

The Hegemonic Nuclear Family: The Interaction Between the Roles of the Nuclear Family Construct and Its Queer Members

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Abstract

In the 1980s President Ronald Reagan brought renewed focus to the family through a variety of messages focusing on it as a cornerstone of United States society. The family in this definition is the nuclear family, comprised of monogamous heterosexual relationships, and exclusionary to any who do not fit its definitions. At the same time, LGBTQ+ communities were gaining increased visibility in popular media, as both Hollywood-produced and made-for-television films began to provide images of queer individuals who were not merely stereotypes to be condemned or laughed at, but were characters. However, these images were produced through a heterosexual lens that overtly subordinates queerness and queer individuals to the nuclear family construct, resulting in caveats to their queerness that necessitated the comfort of straight individuals over the legitimacy of queer ones, all while ensuring the survival of the construct itself. Using literature on masculinity constructs and the nuclear family, I examine how the nuclear family construct contains roles that are expected of each family member, and how these roles determine what is and is not acceptable for members of the nuclear family construct I employ textual analysis to understand the meaning of each media object. This thesis argues that the heteronormative nuclear family construct is positioned as the absolute family construct by Hollywood films and similar made-for-television programs, resulting in the marginalization of groups and individuals that are perceived to threaten it. This imposition of heterosexual constructs excludes queer individuals and communities even in narratives that are intended to promote their inclusion. Furthermore, this thesis examines emergent queer family structures presented in *Making Love* and *And Everything Is Going Fine*, in contrast to their absence in *An Early Frost*, *Consenting Adult*, *Doing Time on Maple Drive*, and *Cruising*, and how these family structures are positioned in contrast to representations of the nuclear family construct.

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Introduction

By the end of 1985, there had been a total of over 12,000 AIDS-related deaths in the United States since the first reported case in 1981.¹ The Reagan administration's response was often categorized by neglect. Historian Samuel Walker provides one example of this legacy of neglect, stating "Reagan finally mentioned AIDS for the first time after the death of the actor Rock Hudson in October 1985. Reagan mentioned AIDS again on February 5, 1986, but the same day he proposed a budget cutting funding for AIDS research."² The overall lack of action by Reagan, as well as his lack of public acknowledgement, created a clear delineation between the priorities of the president and the needs of various communities that were being struck by the AIDS epidemic. This pattern of inaction evidenced the Reagan administration's lack of regard for communities that were perceived to fall outside of the "traditional family values" that were prioritized in their policies and actions.

Walker also details the Reagan administration's focus on traditional family values when it came to policy decisions³, as well as the fact that members of Reagan's administration were perceived by some, including activist Larry Cramer, to be very anti-homosexual, even to the point of "loathing."⁴ The silence by the Reagan administration on the AIDS crisis is argued by Walker to be a result of religious right pressure, as the belief persisted that acknowledging AIDS would be an endorsement of homosexuality.⁵ The exact motivations here are unknown, but by

¹ "AmfAR :: Thirty Years of HIV/AIDS: Snapshots of an Epidemic :: The Foundation for AIDS Research :: HIV / AIDS Research." Accessed January 30, 2021. <https://www.amfar.org/thirty-years-of-hiv/aids-snapshots-of-an-epidemic/>.

² Walker, Samuel. *Presidents and Civil Liberties from Wilson to Obama: A Story of Poor Custodians*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 390.

³ Ibid 389.

⁴ Ibid 390.

⁵ Ibid

continuing to ignore the AIDS crisis and at the same time publicly pushing traditional family values, even to the point of including the term in official policy decisions, the prioritization of the Reagan administration was made clear. Communities that fell outside of the family model valued by the Reagan administration was less important and would not be endorsed or in some cases even acknowledged, while the nuclear family was instead placed as the public ideal. The traditional family valued by the Reagan administration was heterosexual first and foremost, and other values, such as monogamy, were prioritized as well.

Taken together, these facets represent an administrative whole that was disconnected from the realities of the non-heteronormative United States. Beyond 1986, the Reagan administration's position toward the AIDS crisis improved in comparison to its earlier almost total lack of response, but, "[b]y January 1989, when Reagan left office, there was still only one AIDS drug on the market even as the Centers for Disease Control had confirmed 82,764 cases and 45,344 deaths.⁶" It is important to follow this trend of negligent behavior, and how it bled into the visual media landscape of the United States. By looking at representations of the groups marginalized by the Reagan administration, contextualized perceptions of these individuals and groups may be understood, both in reaction to, and adjacent to, the government policies of the time. As a result of the policies and actions by the Reagan administration, there were few instances of publicly positive interactions with queer communities by the federal government. Though these were far from the only interactions with queer communities, the effect of them being public policy raises their overall clout.

⁶ Richert, Lucas. "Reagan, Regulation, and the Fda: The Us Food and Drug Administration's Response to Hiv/Aids, 1980-90." *Canadian Journal of History* 44, no. 3 (Winter 2009): 467–87. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjh.44.3.467>, 469.

However, the negative interactions by the US government did not result in all approaches to queer individuals and communities following this template entirely. The main carryover from the Reagan administration approach was that queer communities were looked at in relation to how they interacted with heterosexual communities and individuals. Throughout the 1980s, film and television representations of gay men were targeted toward heterosexual audiences by placing homosexuality within heterosexual domestic spaces and norms. This new placement came primarily in the form of made-for-television movies dealing with the groups marginalized by the negligent “family values” approach of the Reagan administration. How these groups, particularly gay men, interacted with and affected heterosexual populations favored by the administration at the time, particularly the heteronormative family, was a focus of these films. The made-for-television films focused on in this project do not offer a wholly unified perspective on the interactions between gay men and heterosexual family structures, but they do unite in a call for acceptance for gay men, though to what degree is variable depending on the situations present in the films and the respective networks producing them. In contrast to these positive aspects, theatrically released films evidence a much broader perspective of approaches to interactions between queer and heterosexual communities, and they approached the issue with both positive and negative attitudes towards their subject matter.

This project focuses on the different approaches, including utilization of the AIDS crisis, catering to patriarchy, and cautious observation, taken by film and television productions and how these films are almost universally structured with the same goal: to preserve heterosexual family constructs. Here I define heterosexual family constructs as the “nuclear family construct,” drawing on this concept as presented in Stephanie Coontz’s *The Way We Never Were: American*

Families and the Nostalgia Trap.⁷ Using this historical work by Coontz, I define the nuclear family construct as a family structure composed of the heterosexual and monogamous relationship between one man and one woman, with the express and intent goal of fostering offspring who will ultimately replicate the nuclear family construct. This definition is not all-encompassing, and there are other features of the nuclear family construct which do exist and will be identified and applied as necessary, but this base definition is adequate to explore the perspectives from which the presented gay men and queer cultures are examined and by whom. In the films examined here, variations in the nuclear family exist in the form of different statuses of marriage, unbalanced family power structures, and a general acceptance that though the nuclear family is the accepted family structure, not everyone will be happy within it, even those who are favored by its rules. The obviously exclusionary nature of the nuclear family definition results in only this heteronormative family structure being acceptable to those who endorse its definition, including, in this case, many of the films that this document examines. As a result, queer individuals are preemptively excluded, and their attempts at movement into the structure is interpreted as a threat to it by those who endorse its definitions.

For the purposes of examining the following films, it is important to define the roles and expectations of the nuclear family. Here I will primarily be focusing on the portrayals of fathers and sons in the nuclear family construct. In this construct, fathers are designated as the leader of each family unit. They are heterosexual patriarchs who essentially gatekeep the nuclear family to those who do not readily fit into the construct, such as potential queer members. Here, the father enforces the values of the nuclear family, including monogamy and the potential for the reproduction of the nuclear family unit. This latter aspect is most important here, as it demands

⁷ Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1992.

the members of the nuclear family construct be heterosexual. For sons and daughters in the nuclear family construct, this is their only role designated by the nuclear family construct, often through its patriarch, their father. They must reproduce the construct by forming new nuclear family units and these units in turn will reproduce themselves. As it is the duty of the patriarch to ensure the reproduction of the construct, any deviation from this path becomes the responsibility of the patriarch to work through. In the case of the films examined here, gay sons present a challenge to the nuclear family construct. In turn, their fathers, the patriarchs of their respective family units, must determine how their gay son will or will not be accepted into the family structure.

As a result of these definitions and expectations, the acceptable range of masculinity and sexuality in the nuclear family construct is narrow. Men must perform the roles of sons and later fathers, and any steps outside of these roles, or actions that would make these roles impossible, are deemed unacceptable by the confines of the construct. Queerness is viewed by the patriarchs of the construct as a clear step outside of these boundaries. In addition to this, sexuality is viewed as a binary by the patriarchs of the nuclear families examined here, and as a result bisexuality is impossible, further narrowing the lanes of acceptable masculinity. Since monogamy is a core tenant of the nuclear family construct, this condition circumscribes the possibility of bisexuality for any members. For any members that fall outside of the construct boundaries, they may be accepted back into the construct, but only by the patriarch and often under certain conditions.

It is important to note that these narrow conditions extend to other members and aspects of the nuclear family construct as well, though they are not the focus of this thesis. Mothers and daughters are also placed into strict roles in the construct, but the difference here is that neither role is placed in a position of power like that of the patriarch. However, many of the films in this

study present characters in both of these roles that resist the severe impulses of the patriarch against their queer sons, such as outright expulsion. This more moderate characterization of the nuclear family, portrayed primarily by mothers, may serve as a bridge between family members who initially fall outside of the construct and the patriarchy. However, this maternal moderator role is not always present, in contrast with the role of the patriarch, which is never absent.

In addition to the defined roles of the nuclear family construct, the queer closet is also a construct that is incorporated and examined. In this thesis, I define the queer closet as a structure through which queer individuals are not open about their sexuality (especially to nuclear family members), while at the same time they are encouraged to remain in the nuclear family structure. In remaining in the queer closet, queer individuals may remain in the nuclear family construct. Each film examined in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 views the queer closet as a positive construct for the nuclear family, as it allows the nuclear family unit to stay intact regardless of the sexuality of the members. However, each film in these two chapters also suggests that the queer closet is no longer a viable long-term construct, and each film explores the effects on the nuclear family construct when the queer closet fails.

In this project I focus primarily on three made-for-television movies and three theatrically released films. The three made-for-television movies are *Consenting Adult*⁸, *An Early Frost*⁹, and *Doing Time on Maple Drive*¹⁰, released on ABC, NBC, and Fox Broadcasting respectively. In terms of theatrically released films, I focus on *Making Love*¹¹ and *Parting Glances*¹², as these

⁸ Cates, Gilbert. *Consenting Adult*. Drama. The Starger Company, David Lawrence and Ray Aghayan Productions, 1985.

⁹ Erman, John. *An Early Frost*. Drama. NBC Productions, 1985.

¹⁰ Olin, Ken. *Doing Time on Maple Drive*. Drama. FNM Films, 1992.

¹¹ Hiller, Arthur. *Making Love*. Drama. IndieProd Company Productions, Twentieth Century Fox, 1982.

¹² Sherwood, Bill. *Parting Glances*. Drama, Music, Romance. Rondo Productions, 1986.

two films provide conflicting views of gay men and queer family structures. Beyond these media objects I also examine the performances of Spalding Gray and the unique performance space that he inhabited, and how his queerness was portrayed in this space and in other spaces going forward.

Throughout this document I primarily incorporate textual analysis as a method to analyze the content and messaging of the selected films. In each case study, I closely analyze the narrative of a scene or more from each film. I then incorporate the theoretical texts of Williams, Althusser, as well as other relevant authors, to work through the content of each scene and draw connections between this content and the meaning of the film, as well as my overall argument. In the close readings of the films, I focus primarily on how the characters are portrayed, specifically to how the film displays the power dynamics between the characters. As each film applies a particular ideology to a single character, how these characters are understood in key scenes is essential to analyzing the meaning of each film. For example, analyzing a scene in *An Early Frost* between Michael Pearson (Aiden Quinn) and his father Nick (Ben Gazzara) is useful to understand how the film portrays its queer characters and how they are represented in relation to its patriarch figure. In using this methodology, I am able to analyze the narrative and visual strategies employed on screen, and how their respective portrayals are representative of specific arguments about the nuclear family. This method does not engage with production histories or audience reception, but I have incorporated external sources such as scheduling information and published commentary by filmmakers to supplement textual analysis.

I have selected the films in this study as a result of how the nuclear family construct and the confining roles are portrayed. *An Early Frost* is looked at here because of its significance as a cultural object, but also because of how the nuclear family roles of the patriarch and the son are

portrayed. *An Early Frost*'s significance stems from it being a high-profile project at NBC, its serious and scientifically-informed look at AIDS, and its willingness to examine how queer men and AIDS relate to heterosexual family structures. The portrayal of these roles is also a main reason for the selection of *Consenting Adult* and *Doing Time on Maple Drive*, as well as the Spalding Gray documentary *And Everything Is Going Fine*. In the case of *Consenting Adult*, its temporal proximity to *An Early Frost* and the similarities between the two films, such as the present character archetypes, setting, and their utilization by their respective networks, allow for an effective comparison between the two, as they are not completely unified in their concluding arguments. In terms of how the nuclear family roles are handled in *And Everything Is Going Fine*, it is a particularly unique case study as it applies these roles in documentary footage of a real world individual, rather than one that was created on the script of a narrative film.

