to audiences. Richman's 2018 interview on the CBCNEWS network (LGBT Canada in the Media, 2018) follows the official recognition of the U=U message by the Public Health Agency of Canada. In his 2020 interview on the ABC network (U Equals U, 2020), Richman and Karl Schmid discuss the findings of the Okoli *et al.* (2021) report which was originally presented at the AIDS 2020 Virtual conference. It appears that Richman, unlike Van Ness (section V. A) follows a top-down approach in his campaign whereby he starts addressing

policy makers and relevant stakeholders first, and then he proceeds to share the message with the general public. Van Ness, on the other hand, addresses his audience, educating them about what living with HIV means, and explains why they should not contribute to the stigmatisation of HIV positive people. As a result of this difference, it can be argued that space is regarded differently by Richman and Van Ness.

On the one hand, Van Ness is very specific about space in that he presents HIV/AIDS suffering within the context of the United States. In doing so, he achieves to challenge the current administration, as well as the society that supports and maintains stigma and discrimination against HIV positive people. Richman, on the other hand, does not discuss HIV/AIDS suffering in relation to a particular geographic location. He addresses changes with regard to local legislation, recognition of the U=U message by local medical authorities, as well as trends with regard to societal responses to HIV/AIDS suffering of a particular country or region. In not contextualising HIV/AIDS suffering within rigid spatial boundaries, Richman allows audiences not to feel threatened by it and, arguably, increases his chances of getting his message across. Often, danger in relation to representations of suffering refers to the audience's fear that the suffering that is represented in a given spectacle might have adverse immediate effects on their own lives, or that they might become sufferers themselves (section III. D. 2). However, Richman in his interviews does not make references to a proposed societal or normative change. His discussions are framed around policy makers and medical professionals and how they should not lie to their HIV/AIDS patients about HIV transmission. At the same time and in a less overt manner, he achieves to communicate the main message of the U=U campaign, making it possible for audiences to understand that they have nothing but benefit to gain if they understand HIV positive people to be less of a threat to public health and more like human beings whose health-related condition does not affect others. Further to that, his answers to various questions appear to be well crafted in the sense that he does not come across as controversial. For example, when he was asked whether the message of U=U could mean that condoms are no longer necessary, Richman responds that condoms are necessary for STIs and unwanted pregnancies among other things, while maintaining an undetectable viral load is "[...] another really exciting tool that we have in this toolbox to prevent it [HIV]." Cautious responses like this one suggest that Richman is deliberately trying not to instil danger in his audiences. Therefore, despite the geographic specificity of his narratives, it emerges that he is careful not to threaten them in relation to HIV/AIDS suffering.

Temporal proximity or distance is examined in relation to the generation of audiences' feelings of action taking. When spectacles of suffering are presented in a setting that suggests temporal proximity, audiences are more likely to feel the need to take action and either address the causes of suffering or contribute to helping those who suffer. On the other hand, temporal distance is less likely to engage audiences into taking action; more likely, it enables them to watch suffering from a distance, considering it as something that will not affect them in any way. Richman's portrayals of HIV/AIDS suffering create a synchronicity with audiences in that he does not discuss HIV/AIDS in terms of the past. Rather, he discusses HIV/AIDS and scientific advances in relation to HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention that concern the here and now. Therefore, one would expect that his narrative would be effective in not only orienting audiences toward, rather than against, the suffering Other, but also that it would be effective in encouraging audiences to actively help those who experience HIV/AIDS suffering. This does not necessarily need to be perceived as literal help; calling out instances of injustice toward HIV/AIDS sufferers can also be regarded as help. However, it appears that in both interviews under examination, Richman does not provide audiences with opportunities to engage with action taking. His campaign seems to focus exclusively on informing audiences about the message of U=U, without an actual call for action that would, perhaps, inspire audiences to even spread the word of the message of the campaign.