In terms of the films in Chapter 2, *Cruising* has been selected due to how the nuclear family construct is viewed as the only family construct possible, even when it does not yet exist for the characters of the film. In the same chapter, *Making Love* is examined for a similar reverence for the nuclear family construct. Like the films of Chapter 1, *Making Love* portrays the roles of the nuclear family as essential, especially the patriarch and father roles. However, the primary reason for the inclusion of *Making Love* in this study is the presence of an emerging family structure in the film. Though it is not explored in detail, *Making Love* does include the possibility of an emerging family construct, represented here as a queer family separate from the nuclear family but still beholden to some of its values, such as monogamy. This emerging family structure is not the same as the family structure portrayed in Chapter 1, as in each case those family units remain firmly within the nuclear family construct as dictated by their respective patriarch figures. Importantly, although Spalding Gray existed in a similar emerging family

construct off screen, *And Everything Is Going Fine* ignores this fact and instead places all of his relationships within the boundaries of the nuclear family construct.

These analyses of these films and the representations within them serve to provide a survey of varied studio-produced presentations of gay men throughout the 1980s United States. The interplay of the emerging ideology of selling queerness to the nuclear family construct through on-screen representations of the same, and the representations of queerness being created for these media objects, is important to dissect in order to understand the methods of these films and the representations that manifest in them as a result. One such example is that the writers of *An Early Frost* are gay men, resulting in a film that advocates more for its gay characters, while *Doing Time On Maple Drive* does not have any apparent prominent involvement by queer creative voices, and the film itself is much more regressive in tone. This relationship is hardly one-to-one, but the decisions made in the film's production are important to understand the motivations of the films and how they sought to approach their respective issues. In the case of the film *An Early Frost*, the result is a film that is educational and scientifically accurate when it comes to AIDS, as well as sympathetic to the AIDS crisis. However, at the same time *An Early Frost* neglects a fair portrayal of its gay characters by subordinating them to dominant heterosexual demands.

In order to examine these relationships, I incorporate Raymond Williams' writing on superstructures and ideologies. Williams' analysis is effective for examining the interplay between the constructed queer spaces and the nuclear family spaces represented on screen, both of which are presented by predominantly heterosexual authors and for an imagined heterosexual audience. Williams is particularly useful to examine the dichotomy between the dominant ideology of the nuclear family construct and the emergent ideology evident in marketing

representations of gay men to this construct while also ensuring the dominance and preservation of it. He states that the hegemony of the moment is a result of the dominant culture, while also stating that hegemony is always an “active process.”¹³ Oppositional culture, in contrast, is made up of elements that challenge the dominance of the dominant structures. Williams notes that “[t]he alternative, especially in areas that impinge on significant areas of the dominant, is often seen as oppositional and, by pressure, often converted into it.”¹⁴ This is further complicated by emergent culture, as Williams argues that it is not always clear where emergent culture is emerging from.

“By ‘emergent [culture]’ I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships are continually being created. But it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture (and in this sense ‘species-specific’) and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel.”¹⁵

Williams further states that arguments concerning the emergent can only be made in relation to the dominant,¹⁶ positioning it as impossible to separate from the dominant. As mentioned, queer culture is not emergent in the 1980s, but the interactions being created by constructing gay men as film and television characters during a time of “traditional family values” and the marketing of these characters within heterosexual family structures are. How much of this emerging culture is actually emerging and not simply an extension of the dominant will be examined in order to

¹³ Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature (Marxist Introductions)*. Marxist Introductions. Oxford: University Press, 1977, 123.

¹⁴ Williams, 126.

¹⁵ Williams, 115.

¹⁶ Williams, 123.

fully explore this relationship between the dominant and emergent family structures. In the case of films such as *An Early Frost*, a queer family structure is shown, but this family structure is shown to replicate the values of the nuclear family construct, so it is not truly an emergent family structure according to Williams. Instead, it is an extension of the dominant, as it is not “oppositional” or “substantially alternative.” In contrast to this, *Making Love* and *And Everything Is Going Fine* both acknowledge emergent family structures in line with Williams’ definition, but neither film endorses this emerging construct over the dominant nuclear family. The interactions between the dominant and the possible emergent cultures in the context of representations of the nuclear family are what I will be focusing on in this study, as the choices that are made in the portrayal of all characters highlights how mediated representations are meant to function and for whom.

I also draw on Louis Althusser’s theories of ideology in examining the formation of relationships between queer men and heteronormative family constructs. On the reproduction of social constructs, Althusser states:

“It follows that, in order to exist, every social formation must, while it produces, and in order to be able to produce, *reproduce* the conditions of its production. It must therefore *reproduce*

- 1) The productive forces
- 2) The existing relations of production”¹⁷

Furthermore, Althusser argues that the successful implementation of this reproductive structure will form an “endless spiral”¹⁸. The application of these processes to the social formation of the

¹⁷ Althusser, Louis. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. London ; New York: Verso, 2014, 48.

¹⁸ Althusser, 49.

nuclear family and the nuclear family's mode of reproduction highlights the incongruity between the nuclear family construct and queerness, which allows for an understanding of the exclusion by the heterosexual family construct of queer individuals. As the nuclear family views potential queer members as a threat to its reproduction, and therefore failing to fulfill the requirements of Althusser's definition, queer members are excluded out of a misguided sense of self-preservation. The implementation of this policy of queer exclusion and expulsion by the nuclear family towards gay men is crucial in order to examine the representations of gay men.

Like Williams, Althusser also allows for greater understanding of the dominant and the dominated. Althusser states "[o]ne of the modes of production in this set is described as *dominant*, the other as dominated. The dominated modes are those surviving from the old social formation's past or the one that may be emerging in its present.¹⁹" In this case, the dominated are the gay men and queer cultures, and they also fulfill both the category of being from a prior social formation, as well emerging. Clearly, queer men and queer culture had existed long before the 1980s, but the release of films such as *An Early Frost* and *Making Love* placed gay men in conversation with the nuclear family, but from the perspective of the latter group. This, in effect, results in new, emerging, modes of heteronormative culture, not queer culture, as this new interaction of selling caricatures of gay men to the heteronormative family audience necessitates extensions of the dominant structure in order to absorb potential new members. As the nuclear family construct expands itself to allow for queer members, it is effectively extending the dominant culture to queer individuals to encompass them, reinforcing the hegemonic nature of the nuclear family. These films argue that the current method of outright rejection of queer members is not viable, and so extensions to the definition of the nuclear family must occur to

¹⁹ Althusser, 19.

allow for queer members. However, the new extension is targeted at and affects queer members, resulting in an emerging perception of queer culture. This dual nature should give queer cultures and their members the same amount of agency in the construct as their heterosexual counterparts, but that is not the case due to the fact that they are visualized by dominant nuclear family constructs to reproduce their dominance and exclusivity.

Althusser is also essential to examining what may be extrapolated through the presentation of *dominated* structures. Though they are created for the primary purpose of reinforcing the dominant structure and its functions, this does not always exclude the dominated structure from being significant in both its existence and its messaging. To this end, Althusser states:

“Yet the social location of the residual is always easier to understand, since a large part of it (though not all) relates to earlier social formations and phases of the cultural process, in which certain real meanings and values were generated. In the subsequent default of a particular phase of a dominant culture there is then a reaching back to those meanings and values which were created, in actual societies and actual situations in the past, and which still seem to have significance because they represent areas of human experience, aspiration, and achievement which the dominant cultural neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses, or even cannot recognize.²⁰”

How queer individuals and spaces interact with heteronormative individuals and spaces, the dominant culture, is the focus of the films that are looked at here. The nuclear family as a heteronormative construct places it as a dominant structure, and the relationships between it and those who do not conform to its parameters designate those as not part of the dominant structure.

²⁰ Althusser, 123.

In each example discussed in this thesis, queer cultures and individuals are approached from the perspective of the dominant culture. While films such as *An Early Frost* were produced for a perceived heterosexual audience²¹, the intended audience does not result in the messaging of the films being exclusive to the purposes of the nuclear family construct. In none of these instances does the dominated culture ever overtake the dominant one, as messages still work through the intentions of the dominant culture. One example of this is that though the images of queer individuals were crafted for the reproduction of a dominant heterosexual construct, they were still queer images presented on-screen. This does not exclude the images from being problematic in their presentation, but it acknowledges that through the lens of the dominant heterosexual family structure, images of dominated ideologies are presented in a dominant setting.

In addition to Williams and Althusser, Stuart Hall's work on the politics of representation, the "other," and the problematization of binaries sheds light on the nature of heteronormative family constructs and how these constructs are predetermined to be biased against potential queer members. The predisposition towards binary constructions is exclusionary at its core, and this results in any individuals or groups that fall outside of it being labeled the "other" in a harmful sense. This harmful label in turn creates a harmful representation of these groups, formulating a cycle of exclusionary moves by heteronormative family structures towards queer individuals. On representation, Hall states "[r]epresentation is a complex business and, especially when dealing with 'difference,' it engages feelings attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer."²² Engagement with the homophobia displayed

²¹ Craig, David Randolph. "Coming out of the Television: LGBT-Themed Made-for-Television Movies as Critical Media Pedagogy." eScholarship, University of California, 01. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4d75k139>, 75.

²² Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Culture, Media, and Identities. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage in association with the Open University, 1997.

within the films and how this relates to the perceived viewer is another important aspect that must be accounted for. As with Althusser, Hall allows for an examination of the dominant-dominated interplay, but with an emphasis on how the images presented are created with a perceived audience in mind. While I do not engage with audience studies here, how and why the films were conceived and produced by their respective studios is essential for examining their subordination to and proliferation of dominant structures, of which most of the perceived audience is a part of.

Another aspect of the films, beyond their perceptions of nuclear family-queer individual relationships, is their relationship to sexual binaries. In cases where bisexuality is a possibility, notably *Making Love*, it is rejected for a gay-straight binary which is presented as the only potential dichotomy within the text. Hall problematizes this relationship as well. While binaries are useful for examining dominant structures, Hall contends that they are a “crude and reactionist way of establishing meaning²³” and furthermore that they are “oversimplified.²⁴” In addition to Hall’s statements, I apply both Althusser and Williams to the work of the binary in the examined media texts, as indicative of the dominant-dominated relationship at play and the unwillingness of the nuclear family construct to endorse or even explore any further complications to the relationship they are seeking to establish. This relationship is comprised of, as noted by Williams,²⁵ the alternative to the dominant being converted into the dominant by way of the dominant’s hegemonic nature. In this case, the action is seen through the elimination of the non-binary possibility through a flat rejection of the possibility of its existence. Althusser speaks to this conversion as well as when he states that all of these structures must be viewed through the

²³ Hall, 235.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Williams, 126.

mode of reproduction.²⁶ The nuclear family construct views any structure with the potential to jeopardize its reproductive potential as a threat to its existence, and one that is not included in the media texts examined here. With its unwillingness to negotiate non-binary sexualities, bisexuality is posited as impossible, and therefore a threat to the nuclear family.

Overall, the adherence to binary sexualities, that is, sexualities that adhere to heteronormative guidelines, by heteronormative family structures is a method of preemptive exclusion of members. This exclusionary action serves to ensure the reproductive nature of the family structure, as noted by Althusser. However, the forced adherence to the binary comes at a cost to the members who have been excluded by the family structure. In this case, these excluded members are queer individuals and queer cultures, as they are seen by the heteronormative family structure as a threat to its reproductive nature. Queer individuals do not fall into the binary of heterosexual male and heterosexual female, other gender identities are also clearly excluded, and this action necessitates the exclusion of these individuals outside of the sexuality binary in the eyes of the heteronormative family construct. The films focused on here continue from this legacy, but they seek to make inclusionary gestures while preserving the nuclear family as their foremost concern. Sexual binaries are still regarded as essential to maintain the nuclear family in these texts. Therefore, the binary is held as an unobtainable trait for the queer members the nuclear family chooses to include, positioning these queer individuals as members, but not full members. Essentially, queer members are ultimately allowed into the nuclear family construct, but as they do not follow the sexuality guidelines in the same way as the heterosexual members of the construct, they are regarded as not equal to the other family members.

²⁶ Althusser, 56.

I have divided my examinations of heterosexual perceptions of the nuclear family's relationship to queer individuals and cultures into three individual case studies, each focusing on different media texts and their respective portrayals and functions. In total, the three case studies provide an effective and targeted understanding of gay men and gay masculinity as defined and perceived within dominant heterosexual constructs and their respective heterosexual lenses. The focused-upon heterosexual constructs are mostly limited to the nuclear family construct, but additional dominant structures and ideologies that inform this are also explored. As for the heterosexual lenses, in the first two chapters I approach films made by primarily heterosexual filmmakers that approach queer individuals, cultures, and issues at play from the perspective of dominant heterosexual constructs. As a result, while these films may offer a greater understanding of their queer subjects to previously ignorant heterosexual audience members, they contort the same queer subjects to fit heterosexual sensibilities. The outcome of this contortion is that the nuclear family construct is an absolute institution, with its rules and gatekeeping argued to be the acceptable status quo and celebrated, even as this same process brings about hardships upon the queer individuals, or even non-queer individuals who fall outside the rigid structure of the construct.

The first chapter examines three made-for-television films, *Consenting Adult*, *An Early Frost*, and *Doing Time on Maple Drive*. This examination is primarily informed by Williams and Althusser's work on dominant and dominated structures, with Hall's work on binaries included in selected cases. I examine the production histories of the three films in order to offer an understanding of the how the films were conceived, for what purposes, and how the intended target audience affected their writing, casting, and production. My argument in this chapter centers on the creation of gay male characters who are "safe" for the heterosexual viewers. In

this context, “safe” refers to the fact that the caricatures of gay men are dictated by heterosexual male characters, often male patriarchs, and in this way any potential threat to the nuclear family by these gay sons is eliminated at the cost of the individual nature and identity of these same characters. This trend extends beyond the mid-1980s to other networks beyond NBC and ABC, as *Doing Time on Maple Drive* evidences.

My second chapter focuses primarily on the theatrically-released film *Making Love* and its arguments relating to gay men and the nuclear family. In this case, Williams, Althusser, and Hall are all incorporated to work through the presentations of the dominant and dominated structures, and also to examine how the binary structure operates in this film according to the needs of the dominant constructs. In addition to *Making Love*, I also examine *Parting Glances*, as it serves as an example of emerging ideology, while at the same time responding to? some of the faults of *Making Love* while neglecting others. I posit that though *Making Love* presents gay characters and seeks to validate them, it still subordinates its representations to the dominant structure of the nuclear family construct. In this context, I position *Parting Glances* as a counter-narrative, which both negotiates the nuclear family in its content, while not subordinating itself to it. I utilize Ian M. Harris’ *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities*²⁷ and Ashley Lavelle’s *Radical Challenges to the Family: From the Sixties to Same-Sex Marriage*²⁸ to supplement the film’s presentation of gay masculinity, and how *Making Love* seeks to present its gay male characters as men who just happen to be gay. The presentation tactics of gay men by the filmmakers is also a key point of examination in Chapter 2, as though the film posits its gay characters as incidentally gay, it also stipulates their expulsion from the nuclear family construct

²⁷ Harris, Ian M. *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities*. Gender, Change & Society 1. London ; Bristol, PA: Taylor & Francis, 1995.

²⁸ Lavelle, Ashley. *Radical Challenges to the Family: From the Sixties to Same-Sex Marriage*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015.

as a direct reaction to their sexuality. In this chapter I examine the arguments presented by the two films, incorporating other films as necessary on a limited basis to build context.

My final chapter and final case study focuses on the reflective presentation of Spalding Gray. I examine how Gray represented himself and his bisexuality in his recorded stage performances, how he interacted with the “queer closet” in this regard, and how subsequent representations seek to closet him completely. Here I draw on the work of the previous two case studies, Williams, Althusser, and Hall, as well Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*.²⁹ This latter text serves to examine the queer closet and how it was utilized by Gray and in relation to him. The dual examinations of Gray as he portrayed himself and how he was portrayed posthumously by others provides a contrast of representations of his sexuality and how representations of his queerness has been affected by this action. The work of the dominant structures, through which the memory of Gray is informed, are examined in their relationship to Gray himself, which in this case is the dominated ideology. In addition, I examine Gray in terms of the theatre structure he performed within, and what his occasional forays into the cinematic realm looked like and represented. I contend that though Gray created a very distinct portrayal of himself, this portrayal is warped and neglected by external forces such as the documentary *And Everything is Going Fine*, in favor of one that is subordinated more closely to the dominant ideological structure, which seeks to create an expressly heterosexual version of Gray by consciously closeting his queerness. The action serves to keep Gray within the sexual binary of the nuclear family structure, even when he did not place himself within it through his own works. In this way, *And Everything is Going Fine* misrepresents Gray for the sake of the nuclear family structure and audiences that fulfill its requirements.

²⁹ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

In each of these case studies I consult the media texts as the primary evidence for my argument. By incorporating textual analysis as my primary method, the meanings of the media objects may be more directly examined, and strategies for how each of them presents its subjects is available for interpretation. Detailed examinations of how queer characters are presented is essential to understanding where and how they are placed in relation to dominant structures and ideologies, and how and where they support these dominant structures. In cases where gay men do not support dominant ideologies, how and why this is possible is closely examined, as are the implications, effects, and any actions taken by the nuclear family structure in reaction to this, evidenced by subsequent films or other media texts that approach the same subject matter through a different method. Cases where gay men and queer cultures support dominant ideologies are also examined. Textual analysis is effective for both examinations, as evidence of the ideologies at play is apparent in the content and readings of the movies, allowing for a connection between supplemental materials and information.

The concluding chapter offers a synthesis of the arguments presented in the preceding case studies. While Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 look at subordinations of queer individuals to the nuclear family by way of fictional narratives, Chapter 3 examines this from the angle of the documentary medium. Specifically, Spalding Gray's bisexuality, and resulting existence outside of binary sexualities, presents a challenge to the filmmakers as they seek to place him within the heteronormative family structure. The desire to place Gray securely within the nuclear family structure, and not emergent as explored in Chapter 1, but is the result of the film failing to envision another identity for Gray outside of a father figure to the nuclear family. As a whole, Chapter 3 accounts for the same attitudes towards and by the nuclear family, but in this case they are embodied outside of the time period of the films in the first two chapters, and in a different

medium. In this way, the examples in Chapter 3 demonstrate the retroactive view towards the attitudes the time period of the other case studies. Much of Gray's work took place in the mid to late 1980s and early 1990s, and by co-opting these materials for a retelling of Gray as a person, *And Everything is Going Fine*, commits the same actions as films such as *An Early Frost* and *Making Love* as it approaches Gray's queerness through a heterosexual lens, though in this case it seeks to erase it as much as necessary to conform Gray to the nuclear family construct.

By focusing on each of these unique media texts, made-for-television movies in Chapter 1, theatrically released movies in Chapter 2, and a performer-centered narratives in Chapter 3, different perspectives are understood on similar reoccurring behaviors. Chapter 1 examines the selling of gay men and the nuclear family to nuclear families through their television sets. Chapter 2 and 3 move outside the home and examine how the interactions presented in the made-for-television movies in Chapter 1 recur in theatrically released films. The reoccurrence of the bending of queer individuals to heterosexual expectations for the sake of a perceived heterosexual audience occurs in each of these case studies, even in instances where the media objects purport to be genuinely concerned with queer issues. The purpose of these case studies is not to point fingers when this occurs, but rather to understand how queerness is imagined in these spaces, and why the vision of queerness that is presented is represented as such. To this end I incorporate film and media theory and textual analysis to classify, dissect, and apply the dominant structures and ideologies at play and how they relate to gay men and queer culture as dominated and emerging structures. Both structures are examined in relation to how one informs the other. This results in a detailed look at heterosexual definitions of the nuclear family construct, and how this construct pervades the understanding of other constructs, while also imposing its values upon them. This thesis examines the dominant ideology of the nuclear family

construct and through it the dominated ideologies it affects the in the context of media objects where this process is made apparent. The examination of this dominant structure is necessary to understand how the presented images of queerness are affected by the expectation that they reinforce the nuclear family construct. The understanding of these portrayals allows for a dissection of the attitudes towards queer individuals, specifically gay men, as they were represented in media texts within the context and confines of an era shaped by “traditional family values.”

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Chapter I: Nuclear Family Panic: Gay Sons in Made-For-Television Films

One of the core pillars of the nuclear family in the 1980s was its relationship to the heterosexual family structure. This means that the family follows the pattern of a male and female in a heterosexual relationship, with their children, the products of their heterosexual relationship, set on similar paths that will ultimately result in them replicating the same family actions as their parents. This results in the growth of the nuclear family structure, and a normalization of this construct-reproducing pattern. The hegemonic nature of heteronormativity facilitates this process. Raymond Williams argues that this is an “active process,”³⁰ and that the focus of the reproduction of the construct is a trait indicative of the dominant nature of the nuclear family structure. To this end, the dominant nature of the heteronormative family structure results in queer individuals who are related to the nuclear family being classified and viewed as emergent.³¹ As in these cases they extend from the nuclear family construct, but with several adjustments to the nuclear family’s criteria, the relationship between queer individuals and the nuclear family is qualified as emergent. This emergent classification extends to the interactions of queer individuals with the nuclear family and the family’s adaptations as well. In the same way, Althusser speaks to the dominant and dominated modes of production. In this structure, the dominated modes are those that are emerging in the present from the dominant mode.³² This does not mean that the dominated modes are queer culture, as dominated modes have already existed prior to the relationships and media objects examined in this chapter.

³⁰ Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature (Marxist Introductions)*. Marxist Introductions. Oxford: University Press, 1977, 115.

³¹ Ibid, 123.

³² Althusser, Louis. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. London ; New York: Verso, 2014, 19.

Rather, this refers to the interaction between the nuclear family and the queer individuals that they are exploring allowing into the structure, within the context of interaction between dominant and dominated being sold to heterosexual family members. What is being sold is the acceptance of queer members into the nuclear family, with the promise that the reproductive pattern of the same construct will be preserved.

Althusser also argues for the family as an ideological state apparatus (ISA),³³ thus reinforcing its hegemony. “The ideology that [the family] realizes is ‘anchored’ in a reality that is not purely ideological,” states Althusser. “For the family is the site of the biological reproduction of representatives of the ‘human race’, of their rearing and training, and so on (let us say that it reproduces *the existence* of labour-power).”³⁴ Here Althusser attributes reproduction as an essential tenet of the family, reinforcing the stance of the nuclear family structure’s hesitance to accept queer members. This statement about the family as an essentially reproductive structure ignores alternative family structures, specifically non-heteronormative ones. This exclusion in turn reinforces the pattern of nuclear family reproduction as an essential feature. Here I examine how these patterns and features of the nuclear family construct inform and interact with the potential act of accepting queer members. In each of the examples here how the nuclear family construct and its respective members interact with queer members is examined. This examination is done in accordance with how Althusser and Williams understand the nuclear family construct, in addition to other values of the nuclear family construct and where those same values come from.

³³ Ibid, 75.

³⁴ Ibid, 76-77.

In accordance with analysis by Ashley Lavelle³⁵, who explores how tenets such as monogamy, child-rearing, and homosexual oppression have both become a part of the nuclear family structure, the result of this pattern has several severe shortcomings in the sense of its range and inclusion process. Firstly, this pattern implies a uniformity and simplicity to the family structure that does not actually exist in most cases.³⁶ The male and female married couple are only interested in each other, and they are essentially locked into the structure. As with their children, this structure is what they were destined for since the time that they were children and born into the structure itself. This implied inevitability is a catalyst of exclusion, which I argue leads to the first major shortcoming of the structure.

The second shortcoming is that this structure of the nuclear family argues for all of its members to be exclusively heterosexual, an expectation that is hardly inclusive, rational, or realistic. Lavelle relates this to capitalism's need for family units, as well as the nuclear family's own need for reproduction.³⁷ The demand for this false reality results from the demand for a heterosexual reproduction pattern, and results in an exclusion of all queer individuals. Althusser explores the demand for heterosexuality in his writing on families as an ISA³⁸ explaining that “*all* state apparatuses, repressive and ideological alike, function *simultaneously* on repression and on ideology.”³⁹ The possibility that queer individuals may enter in any of the positions of the nuclear family presents to the nuclear family the potential that the structure may not be continued. But this assessment is inaccurate for a variety of reasons, as it ignores alternatives to heterosexual child-rearing, but the result of this assessment is that queer individuals are

³⁵ Lavelle, Ashley. *Radical Challenges to the Family: From the Sixties to Same-Sex Marriage*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015.

³⁶ Ibid 23

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Althusser, 76-77.

³⁹ Ibid, 85.

perceived as a threat to the nuclear family by members and proponents of the structure. The exclusion of queer individuals for this reason is not the only exclusion made by the structure, but it is the one that I will focus on in terms of how it is approached and negotiated by the nuclear family construct.

In *The Way We Never Were*,⁴⁰ author Stephanie Coontz explores the history of the nuclear family structure, and the various factors that resulted in its conceptualization and implementation, which may eventually be traced to the 20th century United States. Coontz details how flaws and fallacies in the structure have always existed, despite claims by proponents of the nuclear family structure to the contrary.⁴¹ She systemically examines and highlights the harsh realities of the family structure across multiple eras of the history of the United States. This includes the colonial era⁴², the Victorian family⁴³, and the late 19th century family⁴⁴, before moving to focus on the “nuclear family” of the 1950s. Coontz also notes that the nuclear family in its present form only came about as the result of labor reforms.⁴⁵ In this case, Coontz notes that the labor structure being rejected in favor of the implementation of the nuclear family was a result of nostalgia for another preexisting structure, in this case the labor structure, being cast aside. The key assertion here being that the nuclear family did not come about as a naturally forming structure, but rather one that was carefully created by advocates seeking to reject the then-current labor construct.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1992.

⁴¹ Coontz, 79

⁴² Ibid, 35

⁴³ Ibid, 36

⁴⁴ Ibid, 37

⁴⁵ Ibid, 38

⁴⁶ Ibid

Coontz's rebuttal of the inherent nature of the nuclear family construct works to dismiss claims that the structure is essential and natural due to its longevity, as well as the assertion that change to the structure would result in its demise, and also that change would be an objectively bad thing for all involved. This same rebuttal by Coontz also extends to the claims relating to the nature and structure of the nuclear family made in the films I will be analyzing here. In the films examined, the nuclear family is posited to be a natural institution. "Natural," in this context, implies that the nuclear family does not have a start or end date, and instead simply is the family structure, with alternatives not being acknowledged or presented. This lack of representation alienates and isolates those who do not fall into the range of acceptance by the nuclear family, in the case of what I am focusing on here, queer men. Coontz's rebuff of the timeless nature of the nuclear family strikes at the desire of the nuclear family to be an absolute institution and complicates the efforts by its members to be exclusionary. The exclusionary nature of the nuclear family is clearly geared towards the preservation of the structure over any other potential objectives. Coontz continues here to firmly rebuff the claim that the Victorian nuclear family, from which the modern nuclear family in the West derives its morality structure, is a historical myth.⁴⁷

The morality of the structure is also an element at play in the films featured here, and an aspect that drives many of the characters. The debunking of this morality myth is useful for rebutting the positions from which the films are approaching their subjects. However, the films also argue that they are advocating for a change to the structure. This claim is not entirely untrue, as in all of the films examined in this case study ultimately petition the nuclear family to accept their queer members. But acceptance comes at a cost in each case, primarily to the individualism

⁴⁷ Ibid, 80

of the queer men in question. This cost is seen as the queer men are forced to accept the values imposed upon them by the patriarchs of each family. The imposition of values, in all cases centered around the lifestyle the queer men are expected to live, gives the nuclear family power over the queer men and in this way seeks to preserve the status quo of the hegemonic nature of the nuclear family structure. The status quo nature of the nuclear family is not unique to this aspect, as Lavelle argues that many elements of the nuclear family are reinforced by capitalism⁴⁸. In Western countries this reinforcement points to an endorsement of the construct by institutions seeking to preserve the status quo. Rebuffing both of the earlier aspects of the nature of the nuclear family, its inherit structure and the impossibility of change to the structure, listed here is essential for a responsible analysis of the featured films. Each film argues in favor of both of these aspects of the construct, and this informs their creative decisions, and are implicative of larger issues behind their respective messages.