Perhaps one of the most significant shortcomings of his campaign is the omission to address the deliberate limitation of sexual health outlets, as well as attempts to further marginalise HIV positive people among others, by the Trump administration. The timing of Richman's interviews was crucial with regard to elections in the US, especially the second interview for the ABC News Network (U Equals U, 2020) which was aired on the 29th of October 2020, less than a week before the 2020 Presidential elections. In this interview, Richman repeats his usual narrative where he clarifies the meaning of U=U and provides scientific evidence to support it. In section V. A. 4., the significance of Van Ness's appearances with regard to addressing governmental negligence and clarifying the effects such negligence has had on the lives of thousands of people in the US were discussed in detail. It appears that Richman's portrayals of HIV/AIDS suffering do not extend as much as to include discussions around politics. As such, even though his narrative addresses HIV/AIDS in the here and now, audiences are less likely to engage in any form of action-taking. The connection between Richman's narratives and the lived experience of HIV positive people is presented in a limited manner by highlighting the potential for partnership and intimacy offered by the message of U=U. In other words, the

narrative is focused on one - arguably very narrow - facet of life which, furthermore, appears to be independent of the current socio-political climate of the US. A few days before Americans cast their ballots, Richman's interview does not seem to be effective in contributing to the motivation of mainstream audiences to become agents of change for the benefit of HIV positive people and, by extension, the society as a whole.

V. B. 5. Addressing the End of HIV

The degree and role of humanisation of HIV/AIDS suffering is one of the most significant features of a spectacle of suffering. As it was discussed in the presentation of the methodological framework of this study in chapter III (section III. D. 2), as well as the analyses that precede this section (sections IV. A. 5, IV. B. 5, and V. A. 5), examining the degree of humanisation in a spectacle of suffering enables us to consider possible responses from its audience. The first prerequisite for audiences to be prompted to act in some beneficial way for the HIV/AIDS sufferer is for the latter to be presented in a humane manner. In the previous section (V. A. 5), for example, it was shown that Van Ness appears to be humane because he shares his vulnerabilities, and despite the fact that he highlights how strong and healthy he is while on treatment, he ensures to admit that coping with an HIV/AIDS positive diagnosis is not easy and takes time. As such, his narrative becomes more realistic, more humane, and audiences are more likely to identify with him. Similar findings emerged from an analysis of *Pose* (section IV. A. 5) and *It's a Sin* (section IV. B. 5) where the insecurities, weaknesses, and flaws of Blanca and Roscoe, respectively, contributed to their humanisation as characters. Richman, in his interviews, also achieves to present himself as humane, perhaps to a lesser extent than the other characters and personas that have been analysed in this study, which is possibly a result of very limited airtime. Richman, nevertheless, manages to share his personal experience with regard to HIV/AIDS suffering and to create a link between the message of U=U and the change in the way he experiences his life. In particular, he shares the challenges he faced with regard to establishing a relationship with another man as a result of him being afraid of infecting the other person. He immediately clarifies how this changed as soon as he found out about the science that supports the U=U message. This is a moment that can encourage audiences to connect with Richman and identify him as a person just like them.

Also important for the analysis of the degree of humanisation is an examination of other characters or people present, literally or metaphorically, in the scene of suffering. It has been

argued that audiences are likely to respond in a predictable way in the manner in which these spectators to the scene of suffering are portrayed. When a scene of suffering involves someone acting as a benefactor toward the sufferer, audiences are more likely to consider engaging in acts of care toward sufferers they come across in their lives. However, when there is someone acting as a persecutor toward the sufferer, audiences are more likely to consider engaging in acts of civil rights. Whereas in *Pose* and *It's a Sin*, there were characters embodying the role of the benefactor and persecutor (sections IV. A. 5 and IV. B. 5), in the previous section of this chapter (section V. A. 5), it was shown that benefactors and persecutors do not necessarily have to be actual characters or people portrayed in the scene of suffering. In the case of Van Ness's representations of HIV/AIDS suffering, it has been discussed that certain structures which enabled him to get diagnosed, to go and remain on treatment, as well as to maintain a healthy and fulfilling life were presented as having the metaphorical role of the benefactor. Conversely, governmental decisions to end the provision of such services initiated and executed by the Trump administration were presented as having the role of the persecutor. This provides audiences with the possibility to engage both with acts of care toward the person who suffers and with acts of civil rights by considering the implications their vote might have on other people's lives.