Here I will focus on three made for TV movies that best demonstrate an adherence and loyalty to the reaffirmation of these two aspects of the nuclear family construct: *An Early Frost*⁴⁹ (NBC), *Consenting Adult*⁵⁰ (ABC), and *Doing Time on Maple Drive*⁵¹ (Fox). While the first two movies debuted in 1985, it was another seven years, in 1992, before *Doing Time on Maple Drive* was released. The temporal proximity of these films is essential to understanding their unities and disunities when it comes to their messaging, and a factor that I will explore later in this chapter. All three of the films aim to approach the “issue” of queer individuals in relation to the nuclear family through a variety of approaches: the AIDS crisis (*An Early Frost*), sexual

⁴⁸ Lavelle, 97.

⁴⁹ Erman, John. *An Early Frost*. Drama. NBC Productions, 1985.

⁵⁰ Cates, Gilbert. *Consenting Adult*. Drama. The Starger Company, David Lawrence and Ray Aghayan Productions, 1985.

⁵¹ Olin, Ken. *Doing Time on Maple Drive*. Drama. FNM Films, 1992.

insecurity (*Consenting Adult*), and parental expectations (*Doing Time on Maple Drive*). Clearly the presence of the AIDs crisis stands out among these motivations, but this does not preclude the associated movie from still advancing the topic of queerness and acceptance in the context of the nuclear family structure. At the forefront, all these movies are about straight families struggling with the revelation that one of their male members is gay, and any other issues presented with this conflict are lenses to help frame the issue.

What is most important about this trio of movies is that none attempt to represent their gay characters purely through the eyes of the queer individual. The closest any of the films come is *An Early Frost*, as it includes sequences solely populated by queer individuals and spends some time focusing exclusively on gay relationships. Outside of this film, the queer men in each case are distinctly viewed as the “other” in each narrative, and the film is much more concerned with the trials and emotions faced by their straight family members, which is indicative of their heterosexual lenses. The othering of the queer characters extends to how the films view queerness in relation to the individual’s masculinity, identity, and the nuclear family construct. In the eyes of each film, the queerness of each man precludes them from being able to be part of any of the other identity categories. Acceptance and inclusion into these identity categories may only be granted by way of their straight family members, who themselves exist in the nuclear family construct, thus resulting in the queer individuals being defined by this construct. Queerness, in the eyes of the films, firmly separates individuals from any heterosexual structures without heterosexual acceptance into the same structures.

An Early Frost, *Consenting Adult*, and *Doing Time on Maple Drive* all approach the perceived issue of the queer closet in relation to the nuclear family by adopting a heterosexual point of view. The heterosexual point of view, or rather the heterosexual gaze, of these films

understands queer individuals to be a breaking point of the nuclear family. The nuclear family must dictate terms for queer individuals or the longevity of the construct is argued by the films to be at risk. In this way, the queer closet is implicitly and explicitly argued by the films to be a positive structure, and one that would spare the nuclear family of the struggle to overcome their differences with their queer members. In addition to this, the queer men featured in each of these films are argued to be failures in their structural roles due to their queerness. If a man is queer, it is argued he cannot adequately fulfill the role of son, brother, father, patriarch, and in this way the films argue that he is not masculine and not a man.

In order for each film to be assessed in its socio-cultural environment, the reach and impact of each film has to be understood, as well as the production histories. For this purpose, David Randolph Craig's *Coming Out of the Television: LGBT-themed Made-for Television Movies as Critical Media Pedagogy*⁵² serves as a useful text. Craig broadly details various aspects of the three films' production histories, as well as the audience numbers and reception for each production. Craig's argument centers on how the examined television movies foregrounded LGBTQ+ concerns, and how these existing media objects may be used as a blueprint for the continued addressing of social issues via critical entertainment.⁵³ However, Craig's analysis falls short in examining how these made for TV movies relate to heteronormative family structures, and *An Early Frost* is the only one of the three films examined here that Craig focuses on at length, with the other two only mentioned in passing. In his analysis of this film, Craig again centers on the production history of the film rather than its arguments, though his accounting of the film's history is useful for reference. Reviews of each film are also useful texts, though most

⁵² Craig, David Randolph. "Coming out of the Television: LGBT-Themed Made-for-Television Movies as Critical Media Pedagogy." eScholarship, University of California, 01. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4d75k139>.

⁵³ Craig, ii.

reviews are located in the years after each film, comparing these TV movies to Hollywood productions that were released in the 1990s and beyond. This results in many of the reviews having distance from the films, taking into account what legacies they have developed, instead of being reactions in close proximity to their respective releases.

To begin, Craig notes that *An Early Frost* reached 34 million viewers⁵⁴. NBC debuted it on Monday, November 11th, at 9:00pm EST, filling the NBC Monday Night Movies slot. It competed with *Monday Night Football* on ABC, and *Kate & Allie*, *Newhart*, and *Cagney & Lacey* on CBS. It outperformed all of these on its initial run, drawing a 23.3 rating, meaning that of all television-owning households in the United States, 23.3% were watching *An Early Frost*. *Monday Night Football* drew a 19.9 rating, and *Kate & Allie* drew a 20.⁵⁵ *Consenting Adult*, by comparison, drew a 23.1 rating on its initial airing, as well as a 33 share⁵⁶, meaning that approximately one-third of all television sets watching TV at the time of airing were watching the made for TV movie. Craig notes that the film was adapted from a book by Laura Hobson, who had previously written *Gentleman's Agreement*, which had been adapted into an award-winning movie.⁵⁷ All of this is to say that the film was fairly high-profile, and in each case the subject matter of the films was an exception to the formula of programming that the networks aired at that time. As both films debuted in each network's network-programmed movie slots, NBC and ABC ensured that they both had a built-in audience regardless of subject matter, further heightening their profile while also lessening the risk of each project.

⁵⁴ Craig, 2.

⁵⁵ "TV Listings for - November 11, 1985 - TV Tango." Accessed October 22, 2020.

<http://www.tvtango.com/listings?filters%5Bdate%5D%5Bmonth%5D=11&filters%5Bdate%5D%5Bday%5D=11&filters%5Bdate%5D%5Byear%5D=1985&commit.x=27&commit.y=15>.

⁵⁶ "TV Listings for - February 4, 1985 - TV Tango." Accessed October 22, 2020.

<http://www.tvtango.com/listings?filters%5Bdate%5D%5Bmonth%5D=2&filters%5Bdate%5D%5Bday%5D=4&filters%5Bdate%5D%5Byear%5D=1985&commit.x=25&commit.y=13>.

⁵⁷ Craig, 71.

The movie programming by both NBC and ABC centered around movies that could be viewed by a family audience, or at the least were not risky enough to put off viewers from all ages. The movies aired were anything from legal dramas, to period pieces, to dramas about the daily lives of the characters. The latter category is what films such as *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult* most closely fall into, but here these two films are exceptional in that they approached queer characters. In every other case, the main characters were heterosexual, with their heterosexual love lives being one of the points of focus, often the primary one. And, with each of these two films, the fact that they were approaching queer characters was a key part of their promotion. They were viewed as exception by the networks for this fact, which they were in a way, and as a result they were outliers in the lineups of both networks.

Still, it is incorrect to assume that these films were produced in a heterosexual vacuum. Craig continues to note that those involved with producing the films, such as executives, writers, and producers, collaborated with LGBTQ organizations when it came to creating the script.⁵⁸ This was especially true for *Consenting Adult*. At the same time, the screenwriters for *An Early Frost*, Ron Cowen and Daniel Lipman, are both gay. Craig notes that NBC selected them for the project in part due to their sexuality. This relationship was not totally harmonious though, as the executives overseeing the project insisted on some elements being featured more prominently, such as homophobia.⁵⁹ It is also noted that Cowen and Lipman felt that the collaboration with LGBT groups by the studio censored their own efforts,⁶⁰ further dissuading the myth that the studio was committed to making a feature free of its own fears about its reception.

⁵⁸ Craig, 217.

⁵⁹ Craig, 228.

⁶⁰ Craig, 217.

Consenting Adult was aired during sweeps week in February of 1985, and it was rebroadcast on ABC in 1987, as well as syndicated in Europe.⁶¹ It aired on Monday, February 4th, at 9:00pm EST, competing with *Cate & Allie*, *Newhart*, and *Cagney & Lacey* on CBS, and the series debut of *Dirty Dozen: The Series* on NBC.⁶² I have mentioned the viewing numbers of *An Early Frost* prior, but it should also be noted that this film garnered 14 Emmy nominations, winning four, including one for “Outstanding Writing,” which went in part to Cowen and Lipman. All of this evidences that these two films were far from small projects that were lucky enough to be aired, and rather concerted efforts by the networks and their studios to draw large audience numbers and critical acclaim by producing materials based on relevant cultural topics. Analysis of the films produced and aired by the networks in the programming slots that *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult* aired in suggests that the audiences for which these films were produced were perceived as straight by those making the film, resulting in a straight lens through which queer individuals and identities were viewed, which will be returned to shortly.

An Early Frost displays this straight lens rather overtly. The film centers on a gay man, Michael (Aidan Quinn), who is closeted to his family. He is a successful lawyer, and perceived as a model son by his parents, Nick (Ben Gazzara) and Katherine (Gena Rowlands). When he is diagnosed with AIDS, he comes out to his parents, only to be met by resistance, disapproval, and even violence by his father, and a gradual attempt at understanding by his mother. However, the film does not immediately condemn the resistive actions by Nick and Katherine, instead showing them as a valid range of response. Nick’s more physical actions are pushed back on, but his

⁶¹ Leo, John. “Television and the Narrative Structures of Discourse and Difference.” *Journal of Film and Video* 43, no. 4 (1991): 45–55.

⁶² “TV Listings for - February 4, 1985 - TV Tango.” Accessed October 22, 2020. <http://www.tvtango.com/listings?filters%5Bdate%5D%5Bmonth%5D=2&filters%5Bdate%5D%5Bday%5D=4&filters%5Bdate%5D%5Byear%5D=1985&commit.x=25&commit.y=13>.

outward abrasiveness toward Michael and later other queer characters is shown to be an understandable reaction in the film's eyes. *And Early Frost* positions the reactions in this way in order to make the heterosexual characters relatable to the heterosexual audience. The film does not ask any of its heterosexual characters to immediately accept their queer family members, and it further couples this with how the characters understand and react to Michael's AIDS diagnosis and the virus in general. Nick initially has an outburst towards Michael before retreating to not interacting with him much at all. He is still shown to care about him later, mainly when the family unit as a whole is at risk, but these interactions are otherwise limited. Katherine, in contrast, begins to learn more about the AIDS virus, and she serves as the audience's surrogate for knowledge about the disease, as well as an example of a more positive response. Taken together, the two reactions explored by *An Early Frost* seek to validate the reactions of real-world parents who are facing similar news, while also offering a path towards acceptance for the queer member. In many ways, the movie becomes Katherine's, as she serves as the surrogate for the audience. This is a trait that the film shares with *Consenting Adult*, as it also does with its portrayal of father figures. Although one of the main characters of the film is gay, and his revealing of his sexuality to his parents is at the epicenter of the movie, *An Early Frost* instead chooses to focus on his AIDS diagnosis, rather than his identity as a gay man.

Mark C. Donovan notes that the response to AIDS in the mid-1980s, both in the public and legislative, was often dictated by the perception of whether or not the diagnosed individual "deserved" it.⁶³ This perception was rooted in the homophobia of the era, and the resulting prejudices affected not only the perceptions of AIDS, but the perceptions of queer individuals.

⁶³ Donovan, Mark C. "Social Constructions of People with AIDS: Target Populations and United States Policy, 1981-1990." *Policy Studies Review* 12, no. 3/4 (Autumn/Winter 1993): 3-29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.1993.tb00548.x>, 15.

This was despite the fact that AIDS was not exclusive to queer individuals, and Donovan further provides evidence that the prejudice against queer individuals was a result of prejudices against the gay community rather purely from fears of the disease. Donovan notes that reports and studies confirming the heterosexual transmission of AIDS were attacked with counter assertions that these transmissions must be the result of “unreported homosexuality.”⁶⁴ Notions and actions such as this rejection of facts sought to make AIDS and queerness synonymous with each other. However, the news in mid-1985 that Rock Hudson had been diagnosed with AIDS complicated this effort. Donovan notes that acceptance of Hudson’s diagnosis was difficult because of his “masculine on-screen persona.”⁶⁵ Gradual acceptance of Hudson’s diagnosis eventually persisted, but the stereotypes about queerness and queer individuals remained unreconciled.⁶⁶

As *An Early Frost* was released just a few months after Rock Hudson’s announcement, the public perception of AIDS was still extremely volatile, as were the perceptions of how the disease related to the queer community. The film is sure to emphasize that Michael does not “deserve” the disease, as it is emphasized that he was likely unknowingly infected by his partner, but it is not willing to fully vindicate Michael for his queerness, at least not initially. Instead, the film focuses on vindicating him of his disease. However, *An Early Frost* positions Michael’s identity as a gay man and his AIDS diagnosis as intrinsically linked, allowing the film to smoothly reconcile them together, rather than focusing on the misconceptions about queer individuals present at the time. AIDS is the centerpiece of the film, with queerness being sidelined as the film does not have as strong a message about accepting queer individuals into the family.

⁶⁴ Ibid 10.

⁶⁵ Ibid 12.

⁶⁶ Ibid

The focus on AIDS is intentional to the goals for the film by the network. As noted by Craig, NBC went to great lengths to ensure that the science on AIDS was as factual and up to date as possible, going so far as to consult directly with the head of the Centers of Disease control.⁶⁷ The commitment shows throughout the film, as much of the content related to Michael is focused on the harsh realities of the virus, and how it affects those who have contracted it. There is an extended sequence in an AIDS support group, and one of the characters from this scene, Victor (John Glover), remains important to the rest of Michael's story. There are also numerous scenes where actors playing medical professionals explain the AIDS virus and how it impacts those who have it as well as how transmission of the disease works. All of this works to a positive effect in terms of AIDS education for the viewing audience, but here it comes at the expense of the gay men who are shown to have the virus. Every gay man in the movie has AIDS, and because of this, their identities as gay men are never separated from the virus, and AIDS is instead portrayed as an inevitable part of gay identity. This move by the film directs sympathy towards the characters, as they are all suffering from the virus, but it comes at the expense of not representing gay characters fairly. They are not gay men, they are AIDS victims. The film spends little time in queer spaces, such as queer households, and as a result its queer characters are never explored as gay men. Instead, the film frames them through their disease.

For Michael, being a gay man means that his family does not accept him. His family certainly does not respect his sexuality, but they are more focused on his diagnosis, which they are told is terminal. Later in the film, when Michael's boyfriend Peter (D.W. Moffett) is introduced to his family, his sexuality once again becomes a prime issue of debate amongst them. There are exceptions to this, including Michael's grandmother Beatrice (Sylvia Sidney),

⁶⁷ Craig, 80.

who is more concerned for his well-being as a person than anything, and is also accepting of his queerness. Her acceptance is coded through her complimenting of Peter's antique shop, a method Cowan and Lipman say they had to resort to, as the studio dictated that her character was not allowed to expressly compliment Peter himself. This, according to the censors, would signal that her character was accepting of homosexuality, something that was unacceptable.⁶⁸ The primary takeaway from this presentation, as well as the concerns of the studio censors, is that even though the movie was primarily concerned with being an informational film about AIDS, it was also preoccupied with its portrayal of homosexuality, to the point of altering minor characters out of fears of negative reception. While the film is certainly humanizing towards Michael, and to a degree Peter, his sexuality remains a problem for the film, and for his family. Nick remains outwardly abrasive towards Peter, telling him that he "does not want him" in his house. The film does feature Peter rebuffing some of Nick's abrasive remarks, but by the conclusion of the film Peter has not been apologized to, and the film dances around formal acceptance of him by Michael's family. The family is portrayed as the most at-risk group in the film, as their interaction with someone who falls outside of the nuclear family construct threatens the status quo, and therefore the existence of their structure. The allegedly vulnerable state of the family is primarily exemplified by Nick, who is placed as the family's leader and defender. The mentioned resistance to Michael is an example of this, as here he defends the nuclear family structure. In each instance, Nick's actions are seen as justified, except when he resorts to physical violence.

The film suggests that Nick's reactions are a result of his anger at not truly knowing who his son is, as well as the expectation that he accept Michael immediately. At the same time, though the film pushes Nick's reasons as valid, it feels the need to redeem Nick by way of his

⁶⁸ Ron Cowen and Daniel Lipman on Censorship on An Early Frost. TelevisionAcademy.com, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARPyCm8wW70>.

saving Michael when he attempts suicide. He is also shown to care for Michael before this, such as when he pleads with, and threatens, a pair of paramedics who refuse to take Michael to a hospital. Regardless of his queerness or his having AIDS, Michael is still Nick's son, and his acceptance of him is ultimately a result of this fact. But this acceptance hinges on Michael fulfilling his role as a son in Nick's family. Nick excludes Michael initially because he has broken the pact of the nuclear family structure in a variety of ways. He is gay, so the nuclear family cannot continue in its current state through him as it is assumed by *An Early Frost* that Michael having children is out of the question, and he has hidden his identity from his family, something that Nick views as an isolating move. As Michael is precluding himself from continuing the nuclear family construct, *An Early Frost* does not assume being gay is a choice, unlike *Consenting Adult*, he is threatening the construct as a whole. Michael's sister is shown in contrast to him, as she is married and has a child.

This latter move by the film is a clear attempt to shield Nick from accusations of homophobia, something that clearly is at the start of *An Early Frost*. Despite his behavior, Michael, seeks his approval and love, and Katherine seeks to change his mind. The result of these efforts is the film's mission as well. Without approval from Nick, the patriarchal head of the nuclear family, all the efforts by the other characters are invalidated. This is further evidenced by Michael's life before he comes out to his family. He is enjoying a successful career in Chicago and happily living with his boyfriend. But he still longs for approval from his family, from the family construct, even though he does not believe that he can gain it. The nuclear family construct is argued to be the center of everyone's desire, even those who do not live within its guidelines. Though Michael and Peter's domestic life is shown, to a limited degree, they both speak of their heterosexual parents in this space, introducing the existence of the

nuclear family construct into a space where it is otherwise absent, and doing so in a way that puts it on an idealized pedestal. Though domestic existence outside of the construct does exist, and is even shown, it is clear that this existence is inferior to the construct itself.

The film argues for the superiority of the nuclear family construct by way of its choices of how different spaces are shot, and what events take place there. The apartment where Michael and Peter reside is barely shown in comparison to the amount of time spent in the home of Nick and Katherine. The apartment is also shot in much cooler colors, blues, whites, and grays, as well as it being mostly shown at night. Compounded together, these features present the apartment as a distant and relatively cold place, while the home of Katherine and Nick is shot in warm yellows and greens, and often during the day. Additionally, Michael initially falls ill in the apartment, and later the only fight between him and Peter takes place in it. Later, the reconciliation between the couple takes place in the home of Nick and Katherine, as does the reconciliation between Michael and his family. The domestic family home is shown to be a place of family and healing, while the apartment is presented as the inverse. The film presents the space of the nuclear family as a positive one, catering to it as well as its members. This action is especially visible in the film's mostly sympathetic portrayal of Nick, who, as the patriarch of the family, is presented as the construct's most valuable member. Being the patriarch also demands that Nick defend all threats to his family, even if they come in the form of his son. Because of this point of view by *An Early Frost*, Nick is not homophobic, as patriarch he is just doing his duty to defend the nuclear family construct.

Nick's defense of the nuclear family extends past simply being hostile towards Michael because of his sexuality and decision not to immediately out himself to his parents. Nick works to ensure that Michael fulfills his role as "son," a role that is hazily defined but centered on

Nick's approval. Try as he might, Michael cannot reinsert himself into his family, and the only way that he can eventually do so is by way of Nick, and to a degree Katherine. They are concerned about him because of his AIDS diagnosis, but they hold back from embracing him due to his queerness. The latter feature restricts him from being a part of their construct as it has and is currently existing, and this is due to his "failure," as perceived by the heterosexual members of his family, to continue the construct. Their decision is whether Michael's queerness can be accepted or overlooked so that he may be included again. Notably, the decision is not whether Michael can be accepted, but it instead focuses more on how the family can negotiate the aspects of him that challenge their existence. This is the concern of *An Early Frost*, not whether Michael will be accepted by his family or the new realities of his life following his AIDS diagnosis, but rather how this affects his heterosexual family and what challenges they are facing as a result of him. Michael and his queerness place a burden on his family, in the eyes of the film, it is their struggle that is most valid, while Michael and his identity are ultimately beholden to them and whether or not they will accept him. The film does not prioritize the concerns of Michael, instead focusing on those most relevant to its perceived target audience: heterosexual family structures. *An Early Frost* is a movie about queerness and AIDS for a straight audience, but it arrives at this perspective by relegating Michael, and the other queer individuals in the film, to the role of burden on the heterosexual sphere, as well as the nuclear family construct.

The sequence in *An Early Frost* in which Nick saves Michael from his suicide attempt serves as a summation of how the film portrays Nick and Michael in their roles within the nuclear family construct. The scene begins with Michael leaving his family home to go into the garage. He enters the car in the garage, turns it on, and begins to let himself suffocate in the exhaust fumes. While this is being shown, *An Early Frost* cuts between Michael and Nick as the

latter wakes up and begins his morning routine. While Michael is shown attempting to kill himself, Nick is shown waking up in his bed with his wife, and then beginning a workout routine. While Michael is taking what *An Early Frost* later argues to be a weak action by trying to kill himself, Nick is shown to be physically strong and active as he jogs and lifts weights. For the rest of this sequence, Nick bears the evidence of his actions by way of the sweatshirt he is wearing, which is soaked in his own sweat.

Shortly after he finishes his workout routine, Nick realizes that someone is in the garage. He enters it to discover Michael, now nearly unconscious, and pulls him out of the room. While Nick does this, he yells at him, telling Michael to breathe. In the midst of this commotion, Katherine emerges from the house and asks Nick what is going on. He insists that everything is fine, and states that “its between me and my son” before sending her back inside. Nick then turns his attention to Michael. The two men argue over what Michael has done, with Michael insisting that it is his only option due to his AIDS diagnosis. The two then argue over Michael’s future, with Nick insisting that he has to keep fighting and Michael stating that he has fought all he can. Up until this point in the conversation, Michael has been standing on the ground with Nick standing over him. Here, however, Michael stands up and for the first time the two are framed as having a similar stature. Michael does spend much of the remaining conversation leaning on various objects in the scene, as he is still recovering from the exhaust fumes, but regardless of this the two men are shown to be on the same level.

At this point, Nick tells Michael how hard he worked for him. Michael responds that he knows these actions were more for Nick’s own satisfaction rather than Michael’s benefit, with Nick admitting to this here. Michael continues by stating that it was so hard for him to come back home because he wanted Nick to be proud and now “I’m not the man you wanted me to

be.” Another moment of silence follows, and here the camera focuses on Nick’s face as he reacts to this. The camera then returns to Michael. “Well I don’t give a damn what you think anymore!” yells Michael at Nick. “Because I’m a better man than you’ll ever be you son of a bitch!” Michael then breaks into tears and Nick moves over to console him. Nick tells Michael that he can call him anything he wants. Nick is physically grasping Michael at this point and after this line the two embrace. “I don’t want you to die” Nick whispers to Michael multiple times as the scene ends with the two embracing and Michael crying on his father’s shoulder.

By finally representing Michael and Nick as equal to each other, *An Early Frost* levels Michael’s plight with a patriarch of the nuclear family construct, a stark statement overall. This change occurs as Michael argues about his future with Nick, placing the former’s plight in line with the nuclear family construct. By levelling the two, *An Early Frost* argues for not only an acceptance of Michael and other men like him, but also that Michael and men like him, are linked to the nuclear family. Michael would have been a patriarch of a nuclear family construct. However, his queerness, and his AIDS diagnosis argues the film, have erased this future. But, *An Early Frost* still places him as a member of the construct, valid and level with Nick, who is a heterosexual patriarch in line with the nuclear family construct’s guidelines. Michael will never be Nick, *An Early Frost* admits in this scene, but is also quickly argues that he should still be a member of the construct.

This scene also represents the only time in the film that Nick concedes anything to Michael, or that he admits he was wrong in general. Up until this point, *An Early Frost* has shown Nick to be distant and cold towards his son, with the exception of his rushing of Michael to the hospital. However, that scene occurs almost forty-five minutes before this one, at the midpoint of the film, and the time between that scene and this conclusion one is filled with

numerous moments of Nick continuing to be resistant and demeaning towards Michael. Here, *An Early Frost* showcases acceptance of Michael by Nick, but with the caveat that this only comes about because of Nick being aware of the reality of Michael's AIDS diagnosis. Michael's queerness is never directly addressed in this scene. Defending members of the nuclear family construct is one of the roles of the patriarch, and in this scene Nick demonstrates this by moving to accept Michael. Despite Nick's differences with his son, Michael is still his son and therefore a member of the family. Michael's queerness is never directly addressed in this scene, but as he and Peter are both acknowledged shortly after this scene by Nick and Gina as being together, this acceptance is grouped with the acceptance of Michael as an AIDS victim and son that occurs in this scene.