Richman, similar to Van Ness, does not present a literal character or person to act as benefactor or persecutor in his representations of HIV/AIDS suffering. Rather, from his narratives, it emerges that these roles are enacted by established structures. In particular, the science behind the U=U message, and most importantly being aware of the available scientific evidence is what marked a significant change in Richman's life according to him. In his 2020 interview with the ABC News Network (U Equals U, 2020), Richman and his colleague Karl Schmidt present the findings of a study that looks at the perspectives of PLWH. In particular, the study focuses on "[...] how [PLWH] perceive [their] health outcomes, [their] relationship with [their] doctors, how [they] perceive this relationship improving [their] help and [their] future." The study concludes that the correlation between being informed about the message of U=U and enjoying an improved health-related quality of life is a significant one (Okoli *et al*., 2021). This further confirms the claim that being informed about available and widely accepted scientific evidence with regard to U=U is presented as being the benefactor toward HIV/AIDS sufferers which, in turn, can encourage audiences to engage in acts of care. Such acts could include sharing the message of U=U amongst their friends and family members, ensuring that someone's life might benefit from knowing this information. Such an act can not only

contribute to the widespread sharing of the U=U message; it can also contribute to the reduction of HIV/AIDS-related social stigma and discrimination. The more people become aware of the fact that HIV can, in fact, be untransmittable, the less likely these people might be to marginalise PLWH out of fear.

Similar to the role of benefactor toward HIV positive people, the role of persecutor is figuratively represented by the deliberate concealment of the U=U message mainly by medical personnel. Richman and Schmidt (U Equals U, 2020), reporting on the findings of their study, note that "[...] we are seeing that one third of women living with HIV have reported that their health care providers had not talked to them about U equals U, something that is empowering to other persons living with HIV, something that should not be denied to anyone." It is important that this was addressed in Richman and Schmidt's latest TV appearance, because it allows audiences understand both the significance of the message of U=U, and the negative effects that not knowing about it can have. These effects are not limited to the lives of HIV positive people; rather, they influence society as a whole. The Okoli *et al.* (2021) study, which Richman and Schmidt refer to, states clearly that the more informed an HIV positive person is about U=U, the more likely they are to start and remain on treatment. In turn, their viral load remains undetectable which does not allow HIV to be transmitted. The long-term result can be the end of HIV. In spite of the powerful nature of these findings, one thing that Richman and Schmidt fall short of doing is to highlight the significance the end of HIV might have for HIV negative members of the audience. If this link was made more explicit, it would be more likely for audiences to engage in acts of civil right by demanding, for example, more support - financial and otherwise - for campaigns such as the U=U one.

V. B. 6. Limiting Exposure to Richman's Active Agency

The role of agency with regard to representations of HIV/AIDS suffering is another significant feature for analysis. As it has already been established in this study (section III. D. 2), the agency of the sufferer is significant in that it provides a framework for audiences to base their actions on. The more active the sufferer appears to be, the more likely it is for audiences to follow suit and realise acts of care and/or acts of civil rights that were discussed in the previous section (section V. B. 5). Conversely, sufferers who come across as passive, by experiencing their suffering in a powerless manner, are less likely to engage audiences in a manner that might inspire them to act. So, all the earlier features of portrayals of suffering in the media refer to the potential of generating certain feelings, reactions, and impulses from their audiences.

Agency, though, is the feature that might encourage audiences to actualise such reactions and contribute to the amelioration of the suffering of others. Ensuring, therefore, that spectacles of suffering present sufferers as active agents is of great importance. This was highlighted in the discussion about *Pose* (section IV. A. 5) and *It's a Sin* (section IV. B. 5) where the feature of agency was identified as a factor that contributed to the success of the series, but it was also identified as a significant feature that contributed to the *queering* of narratives of HIV/AIDS suffering which, prior to these two, used to present HIV/AIDS sufferers as passive agents, unable to fight for themselves (section III. D. 4).

Similar to the representation of the sufferer's agency in *Pose* and *It's a Sin*, Jonathan Van Ness's narratives of HIV/AIDS suffering are also significant in their representation of the sufferer as an active agent in charge of their own life (section V. A. 6). Richman is a very successful activist whose work has been focusing on empowering HIV positive people, as well as educating the general public about HIV/AIDS. He is a graduate of Harvard Law School, and prior to working on HIV/AIDS activism and the U=U campaign, he had founded *Inspired Philanthropy Group* and had worked with many well-known Americans, such as Ellen DeGeneres, on initiatives focusing on social change (Artavia, 2020). The success of *Inspired Philanthropy Group* was interrupted when Richman got diagnosed HIV positive in 2003. He spent a few years "[...] depressed, suicidal at times, because [he had] really internalised the stigma and felt toxic, dangerous [...]" (*ibid*.). However, he managed to stand up for himself, and after finding out about the fact that he was no longer infectious, he founded Prevention Access Campaign. He explains,

> I started collecting research and talked to clinicians, HIV positive leaders, heads of medical associations, [...] for input and found the general consensus wat that U=U was true and accepted by many in the highest levels. People were so open with me about what was essentially a massive human rights abuse, and many in the field were participants or bystanders (*ibid*.).