Consenting Adult, like *An Early Frost*, centers on a son who comes out of the closet to his family, and the resulting turmoil is what makes up the body of the narrative. The film centers on Jeff Lynd (Barry Tubb), who comes out to his parents as gay. The reactions of his parents are similar to that of Nick and Katherine from *An Early Frost*. However, the reactions here are pushed to the extreme in a variety of ways. The primary difference between the two films is that *Consenting Adult* is not focused on the central queer character having AIDS. As a result of this, there is not a buffer between Jeff's queerness and the nuclear family construct. Thus, the film must center on the experience of a heterosexual family with a queer member, and there is not any way to divert attention from this experience by way of other struggles. At the same time, the film takes a different approach to Jeff's sexuality than *An Early Frost*. Unlike the former film, *Consenting Adult* rarely focuses on Jeff's relationships. There is a brief domestic scene with him and his boyfriend, as well as an earlier scene that focuses on him being seduced by a man for the first time. This voyeuristic view of Jeff's sexuality is argued by Heather Murray to be a result of

the novel from which it is based.⁶⁹ By distancing itself in this way, the film holds back on humanizing Jeff, and instead is focused on the consequences of his queerness. The result is that the film explicitly reveals its opinions on queerness, more so than *An Early Frost*.

These opinions are revealed once Jeff comes out to his mother, Tess (Marlo Thomas). Though this scene is framed as a moment of honesty, Tess has been worried about Jeff for the duration of the film while at the same time Jeff has shown to be burdened by something, catharsis is not presented or intended. Instead, the conversation immediately turns to what can be done to “solve” the problem of Jeff being gay. Unlike *An Early Frost*, where Michael’s queerness is never questioned by himself or his family, *Consenting Adult* takes the route of exploring “cures” for homosexuality. Tess visits a therapist who believes that someone can be cured of being gay, and Jeff starts to see him in an effort to bring this to fruition. Later, Jeff announces to his parents that he would rather be gay than to pretend to be straight and stops going to his therapy sessions, resulting in conflict. The result is that homosexuality is very clearly argued to be a choice. In this view, Jeff is not gay. Instead, he is *choosing* not to be straight. This choice also means that Jeff is choosing to turn his back on the nuclear family construct, something that is unacceptable in the eyes of his family, and problematic in the eyes of the film.

It should be noted that the film briefly acknowledges there are beliefs other than the one that states that homosexuality is a choice, but it never explores these, nor does it offer them any validity. By marginalizing queerness as a choice, the film instead works to reinforce the nuclear family construct, and by keeping queerness classified as optional, those who would be queer are villainized to an even greater degree. Initially, Jeff agrees to go to counselling to work through

⁶⁹ Murray, Heather A. A. *Not in This Family: Gays and the Meaning of Kinship in Postwar North America*. Politics and Culture in Modern America. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, 33.

his queerness and return to being heterosexual. This is seen as an acceptable move by the nuclear family. But once Jeff stops going to counselling and embraces his sexuality, it is presented that he is hurting the nuclear family by way of the reactions of Tess and Ken. Their reaction goes so far as to kick him out of their house, and almost completely cut contact with him. Coontz notes that in the 1980s, the selfishness of the 1970s was argued to result in the destruction of the “traditional family morality.”⁷⁰ By the film arguing Jeff as selfish in his decision, at least initially, it places him in a cultural moment, one that was focused on the perceived greater good of the family structure, but at the expense of individuality and identity of any member that did not conform to the structure itself. Like *An Early Frost*, the father figure of the nuclear family is tasked as the gatekeeper to the construct, and the one that serves as the greatest obstacle to Jeff finding acceptance.

Jeff’s father, Ken (Martin Sheen), does not accept Jeff as gay once he comes out to him, nor does he do so even as Jeff is seeking therapy for his sexuality, despite the fact that the therapy was Tess’s idea in the first place. As the film continues, the relationship between Ken and Jeff only continues to sour, to the point that Ken eventually cuts Jeff off financially and they are no longer on speaking terms. Like *An Early Frost*, violence is not condoned. But Ken’s expelling of Jeff is. He is framed as the defender of the nuclear family here, and as a result Jeff is pushed out of the space and away from the construct. But where *Consenting Adult* differs from *An Early Frost* in this stance is how the film presents Jeff’s extended family. Whereas Michael from the latter film is faced with derision by his sister due to his AIDS diagnosis, here Jeff finds acceptance in his sister Margie (Talia Balsam), and brother-in-law Nate (Matthew Laurance).

⁷⁰ Coontz, 101.

This relationship is essential to the film and is particularly important in terms of how the film frames the nuclear family construct.

Margie and Nate introduce the prospect of a nuclear family that is accepting of queer individuals. They are expecting a child at the start of the film and are engaged in a healthy relationship with Ken and Tess. Once Ken cuts off Jeff and kicks him out of his house, Margie and Nate willingly and eagerly take him in. They do not offer any judgement on his sexuality, and they encourage him in his decisions as well. While there are differences between Margie, Nate, and Ken and Tess, they are still presented as a family, and one that falls into the nuclear family construct. Margie and Nate go so far as to even speak highly of Ken and Tess to Jeff, encouraging him that things will get better and to try to continue his relationship with them. In this way the construct practiced by Ken and Tess, though it is shown to be outdated to a degree in the eyes of the film, is still argued to be valid and deserving of preservation. Margie and Nate do not represent a replacement to the construct of Ken and Tess, but instead a slight alternative. In the same way, there is a noticeable age difference between the two families and the film begins with Margie and Tess expressing their different points of view in relation to how they present themselves as women in an effort to stress that the two are not totally in agreement on everything. Here the film highlights that Jeff is not the only member of the family not living up to expectations, as minor disagreements between the parents and their children are shown to be common and exist here. *Consenting Adult* frames these minor disagreements against the conflict between Jeff and his parents, contrasting them against each other and arguing that they are extensions of each other. Ken and Tess hold high and disconnected opinions of what their children should be and so their treatment of Jeff is not a result of homophobia, but instead the result of generational differences of opinion and expectations. *Because* of this, the film sets up an

implicit argument that the differences between the two families are the result of a generational difference between the members, and that the older generation will become accepting of queer members given time. This is not an entirely unfair request on its own, but *Consenting Adult* goes a step further by asserting that the members of the family are not wrong in their action, going so far in the case of Ken to never require him to visibly change.

Immediately following Ken's funeral, *Consenting Adult* contains a scene between Tess and Jeff as the two discuss Ken's legacy on their family. In this scene, Tess gives Jeff a letter, written by Ken and intended for Jeff, but never sent. The letter reads as follows:

Dear Jeff, I'm not good at writing letters. I'm not good at saying I am wrong, so do not expect a lot from this. I am trying. You are my only son, and I had your life, our lives together, all mapped out, every step of the way. Then you went off in a different direction. You were suddenly no longer the son I deserved. A homosexual, what father wants a homosexual for a son? Who needs such a son? The answer seems to be: I do. I'm not ready to embrace the whole homosexual world, but I will not give up my son. You [Jeff] said you had no choice, and neither do I. Can we give each other a chance? I love you, Dad.

Jeff immediately follows his reading of this letter by asking Tess why Ken never sent the letter. "He was working on it. He wanted it to be just right" she replies. The scene continues with Jeff wishing that he and his father could have had "a little more time" so that they could have settled their relationship issues. Jeff also states that with his father, he always knew how Ken felt about him, before turning to Tess. "How do you feel about me mom?" Jeff asks Tess. Tess initially dodges the question by talking about what Jeff is doing, in terms of his friends, his job, and the like. Jeff stops her, and asks the question again. "I've learned to let go" states Tess. "You mean given up? There is a difference mom," replies Jeff. To this Tess replies: "It's your life Jeffy. You have to live it your way."

This final line is delivered with Tess's face in a medium close-up facing the camera. She delivers the line in a matter-a-fact way, with little hint of emotion behind it. Tess does not say this line as a means to condone Jeff's queerness, but rather as a way to remove herself from the issue entirely. The scene ends after this line, with only Jeff telling Tess to "take care" following it. The movie itself ends fewer than five minutes later. Like *An Early Frost*, this scene serves as a summation of the queer son's status in the nuclear family construct. However, unlike *An Early Frost*, there is not a direct confrontation in *Consenting Adult's* conclusion between Jeff and Ken. Instead Ken, the patriarch, has his final words read with no pushback or questioning of them. While Ken's purpose for his letters is to show his love to Jeff, here he accepts Jeff as his son but not necessarily as a gay man. Instead, he states that Jeff's queerness is not a problem for him, or if it is, it is not enough to keep him from loving his son. Tess's answer to Jeff follows this same level of acceptance. Tess will accept Jeff as her son, but she will barely speak to his sexuality or how she feels about it.

Throughout this scene, Jeff and Tess are framed as equals. They are both standing, therefor at equal level, and facing each other for most of the scene. However, they never physically embrace such as Michael and Nick in *An Early Frost*, with the scene instead concluding with Jeff kissing Tess on her forehead before they part. The overall tone here is much more negative as well. Tess does not accept Jeff as a gay man, rather just as her son, and there is no indication that this relationship is actively mending in any way. This may be read in two ways. The first is that by not requiring Jeff to seek the acceptance of Tess, or even Ken given his death, that his queerness is as valid by those made by his parents, who represent the nuclear family construct. This is further reinforced by the stance taken by Jeff's sister and brother-in-law as they accept him. The second reading is that while Jeff has resolved to live his life as a gay

man, Tess, the remaining member of the nuclear family construct, is not expected to accept him. As the *Consenting Adult* has followed Tess for most of the runtime and in many ways the film is her story, this option seems more likely. Both Jeff and Tess are framed as equals, but acceptance is never expected of Tess. The darker tone of the scene is directed at this breakup of sorts, as the world of Jeff and Tess are viewed as incompatible. By attempting to validate both of them in this scene, *Consenting Adult* instead validates neither. However, Tess has already been validated as a member of the nuclear family construct, so this failure of validation harms Jeff more than her.

While Jeff's queerness is not accepted by his parents, as mentioned, it is accepted by his sister Margie and her husband Nate. Both argue that Ken and Tess will come around eventually, and that their initial lack of acceptance is due to their generation. *Consenting Adult* engages in this method of argumentative representation in order to shield Ken, Tess, and their generation from criticism regarding their reaction to the queerness of their son. The younger generation represents the more acceptable reaction, but the movie never goes so far as to condemn Ken and Tess, instead suggesting that the positive actions by their children represent their future. Margie and Nate are an example of this, as they are shown to be replicating the nuclear family construct and are also seen to have a mostly healthy relationship with Ken and Tess. Ken and Tess also talk about Jeff's goals at college, and this is further presented as a way in which Jeff will make his parents proud. At the same time, queerness is argued to be new to Ken and Tess's generation, as both parents act as if gay men are something that is exclusive to the generations after them. By positing that queerness is new, the film further seeks to justify their actions by stating that they cannot be ready to accept their gay son as queerness is a new idea to them. While it is believable that neither Ken or Tess have had a family member or close friend who was openly gay before, this does not justify their stark resistance to Jeff, nor does it justify *Consenting Adult's*

embracing of this behavior and other harmful ones. This includes arguing, and never rebuffing, that queerness is a choice and queerness can be “cured.” Furthermore, Ken engages in the defense of his family by way of rejecting Jeff, even though much of his family comes to accept Jeff long before he does. Ken’s character serves to justify the homophobic behaviors of patriarch figures that he enacts, without ever calling for him to apologize or even have an on-screen change of heart. The death of his character before he ever tells Jeff that he accepts him is further justification of his behavior. Finally, Ken and Tess never accept Jeff’s queerness, instead only going so far as to declare that they *still* love Jeff.

In *Normal Queers: Straight Parents Respond to Their Children’s “Coming Out,”*⁷¹ Jessica Fields offers analysis that is useful to analyzing the behavior of the father figures in these films towards their queer sons. “Those who hold and who wish to maintain conventionally moral social standings as mothers and fathers must reestablish their children and themselves as ‘normal.’ They therein appeal to gendered and often sexist understandings of family and sexuality.”⁷² This reinforcement of family may clearly be seen in each of the three films, often coupled with the rejection of the queer individual. Fields continues: “‘Parent’ proves to be a moral identity that not only lends straight mother and fathers credibility as spokespeople for queer communities but also threatens to perpetuate ‘heteronormativity.’”⁷³ Heterosexual parents are placed as spokespersons for queer individuals and communities, even though they themselves are not undergoing the same issues of those that they are speaking for, and they are offering a heterosexual point of view on the same. Fields argues this to be an essential component of heterosexual parents, and this pattern of encroachment may be seen in all three of the films. A

⁷¹ Fields, Jessica. “Normal Queers: Straight Parents Respond to Their Children’s ‘Coming Out.’” *Symbolic Interaction* 24, no. 2 (May 2001): 165–87. <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2001.24.2.165>.

⁷² Fields, 166.

⁷³ Et al.

failure to promote the nuclear family construct is unacceptable as one of the core components of this construct is its replication. Ken and his equivalent figures exist in the nuclear family construct and they follow this demand of promotion and replication, and this is a key reason that acceptance only comes after a series of trials demanded of the gay man by the patriarch.

By not requiring Ken to visibly change or personally engage with Jeff in a meaningful way, *Consenting Adult* hand-waves all of his homophobic actions, and similar actions committed by the people that Ken represents. Essentially, men and women who are unaccepting of queer members of their constructs do not need to personally make any moves of acceptance or tolerance, as their actions will be eventually vindicated, and their memories will be fondly preserved. The representation and condoning of Ken are an olive branch to the straight viewers of *Consenting Adult* as well. Though the film argues that the construct must change, to a limited degree, so that its queer members can be accepted, it also argues that this change will be something that the current members do not need to worry about. Althusser argues that the family represses various ideologies for the purpose of maintaining its status quo, which is to reproduce itself.⁷⁴ Both *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult* initially take this position on that status of their families. Furthermore, they position the reproduction of the nuclear family as the paramount concern for the structure, with their queer sons presenting a threat to this action.

Though both networks had aired made for television films with queerness and queer main characters as the focus before, such as *That Certain Summer*⁷⁵ on ABC and *Terraces*⁷⁶ on NBC, these entries were the exceptions in terms of content to the productions that aired around them. Both films are similar to each other in their embracing of ideology as to how the family functions

⁷⁴ Ibid, 76-77.

⁷⁵ Johnson, Lamont. *That Certain Summer*. Drama. Universal Television, 1972.

⁷⁶ Garrett, Lila. *Terraces*. Drama. Charles Fries Productions, Worldvision, 1977.

in its societal roles, and Williams is again useful here to understand how the films utilize the hegemony of the structures they are presenting. “Formal institutions,” states Williams, “evidently, have a profound influence on the active social process.”⁷⁷ The negotiation presented by both *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult* fits firmly within the active social dialogue on queer issues and queer acceptance, and the resolution by both films that queer members can be accepted into the nuclear family, though with varying caveats on the part of the films, is at least non-regressive given the time at which the films debuted. Furthermore, both films were rare in terms of their subject matter, as a vast majority of similar content did not include queer issues or characters, and as a result the marketing of *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult* focused on the queer issues both films approached. Both films were promoted as being about gay men and their families. This is logical considering the plots of both films are about gay men interacting with heterosexual family members, but at the same time they were both developed to be aired during sweeps week and draw exceptionally high viewers. In the case of *An Early Frost*, it was also pushed as a film about AIDS, and NBC went to great lengths, consulting doctors and scientists, to make sure that the information presented about the virus was accurate. This resulted in both films drawing in above-average viewing numbers in comparison to similar content aired in the same time slot.

Both *Consenting Adult* and *An Early Frost* aired in time slots on ABC and NBC that were frequently used for premiering made for television movies. This time slot on both networks was 9:00pm Eastern on Monday nights. During 1985, NBC kept this time slot almost exclusively for made for television movies, with seventeen new movies debuting, and six more specials airing

⁷⁷ Williams 117.

Part 2 of their two- to five-part series in the time slot.⁷⁸ In the case of segmented films such as these, Part 1 would air on the preceding Sunday night, normally at 9:00pm Eastern as well, with Part 2 coming on Monday night, and Part 3, if it existed, airing on Tuesday night at 9:00pm Eastern, and any remaining Parts airing on the subsequent days in the same pattern. In addition to these instances and the seventeen new movies that debuted, NBC also re-aired ten made for television movies that had previously debuted over the past few years. Almost all of these re-airings occurred over the summer months of 1985, in June, July, and August. The one exception to this is the re-airing of the made for television movie *Adam*⁷⁹, which will be returned to shortly. It was re-aired on April 29th, from its original airdate in October of 1983. There were also nine instances during 1985 when this time slot was used to air a theatrically released movie instead of a made for television one. In most of these cases, they were aired as counter programming to event programming on another network, usually ABC. These event programming instances included the Academy Awards and the season premiere of Monday Night Football. A theatrically released movie was also aired over the 4th of July holiday week, though notably this action was not repeated for Thanksgiving or Christmas that year, and in each of these cases, NBC chose to air original programming. For Thanksgiving, Part 2 of a three-part series, and for Christmas the network aired an original made for television movie.

In the way that *An Early Frost* approaches the topic of queerness and AIDS, there are several other movies that aired in 1985 in the same time slot that approach other social issues in similar ways. These include *Adam*, which focuses on child abductions, *M.A.D.D.: Mothers Against Drunk Drivers*,⁸⁰ which focuses on the formation of the titular organization, and *This*

⁷⁸ "TV Tango | TV Shows, TV Movies, TV Database, TV Listings Guide, Watch TV Free Online, TV Ratings." Accessed June 18, 2021. <http://www.tvtango.com/>.

⁷⁹ Tuchner, Michael. *Adam*. Crime, Drama, 1983.

⁸⁰ Graham, William A. *M.A.D.D.: Mothers Against Drunk Drivers*. Drama. 1984.

*Child Is Mine*⁸¹, which focuses on adoption and custody disputes. In each case, the issue in question was approached in a docudrama style, with the facts of the issues being just as important as the presented drama. The examination of these topics by network-original programming precluded *An Early Frost*, which does the same by way of its scientifically-accurate information on AIDS. Additionally, the other titles that debuted in this time slot were targeted at an adult audiences. While the presentation of the content was safe enough that full families could watch the films together, most of them were rated TV-PG, the subject matter ranged from love affairs, to murder mysteries, to legal dramas, with the target audience being adults. Children were rarely, if ever, featured prominently in the films, and they were never the main characters. Most of the films were dramas as well, with the rare action movie appearing to start off a season of television.⁸²

ABC's made for television movies were largely the same in terms of content as those that aired on NBC, including target audiences. In 1985, on NBC the average rating for original Monday night movie programming, either a movie or a part of a miniseries, was 25.7.⁸³ The average share for this same time and criteria was 28.4. Excluding the miniseries episodes, the average rating rose to 27.3, but the average share fell to 26.7. On ABC the average rating including miniseries was 17.6, with the average rating of just the original movies falling to 16.9. ABC's share in the same categories was 28.3 and 27.7, respectively.⁸⁴ It is worth noting that ABC's original movies resulted in considerably lower ratings and share numbers than NBC at the same time, while their miniseries numbers were the opposite. At the same time, NBC's

⁸¹ Greene, David. *This Child Is Mine*. Drama, 1985.

⁸² "TV Tango | TV Shows, TV Movies, TV Database, TV Listings Guide, Watch TV Free Online, TV Ratings." Accessed June 18, 2021. <http://www.tvtango.com/>.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

original movie programming was much more established than ABC's. They aired more original movies per year, and the Monday night slot was routinely and consistently devoted to original network programming, instead of sports as it often was on ABC. And while ABC's movies performed poorly, the better ratings of the miniseries were in part derived from the fact that they carried some of their audience from Sunday nights. In terms of *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult*, the former film was in line with the NBC network averages of the time, while the latter performed above ABC's averages. *An Early Frost* achieved a 23.3 rating and 33 share, slightly below the average rating of 27.3 at the time, but well above the average share of 26.7.⁸⁵ *Consenting Adult* achieved a 23.1 rating and 33 share, well above the network ratings average of 16.9, and also above the network share average of 30.3. *Consenting Adult* premiered in February of 1985, several months before *An Early Frost*, and it achieved higher ratings and share numbers than either of the two original movies that debuted on ABC before it that year.⁸⁶

Ultimately, it is clear that both *Consenting Adult* and *An Early Frost* were designed and marketed towards a presumed heterosexual audience, one that was also middle class and, in many ways, seemingly ready to accept the films and even their messaging. While much of the audience targeting is the result of the fostering of this time slot on the television networks, it is also important to note that both of these films were aesthetically and functionally similar to the other films showcased on NBC and ABC, respectively, that did not approach queer issues or characters. This prevented the films from being out of the order for the viewers of the networks at the time, as they would not be struck by a different style or form upon viewing the films. Instead, the aesthetics stay firmly within the style of network made for television movies or the time. All of the films are made in a traditional, easy-to-follow, television style, similar to

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Classical Hollywood style. Continuity editing is key, and the dialogue of the films is structured to clearly convey all of the relevant information to the audience.

The spaces the films spend a majority of their time in are shown at least moderately wealthy and affluent. They are populated by white suburban families, headed by men and women who are shown to have completed successful and profitable careers, or are still in the midst of them. The queer individuals in each of these films arrive as an outsider to these spaces, and all of these scenes involving them, with the exception of the reconciliation ones near the end, show how the exit of the queer closet disrupts these idyllic spaces in the argument of the film. All three films rarely view their queer characters without a member of their family in the scene with them, and as a result heterosexuality is the dominant structure here, denying any chance of queer identities or sensibilities to become a notable factor.

The final film I examine here is 1992's *Doing Time on Maple Drive*.⁸⁷ It was released by the Fox Broadcasting Network seven years after *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult* as a part of a movie division focused on gay-themed movies, but nonetheless follows a similar formula and the themes of the previous two films. Unlike the previous two, it did not debut during sweeps week, instead debuting on Monday, March 16th, and at 8:00pm EST as opposed to 9:00pm EST. It competed with ABC's schedule of *FBI: The Untold Stories*, *American Detective*, and one hour of ABC's Monday Night Movie, *Those Secrets*, in this case. On CBS it competed with *Evening Shade*, *Major Dad*, *Murphy Brown*, and *Designing Women*, and on NBC *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *Blossom*, and *In the Line of Duty*. Also unlike *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult*, *Doing Time on Maple Drive* did not outperform any of the programs it competed with.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Olin, Ken. *Doing Time on Maple Drive*. Drama. FNM Films, 1992.

⁸⁸ "TV Listings for - March 16, 1992 - TV Tango." Accessed October 22, 2020.

<http://www.tvtango.com/listings?filters%5Bdate%5D%5Bmonth%5D=3&filters%5Bdate%5D%5Bday%5D=16&filter%5Bdate%5D%5Byear%5D=1992&commit.x=27&commit.y=22>.

The performance of *Doing Time on Maple Drive* is not particularly surprising when considered in conjunction with the other films Fox aired in this same time slot. In 1991, Fox aired twelve made for television movies in the 8:00pm EST Monday slot. These twelve movies were aired over a six-month period from April 22nd through October 28th. Unlike NBC and ABC, new movies were consistently aired over the summer months. However, the lack of competition during this time did not equate to strong audience numbers. The average rating of the twelve Fox made for television movies in 1991 was 6.3, and the average share was 9.3. The performance of the original movies was only slightly higher than the average rating of the eleven non-original movies aired by Fox during this same time slot, which had an average rating of 6.1. Not enough share data was provided to make a comparison, and during 1991 the original movies and non-original movies were rarely aired in a consistent back and forth with each other. Rather, while the original movies aired in the late spring and summer months, the non-original movies aired in the early spring, late fall, and winter months.

The placing of the original movie programming, as well as what they were scheduled against, argues that they were used by Fox in an attempt to draw viewers to the network. From the ratings numbers, this was not successful. Much of the tendencies with the programming of these movies is consistent with what ABC and NBC had done years prior, including placing a movie about queer issues as a point of marketing the movie. This did increase the ratings by a notable amount, but the movie still underperformed its competitors. Though it is not clear if this performance in 1991 was the cause, only three made for television movies aired on Fox in all of 1992, including *Doing Time on Maple Drive*. The average rating of these three was 8.4, and the average share was 14.3. *Doing Time on Maple Drive* had the highest individual rating among the three with a 9.4, and its rating was tied for the highest at 15. In addition to these three movies,

only six non-original ones were aired in the same time slot. The average rating of these six was notably lower than the three originals at a 5.7. Despite these low numbers, both in the number of movies aired and their ratings, Fox continued to air made for television movies the following year. In 1993 the output of made for television movies was increased from three to eight, and in addition to this they re-aired three made for television movies, including *Doing Time on Maple Drive*. In this airing, the film had a 4.9 rating, slightly below the average rating of the original made for television movies that year, which was a 5.6.

Across the three years of 1991, 1992, and 1993, *Doing Time on Maple Drive* is the only Fox-produced made for television movie to focus on queer individuals and issues. While there may be cases of queer characters in some of the other seventeen films aired across these three years, *Doing Time on Maple Drive* stands out in terms of its subject matter as an outlier. Across the three surveyed years, it was the highest rated of any of Fox's made for television movies. However, while the film mirrors many of the themes and even story beats of the previous two films, it takes a more conservative approach to the topic, even in comparison to the two that were released seven years earlier. Instead, *Doing Time on Maple Drive* represents an emulation of the views presented by the films, but with notable reservations that balk at some of the progressive moments hinted at in the previous two narratives.

Like the previous two films, *Doing Time on Maple Drive* follows the story of a gay man who comes out to his straight family, and the conflicts that ensue serve as an exploration of heterosexual views on homosexuality and queer individuals. Much like *Consenting Adult*, the film takes the angle of the queer individual, Matt (William McNamara), as failing to meet the expectations of his parents as a result of his queerness. This theme is moved to the forefront here, as Matt is not alone in his failure to live up to expectations. The film also focuses on his straight

siblings, Karen (Jayne Brook) and Tim (Jim Carrey), and how they fail to meet expectations as well. The coupling of their perceived shortcomings with Matt's queerness again argues that the animosity and resistance towards Matt is not a form of homophobia, but instead a result of him failing to live within the nuclear family construct. In fact, it is both.

One element introduced in *Doing Time on Maple Drive* that is not present in either of the previous films is the prospect of a heterosexual relationship for the queer character. While there is a scene of Jeff "testing" his queerness with the prospect of a heterosexual relationship in *Consenting Adult*, here *Doing Time* goes a step further by beginning the film with Matt in the final days before his marriage to Allison (Lori Laughlin). This marriage is viewed by his parents, Phil (James Sikking) and Lisa (Bebe Besch), and framed by the film as a fulfillment of the expectations beset on him by his parents and the nuclear family construct. However, the marriage is derailed when Allison discovers a letter to Matt from his gay crush in high school. She immediately breaks off their marriage, telling Matt that she cannot allow him to live a lie, and then exits the film entirely. This is all against the pleas of Matt, who begs her to stay with him.