Richman identified the cause of his suffering - in this case, not getting intimate with someone in fear of transmitting HIV and infecting the other person - and he turned it into a cause. Focusing on this has helped him not only overcome the cause of his suffering and help himself, but it has also allowed him to help others and contribute to the community. In 2020, Richman was in the top 20 of the 100 most powerful members of the LGBTQ community in New York Pride's Power 100 (*ibid*.) in recognition of his contribution and service. Since the launch of the U=U campaign by Prevention Access Campaign, there are

> [...] over 500 organisations from 68 countries and at least 15 languages that are sharing this message and ensure that people living with HIV, our providers, our partners, policy makers, and the public understand that this is true and that this is an important message to share (LGBT Canada in the Media, 2018).

U=U has been a very successful campaign and Richman, as an HIV/AIDS sufferer himself, is an example of an active agent. However, Richman's achievements, as well as his personal story of overcoming the challenges that HIV/AIDS brought him, can be found in fringe media that are LGBTQI+ oriented but rarely on corporate ones. For example, the two interviews that have been the focus of analysis in this section of this chapter do not mention any of this. As such, it is less likely that members of the audience with no interests in LGBTQI+ matters or in Richman's life story will search to find out all these important details. In turn, this weakens the effectiveness of the representation of HIV/AIDS suffering through Richman's narratives on corporate media mainly because the sufferer's agency is not punctuated enough.

V. B. 7. Discussion

It appears that the representation of HIV/AIDS suffering in Richman's appearances on corporate media is the least effective when analysed using the methodological framework that has been employed in this study. Even though there are certain aspects of it that are effective, the restrictions of TV as a medium - for example limited airtime - have not allowed HIV/AIDS suffering to be presented in a manner that can fully engage audiences and encourage them to contribute to the end of HIV/AIDS. For example, even though Richman's portrayal of HIV/AIDS suffering provides opportunities for factual, emotional, and ideological responses to be elicited from audiences, it fails to directly address the political and ideological causes of governmental and institutional negligence in relation to informing the public about medical advancements with regard to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. As such, audiences are encouraged to generate feelings of care and sympathy toward the HIV/AIDS sufferer, but they are not prompted to proceed to actions that can have an actual beneficial effect for HIV positive people, and the society as a whole. It is important, though, to acknowledge that this is not a criticism for the campaign as a whole. Rather, it suggests that the way in which the U=U campaign has been using the medium of television - and mainstream TV programs, such as the news, in particular - has not been optimum in creating the conditions for audiences to be fully and actively engaged against those responsible for the continuation of HIV/AIDS suffering.

It should be noted that Richman's TV appearances are not the only outlets of the U=U campaign. Also, it is important to highlight that the observations of this study with regard to these appearances are not meant to suggest that such appearances should not occur. Every opportunity one might have to share the message of U=U should be exploited to its fullest potential. However, it is also important to recognise the shortcomings of these representations so that the possibilities of other media and outlets are explored. There have been instances where activists have deployed methods that truly subvert restrictive and damaging normative discourses with regard to HIV/AIDS. The most recent example is Kayden Gray's (2021a; 2021b) 2-part porn movie *U Equals Fucking U*. To contribute to the breaking of HIV/AIDS related stigma and to spread the message of U=U, Kayden Gray and Bishop Black shot a short porn movie in which they included information about U=U and its significance.

> Bishop - who's HIV negative - consented to coming off PrEP for the time of the filming, which left Kayden being on HIV meds and undetectable as his only HIV prevention tool. This allows the film to do more than support U equals U theoretically - it transforms it into a real-life testimony to the reliability of treatment as prevention (Miguel, 2021).

An analysis of this movie and its significance is beyond the scope of this study. For one thing, the movie is not intended to be consumed by mainstream audiences. Rather, it is an attempt to specifically address gay men and encourage them to learn more about U=U and contribute to the end of HIV/AIDS-related stigma. However, it is worth mentioning that the U=U campaign *does* explore and utilise a variety of media outlets to ensure the message reaches as many people as possible. It is, therefore, to everyone's best interest to reflect on ways of using corporate TV media to achieve effective results.

VI. Conclusion

This thesis has focused on carrying out a textual analysis to determine the ways that cultural discourse with regard to HIV/AIDS is *queered*. In particular, it has focused on how PLWHA and the related *social suffering* of HIV/AIDS are represented in various media texts. In doing so, the thesis commenced by proposing a theoretical framework, *hegemonic othering*, which recognises hegemony as a transhistorical structure which, by means of *othering*, produces historically and socio-culturally specific power formations among dominant and Other identities. *Hegemonic othering* also caters for the complexity of intersectionality as a lens to approach identity formation. In other words, it does not value one characteristic of identity as more important than another, for example race over gender identify or sexual expression; rather, it focuses on the processes through which dominant and Other identities are produced and, more importantly, on the production of power relationships among these identities. It is important to note that *hegemonic othering* is not proposed to be a theory of social order; rather, it is aimed to be viewed as a framework through which power relationships can be explained. This has been proven useful in the analysis of HIV/AIDS suffering in that it enabled a multifaceted understanding of *othering* as experienced by PLWHA. Through *hegemonic othering*, the thesis offered an explanation as to why PLWHA are marginalised not only by members of the dominant/mainstream society, that is a heterosexual heteronormative society, but also by people who identify as non-heterosexual and are HIV negative as well as by people who identify as non-heterosexual and are HIV positive themselves.

This is a significant contribution to existing work that has been done in the field of Masculinity Studies and Viral Masculinities in particular. Examples of recent scholarship in these fields include the queer body and emerging forms of sexualised gay masculinities (Florêncio, 2020), PrEP as democratic biopolitics (Schubert, 2021), and cultural studies of chemsex erotics (Møller, 2021). This thesis revisits classical arguments about gender and sexuality, bringing together theories and concepts from philosophy, sociology, psychology and cultural studies to argue that *hegemonic othering* provides a new understanding in relation to the production of dominant and subordinate social roles and identities. One might find contradicting that *hegemonic othering* is proposed as a framework that accounts for intersectionality when in fact it has emerged from a discussion that focuses primarily, if not exclusively, on gender and sexuality. Indeed, this is one area that bears further exploration and analysis with attention to whether societal discrimination on the basis of other aspects of identity as well as on the basis

of combinations of other aspects of identify can be explained through *hegemonic othering*. If this is indeed the case, then this framework can be proven useful in helping us understand why discrimination exists, to what ends, and how we participate, willingly or otherwise, in this. In turn, this can provide the basis for a discussion on ways in which such discrimination can end.

The thesis also identified representation, and in particular representation through corporate mainstream media, as a *locus* for *hegemonic othering*. The argument is that representation contributes not only to the production of certain identities, but it also contributes to the categorisation of these identities into dominant and Other as well as to the ways in which these can interact with one another. With reference to HIV/AIDS, the argument is that when PLWHA are represented in a cultural production of corporate mainstream media, ideas about the identities of these people spread and can be adopted by all people irrespective of their HIV status. Therefore, representations can contribute to the ways in which identities are constructed both in terms of societal beliefs about an identity and in terms of one's own understanding of their own identity. Representations can also provide a blueprint for the way in which social interactions are to be conducted among specific people and the rest of the society. For example, representations can suggest possible ways of interacting with PLWHA. This does not aim to suggest that the individual agency of media consumers does not come into play; rather, the claim is that the individual's agency has been limited as a result of socialisation into social structures of discrimination. In other words, the individual is not separate from the society within which they exist. As such, an individual, who is part of a society which promotes certain social roles and certain types of interactions among these roles, appear to be less likely to challenge representations which reinforce instances of domination and subjugation among dominant and Other identities.

At this point, it is important to remind the reader that this study does not examine representations from the point of view of the audience and the way they might receive and react to these. Rather, the thesis focuses on the cultural product itself; the media texts which promote certain ways of being, acting, and reacting. The contribution of media to the construction of a situation or an identity as a social problem is not a novel idea (Best, 2008). The contribution of this thesis, though, is that it synthesises social and cultural theories to provide a more detailed explanation as to how binary relationships of domination and submission are produced. With particular attention to the ways in which representations have contributed to the construction of viral masculinities, the thesis examines how *othering* has been promoted as the dominant

way in which non-viral (and queer) masculinities are to be treated by the rest of the society. The significance of this is that it highlights the need for a systematic approach in the analysis of media texts and representations with particular attention to how identities and practices that have been *othered* are treated. Indeed, doing so provides us with valuable insights about representations which might not be apparent from an initial reading of such texts. More specifically, this enables us to analyse works that seemingly contribute to the amelioration of societal stigma against certain people, such as PLWHA, when in fact they encourage the perpetuation of such stigma. It is also important here to note that the thesis does not claim that such encouragement is a result of a creator's conscious decision; there is no claim about the existence of a discriminatory agenda. Rather, it focuses on the outcome of a creator's work without analysing or examining their motives.

A further original contribution of this thesis is an original application of the concept of social suffering. Focusing on the HIV positive person would not allow for a complete understanding of the ways in which HIV/AIDS has been regarded and treated by those members of the society who do not live with the virus. Examining HIV/AIDS suffering, though, enables a detailed understanding of the power relations that both cause and emerge from it. In turn, doing so recognises HIV/AIDS as a social phenomenon, shifting the blaming of the individual, an unfortunate but very common occurrence, to exploring the role of society in contributing to the prolongation of the end of the virus and the respective suffering it causes both to individuals and society as a whole. In addition, another benefit of situating HIV/AIDS within the discourse of social suffering is that the *hegemonic othering* framework can be applied and can open up the possibilities of exploring not only the ways in which institutional manifestations of power contribute to and, possibly benefit from HIV/AIDS suffering, but it can also explain why early cultural representations of HIV/AIDS suffering were not successful in addressing HIV/AIDS-related stigma despite appearing to aim to do exactly this. This further confirms what was discussed earlier in this chapter; the thesis does not claim that certain creators or producers have a hidden agenda whereby they want to discriminate against PLWHA. Rather, by acknowledging HIV/AIDS as social suffering, one can better understand how *hegemonic othering* limits everyone's agency to the extent that certain power relationships are being maintained. With particular attention to the creators' will and the result of their product, situating HIV/AIDS within the discourse of social suffering allows a better understanding of the multifaceted effects of suffering caused by HIV/AIDS; not only does the HIV positive person experience social suffering by means of discrimination, isolation, and marginalisation,

but also society as a whole suffers in that, PLWHA are members of society and they are viewed as such. In acknowledging PLWHA as more than just their medical condition, discussing HIV/AIDS within the discourse of social suffering *queers* dominant understandings of PLWHA as second-class citizens, whose medical condition is viewed as disability that burdens the society (Campbell, 2003); rather, the very concept of social suffering allows us to reconsider our perceptions of the suffering Other and acknowledge them as members of the society, not outcasts.

In treating HIV/AIDS as social suffering, the motive to focus on examinations of representations of PLWHA and HIV/AIDS-related suffering is justified in that it is through representations that social suffering might become normalised. As Kleinman, Das, and Lock (1997) suggest, representations are linked to experiences which are linked to professional processes. In this schematic representation of the normalisation - and normativisation - of social suffering, the process does not follow a linear path whereby representations dictate experiences which, in turn, dictate professional processes; rather, each aspect of this schema influences the others in ways that are intricate and multi-layered. As such, the thesis does not claim to offer a comprehensive account of how social suffering emerges or how it is prolonged. What this thesis does is to focus only on representations of HIV/AIDS and PLWHA and analyse whether and how they are *othered*. It is important to note that when one examines representations, it is important that they also examine instances where there is lack of representations. For example, examining the reasons behind the absence of any representation of HIV/AIDS in cultural products is significant and it has been discussed in chapter III. Therefore, in studying representations, or lack of representations with particular attention to modes of social suffering, in this case HIV/AIDS, can provide insights into how the representation aspect of Kleinman, Das, and Lock's (*ibid.*) schema contributes to HIV/AIDS suffering. It is, therefore, important that further studies look into if and how experiences and professional processes are indeed affected by such representations, as well as how experiences and professional processes can contribute to altering representations.

As such, there appears to be an aspect of intervention inherent in representations of suffering. If, as discussed above, they are in close affinity to social experiences and professional processes, representations can potentially intervene in the way society understands and/or responds to a certain phenomenon. Therefore, the thesis shifts to a close analysis of the ways in which suffering is mediated through representations. To do that, I adapted Chouliaraki's

(2006) *analytics of mediation*, a methodological approach that allows for a close analysis of media texts with regards to both multimodal analysis and critical discourse analysis. Indeed, Chouliaraki's model has been widely used in journalism studies, with particular emphasis on instances of news reports that mediate suffering (examples include Mellor, 2009; Engelhardt, 2015; Scott, 2015; Zhang and Hellmueller, 2017; Morse, 2018; Higgins, 2021). However, there have not been studies applying Chouliaraki's methodological approach neither to the examination of mediated social suffering, nor to the examination of cultural products that are not pieces of journalism. The importance of using this approach to the analysis of media texts - without being restricted to news reports - and with particular attention to social suffering and the way HIV/AIDS suffering, in particular, is framed provides opportunities for an in-depth study of the product of representation and the possibilities it provides to audiences for meaning-making. As such, it acknowledges the fact that meanings are co-constructed with audiences being involved in the meaning-making process, but it allows us to focus on the product of representation rather than the audiences. In other words, a detailed analysis of media texts, like the one enabled by the *analytics of mediation*, allows for a detailed examination of the frames and discourses concerning filmic and TV representations of PLWHA which can then be further studied from the point of view of audiences' reception. It is important to note that this study does not examine the meaning making process from the point of view of the audiences; rather, it analyses the meaning production process with attention to certain features of representations and the potential they provide to audiences with regards to their possible responses to HIV/AIDS and PLWHA in particular.

By applying an *analytics of mediation* to representations of HIV/AIDS suffering that were produced from the outbreak of the pandemic until the middle of the 2010s, it emerges that no matter what the intention was, there were certain features in all of these works that did not contribute to the provision of a realistic representation of life with HIV, nor did they contribute to the amelioration of suffering by, for example, addressing discriminatory behaviour against PLWHA in a manner that would explain where such behaviour comes from and why it is damaging. This becomes particularly clear when one examines works, such as *Queer as Folk* (2000 - 2005), which aimed at normalising both queer people and conditions such as HIV/AIDS. However, as it was shown in chapter III, the way HIV/AIDS was represented did not but reproduced discriminatory attitudes not only from the dominant heterosexual members of the society, but also from other HIV positive gay men. The thesis also analysed works such as the movie *The Hours* (2002) and the documentary *Chemsex* (2015). What emerged from the

analysis of these two works was not dissimilar to what was discussed earlier about *Queer as Folk*. This further confirms the discussion of chapter II and the use of the frame of *hegemonic othering* as a way to understand collective, even if unconscious, discriminatory behaviour. In these works, representations of PLWHA perpetuate anachronistic views about the virus and the effect it might have on people who have it as well as their loved ones (*The Hours)*, they further contribute to in-group discrimination whereby HIV/AIDS can be normalised as long as the person who lives with it ascribes to normative ideologies and lifestyles (*Queer as Folk*), or they present HIV/AIDS as a result of reckless, unethical, underground behaviour that many gay men engage in (*Chemsex*). Being a consumer of such media, I observed a shift in the way filmic and TV representations of PLWHA were framed as well as in the discourses around HIV/AIDS. The main task of this thesis, therefore, was to examine in detail contemporary representations of HIV/AIDS suffering and understand how that shift was achieved.

The first two cultural texts that were analysed in detail were *Pose* (2018 - 2021), with attention to the first two seasons of the series, and *It's a Sin* (2021). Both works belong to the retrovision genre, dramatising the early years of the pandemic. An analysis of *Pose*, both at multimodal and critical discourse levels, showed that the way HIV/AIDS suffering was represented in this series was very different to earlier representations. In particular, the use of the medium of representation, the relationship between verbal and visual narratives, as well as the overall aesthetic quality of the series were shown to contribute to the provision of opportunities for audiences to identify and empathise with PLWHA. At a critical discourse level of analysis, *Pose* enables audiences to reflect on the position of PLWHA in the society; as such, rather than promoting feelings of care, the series appears to encourage audiences to engage with HIV/AIDS suffering in more depth, promoting the possibility for audiences to contribute to the demand for civil rights for PLWHA. Indeed, an analysis of the spatial and temporal proximity, the degree of humanisation, as well as the aspect of agency suggests that *Pose* addresses social stigmatisation and marginalisation in a manner that promotes sociocultural change. The *us versus them* binary is reversed in such a manner whereby it becomes possible that those who contribute to the stigmatisation of PLWHA are the ones who become the Others. The contribution of the series lies not only on the fact that PLWHA as well as members of the queer community were involved in the creation and production process; rather, the series addressed HIV/AIDS in an empowering, rather than a stigmatising manner.

Equally different to earlier representations of HIV/AIDS was *It's a Sin* (2021) which starts its narrative from the years prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. The series narrates the transition from a sex positive era where non-heterosexual people were standing up for their freedom to love, have sex, and enjoy life to an era of fear, illness, and death that followed the outbreak of HIV. What is different in this series to earlier representations was the fact that there is no blaming toward PLWHA, nor do we see them as passive victims of an unknown virus. The series approaches the matter with honesty, focusing on the loss of innocence that was caused by the virus, and it explains the effects it had on all members of society irrespective of their sexuality. Indeed, both levels of analysis, multimodal and critical discourse, suggest that the positive effect of the series is that it does not point fingers; rather it presents everyone's points of view and invites audiences to consider not who to blame, but to reflect on the ways society treats PLWHA and what the best way to do so might be. Of particular importance is that following the release of the series, its cast members have been using it as a platform to talk to people about HIV/AIDS, but also about other issues related to sexuality, such as transphobia and trans-related stigma. Although *It's a Sin* is taking audiences to a bygone period, it does not perpetuate the association between HIV/AIDS and imagery of illness and death. The series focuses on the social suffering experienced by the non-heterosexual community and invites audiences to reflect on their contribution to the suffering of others.

The final chapter of this thesis focuses on non-fictional narratives and, in particular, it analyses activist campaigns. The first part focuses on celebrity activism and the work of Jonathan Van Ness from *Queer Eye* (2018 - present) and the second part focuses on non-celebrity activism and the work of Bruce Richman from the U=U campaign. Jonathan Van Ness, following the success of the reality TV show he participated in, used all public appearance opportunities he had to talk about HIV/AIDS suffering, HIV/AIDS-related stigma, and the political negligence relevant to HIV/AIDS that was prominent at the time of his interviews. By applying an *analytics of mediation* to Jonathan Van Ness's narratives of suffering, it emerges that he provides audiences with opportunities to understand what having HIV/AIDS after the medical advancements of 1996 means for the individual and the society. He also achieves to address social stigma as an issue that has both social and political dimensions, and he openly challenges the Trump administration, as well as earlier ones, for contributing to the stigmatisation of HIV/AIDS and those who live with the virus. What is of particular importance is the timing of these interviews which coincided with the end of Trump's first term as President of the United States and the possibility of him being re-elected to office. Although the thesis did not

investigate whether Jonathan Van Ness had an impact on the way his audiences voted, the analysis of his narrative suggests that he encouraged audiences to act as agents of change and invited them to reflect and challenge those socio-political structures which contribute to the stigmatisation of HIV/AIDS.

The effectiveness of the way HIV/AIDS suffering is represented in Bruce Richman's campaign narratives is not as significant as in Jonathan Van Ness's ones in terms of representing HIV/AIDS suffering in a manner that encourages audiences to reflect on the socio-political dimensions that brought about and contribute to the stigmatisation of PLWHA. The analysis suggests that this might be a result of various restrictions, for example limited air time, that Richman faces. Indeed, a celebrity like Jonathan Van Ness is given much more time on air which he can then capitalise on in any way he sees fit. On the other hand, Richman is given limited time to discuss the scientific findings that led to the U=U campaign. Also, not having the public influence that Jonathan Van Ness has, Richman does not address political and ideological causes of governmental and institutional negligence in relation to informing the public about medical advancements with regard to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. As such, although his TV appearances might be successful in informing the public about why PLWHA should not be stigmatised, and about the importance of encouraging one another to be tested for HIV and of providing access to treatment for all, it seems less likely for audiences to be encouraged to reflect on the socio-political conditions that surround HIV/AIDS and PLWHA.

This further confirms the importance of conducting an *analytics of mediation* to explore the significance of representations with regards to social suffering. Such an approach allowed for a detailed and multi-layered examination of cultural products. This further suggests that such an approach could perhaps be adopted by creators and producers as part of the production design process so as to increase the potential impact of their work. Whether this is feasible or not, and whether it would contribute to producing works that address social suffering, HIV/AIDS-related or otherwise, is something that is beyond the scope of this study, but it would be an important direction for further research. Equally important would be a study focusing on the actual responses of audiences of these works. This would provide important information with regard to whether audiences actually reflected on the role of society in relation to HIV/AIDS suffering, as well as their own role in the amelioration or perpetuation of stigmatisation of PLWHA as a result of watching these works. It would also be important to

study whether changes related to HIV/AIDS occurred at the socio-political level following the release of these works and if such changes were observed, it would also be important to examine whether these works contributed to such a change.

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