The implications of this scene represent several regressive attitudes on the part of the film. The pushback by Allison represents a pushback against the possibility of bisexuality on the part of the film. Her firm pushback of Matt, as well as the fact that she is completely removed from the film after this scene, argues that sexuality must fall within the presented binary. Matt is not allowed to have ever questioned his sexuality or experimented. If he was ever outside of the heterosexual construct, then not only will he forever be barred from it, but he must actively be kept out by heterosexual individuals. In this case, Allison. This scene begins a trend in *Doing Time on Maple Drive* and continues the same one from the previous two films. This trend is the dictating of terms of queerness by straight individuals. Allison does it in the scene in which she

ends her relationship with Matt, and it is later continued by Matt's father, Phil. This move by the straight members allows them to preserve and set the terms of the nuclear family construct, while also making moves of acceptance towards the queer members. Importantly though, these moves are based on the fact that the queer members in question are former members of the nuclear family construct, and so the moves to include them are largely with the intention of bringing them back into the fold, so to speak. This move by the family is representative of its reproductive necessity as an ideological state apparatus. By pulling Matt back into the structure, the family is seeking to preserve their status, but also to keep him within it as well.

Near the end of *Doing Time on Maple Drive*, in a continuation of the trend of final scenes in which the queer individual settles their relationship with their heterosexual family members, Matt and his father Phil discuss the status of Matt's relationship with his family. In this scene, Phil is firmly in the role of the nuclear family patriarch, a role he embodies steadily for the entire film. It is also important to note that prior to this scene Matt has attempted suicide, resulting in his family learning of his sexuality, further triggering a falling out between Matt's siblings and Phil. Also prior to this is a scene in which Lisa (Bebe Besch), Matt's mother, violently destroys a display of the accomplishments of her children as a result to all of the falling out occurring. Following her destruction of the display, Lisa is never shown to reconcile with any of her children, especially Matt, at which most of her outrage is displayed. They share two scenes following this incident. In the first one, Matt apologizes for his suicide attempt and the other trauma the family has been put through, before stating that his sexuality is not a choice and is instead who he is. There is not any reconciliation between Lisa and Matt in this scene. A shot of Matt, Lisa, and Phil eating dinner together follows, but this shot ends with Lisa exiting the table with her food, refusing to have dinner with Matt. Lisa never appears in the film again, and a

reconciliation between her and Matt never occurs. As a result of this, the scene between Phil and Matt not only serves as the only scene in the movie that offers any sort of reconciliation between Matt and his parents.

The final scene between Matt and Phil, which is the final scene of the movie, begins with Matt coming home one night to find Phil waiting for him. The two exchange greetings, and Phil makes it clear that he is concerned for Matt following his suicide attempt. Phil also admits that he has not always done or said the right things to Matt in terms of his upbringing. Following this, the dialogue soon turns to Matt's sexuality. "Homosexual." Phil begins. "There, I said it. Didn't make me sick or anything." Matt responds that the word "gay" is a "little easier" to say. However, Phil responds to this: "I don't like that word. That's a perfectly good word that's been destroyed and I don't like it." Neither of the characters expand on this statement or follow up on it. Phil continues that he has a few questions of Matt, and he wonders if he can get Matt's opinion on them. Matt agrees, and Phil begins: "What do you say about this thing, about God hating homosexuals? Or homosexuals being unnatural and going to Hell? What do you say about that?" Matt is clearly taken aback at this line of questioning and does not immediately have a response. Matt eventually says that he doesn't know. Phil responds to this by stating that they should look into these claims. To this, Matt responds: "No not really. I don't believe that."

To this, Phil responds: "Well what you believe isn't factual. If you go around telling people that you're a, that you're a homosexual, sooner or later someone is going to say this and you have to know how to defend yourself." It is not clear which part of Matt's statement Phil is asserting as "not factual." Whether or not he is referring to Matt's statement that he does not believe the claims against queer individuals, or that he does not think they should look into how to respond to these claims is never expanded on. Given the following line of dialogue, it would

seem that Phil is referring to the latter, but the entire scene is vague in this way. Matt places emphasis on “I don’t believe that,” and in the context it appears that he is referring to the claims that Phil has laid out, not Phil’s belief they should formulate a response. Phil continues on: “I’m not thrilled about this, I don’t want to give you the wrong idea. I would rather you be normal.” Matt, again clearly taken aback, states: “Well I think I am normal.” “Oh don’t quibble with me,” Phil begins, “You know what I mean.” “Yes sir” Matt responds. “But whatever you are, you’re my son” states Phil. “And I, I’m uh, that’s all. You’re my son. And I don’t think I want people saying things like that about my son, without knowing how to respond.” At this point Phil almost begins to cry as his voice cracks, but he returns to his more somber form before he finishes speaking. Phil exits his seat after this, and then regales to Matt how Alexander the Great, who Phil states “was a damn fine general,” was “a homosexual too.” The scene, and the film, then concludes with Matt telling Phil that he loves him and Phil responding that he loves him too.

Though the scene begins with Phil sitting and Matt standing, they are never framed together outside of the establishing shot. Instead, their framings don’t indicate one having superiority over the other, though Phil dominates the scene with his dialogue. Eventually, Phil does stand up, and here he towers over Matt. The two are still rarely framed together, but Phil is framed as being much larger through the use of slight low angles and his filling of the frame. Matt stays static in his framing throughout the scene. He is standing throughout, but he never gains any space on Phil, only losing whatever he had when Phil eventually stands. The two men are not portrayed as equals here, and though the scene ends with a resolution between them, it is clear by the portrayals of the two men that Phil is the dominant one, being the patriarch of the nuclear family construct. The future of the nuclear family construct is not at stake in this scene, just whether Matt will be involved. As a result, Phil remains in a position of power throughout

the scene, as his framing and stature evidence, with Matt's future being the only volatile element. Matt is accepted by Phil at the end, but only after he accepts all of Phil's terms.

Doing Time on Maple Drive replicates many of the conservative elements of *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult*, despite coming seven years later than the other two films. This replication is centered on how Matt is portrayed in relation to his family, specifically the expectations of his parents. Here, like *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult*, the expectations of a father figure is the primary concern of Matt in the film. But unlike the two earlier films, Matt does not find an advocate with his mother. Instead, Matt receives firm pushback from Lisa, and there is never a moment of reconciliation between them. In this way *Doing Time on Maple Drive* takes an even more conservative step than its predecessors, as it centers everything on Phil, the patriarch of the family. This is only reaffirmed in the film's conclusion, where the film justifies the use of the term "homosexual," which had and was commonly used in discourse by parties taking a negative stance on the gay community. This is not to say that the term was entirely used in a negative way, but its usage harkens back to Congressional sessions in which helping the gay community with the AIDS pandemic was pushed back on. The goal of this final scene is to lay out terms for the preservation of the nuclear family structure, which in this case comes at the cost of moves by Phil that go against the wishes of Matt. Althusser argues that this is the family structure recognizing that it "is 'anchored' in a reality that is not purely ideological."⁸⁹ As a result of this, the family must work to preserve its structure, even if it means going against some of the more purely ideological points of its nature.

As with the previous two films, here queerness and the acceptance of it is equated to other disconnects between the homophobic members of the family and the accepting ones,

⁸⁹ Althusser 76.

though the film does not argue anyone to be homophobic. The intention here is to sell the acceptance of queerness to the straight audience members, but in doing so the films trivialize the challenges facing queer individuals and queerness as a whole outside of its relation to the nuclear family construct. This interaction functions as a method of pushing heteronormativity. Fields posits that interactions with their queer children are perceived to place the parents' identities at risk,⁹⁰ and the insistence on the reinforcement of the nuclear family is an attempt to stave off this outcome. Fields also notes that heterosexual mothers and fathers work to redefine the identities of their queer children into "noble [ones] rather than flawed."⁹¹ *An Early Frost*, *Consenting Adult*, and *Doing Time on Maple Drive* engage in this process to varying degrees, working to reconstruct their queer characters through heterosexual lenses while also running triage on the nuclear family.

All of the films examined here share the perspective of looking at queer individuals and coming out of the queer closet through a heterosexual lens. This is due to the films being made for straight audiences with the queer characters being surrogates for the issues faced by straight individuals when they have a queer individual enter their sphere. In each film, *An Early Frost*, *Consenting Adult*, and *Doing Time on Maple Drive*, the result of the gay man coming out of the closet on the nuclear family is a negative one. Members are shocked, hurt, and enraged. Though they eventually come to some form of acceptance, all of the films highlight the pain felt by the various straight family members. Some films, such as *An Early Frost*, focus on the queer characters as well, but most of the screen time is devoted to the struggles of the straight members. While this is happening, the straight members inflict a large amount of emotional, and potentially physical, trauma on Michael, Jeff, and Matt, none of which is ever apologized for.

⁹⁰ Fields, 166.

⁹¹ Et al.

Each film concludes with a change to the status quo of each nuclear family, symbolic of a change of the construct as a whole. In this way, each film advocates for the acceptance of queer members to the structure, while also stating that change is necessary. But these changes only appear on the terms of the heterosexual family members. Nick's concerns about how his son's queerness affects the family comes before his son's well-being. This is in part due to his slow acceptance of his son, and this same pattern of slow acceptance can be said for all three of the fathers in the respective films discussed here. All three films conclude with the queer member, be it Michael, Jeff, or Matt, being accepted into their families, but none of the films go so far as to overtly condone and accept queer individuals and culture. Instead, in these unique cases acceptance is shown to be possible, but not in a universal sense. Each film argues that this acceptance comes about as the result of trauma on the part of the nuclear family, but more importantly, the acceptance is on the terms of the nuclear family.

The trauma of the nuclear family is a result of the coming out of their family members is always argued to be unquestionable. None of the films present a moment where the straight characters recognize that they are reacting inappropriately to the coming out of their family member by making the trauma about themselves. Instead, the trauma of the nuclear family is what each film focuses most of its time on, while much of the journey of the queer member happens off-screen. As a result, the films implicitly condone the queer closet by arguing that trauma comes about only when the family members are open about their queerness. This "don't ask, don't tell" policy is shown to ultimately fail in each of the films, with queer members coming out to their families for a variety of reasons. The coming out of each queer member is the catalyst for the films' drama in each case, and as a result the traumas shown in each film are the fault of the queer individuals, so argues each film.

Because of this negative implication, the queer closet is implicitly argued to be a positive construct. *An Early Frost* argues that Michael and his family were on positive terms prior to his coming out to them. *Consenting Adult* states that Jeff has had some differences with his father prior to the beginning of the film, but this is later argued to be a result of his insecurity in his sexuality. *Doing Time on Maple Drive* admits that its nuclear family has had its struggles, one brother is an alcoholic and Phil is shown to be overbearing towards all of his children. But in each case, this is an accepted flaw. That is to say, the family continues onward regardless of its struggles. But when Matt comes out as gay, the resulting trauma is shown to be much harsher.

Overall, the families are shown to be if not happy, stable prior to their learning of their queer members, and all of the films end with a sense that the road forward for them is uncertain and uncharted to a greater degree than before the events of the film. At the end of *An Early Frost*, Michael still has AIDS, and his family is still grappling with the implications. Jeff finds acceptance in *Consenting Adult*, but only after the death of his father. *Doing Time on Maple Drive* has the most ambiguity of the three, as though Matt is now accepted by his father, it is on his father's terms, and there is never a scene of closure with his mother. But it is the flip side of these situations that are focused upon by the films. Phil and Lisa of *Doing Time on Maple Drive* face uncertainty in their structure and status quo going forward now that they have a gay son. In *Consenting Adult*, Tess eventually comes to accept her son, but she has now lost her husband to a stroke. Finally, Nick and Katherine of *An Early Frost* do accept Michael and work past most of the stigmas surrounding AIDS, but they are still left with a new reality and uncertainty about what the future holds. Each film prefers to focus on these situations rather than those faced by the gay men in each case. To highlight the struggles of the family members is a comprehensive by each of the films, allowing them to explore all of those involved in the coming out of the

queer individual. But doing so in favor, of rather than adjacent to the struggles of the queer men, results in a prioritization of the heterosexual members and the construct that they are a part of, as well as implicating the coming out of the queer closet by the queer members as a source of trauma.

Though none of the films explicitly state it, their view towards the queer closet construct is a positive one. This is to say that each film implicitly argues that the conflict of each film should be avoided by the queer members remaining in the closet and not burdening their families with the new reality of their queerness. This is most apparent in *Doing Time on Maple Drive*, but it also appears in *Consenting Adult*, and to a degree in *An Early Frost*. Had Matt remaining in the closet successfully in *Doing Time on Maple Drive*, his life would have followed the pre-ordained nuclear family construct plan, sparing him and his family a large amount of trauma. This is a bit of a unique case considering Matt did not choose to come out of the closet, he was instead accidentally outed to Allison, which resulted in his outing to the rest of his family, but the effect of the closet remains the same. *Consenting Adult* also views the closet in this way. Jeff comes out of the closet to his mother, seeking help, and the result is turmoil which nearly tears their family apart. Nothing is fully reconciled until after the death of Ken, at which point the nuclear family construct have been reshaped by a variety of factors.

An Early Frost has the most neutral attitude towards the queer closet of the three. Michael is shown to be living happily outside of the closet in his everyday life, he is only closeted to his family. As I have mentioned prior, this film holds the nuclear family in high regard, going so far as to insert it into the domestic space of Michael and Peter and requiring them to seek approval from those who exist in the construct, despite their own success outside of it. As Michael seeks approval from his family, he is also seeking approval from the construct, but

unlike *Consenting Adult* and *Doing Time on Maple Drive*, he never questions or attempts to change who he is to fulfill the requirements of those around him. He does attempt suicide near the conclusion of the film, from which he is saved by his father, but this moment is framed more as a reaction to his future as an AIDS victim than because of his queerness. Michael has closeted himself to his family not because he is ashamed of who he is, but rather because they are the only ones in his life that he fears will not accept him for being the same. The conclusion of the film still results in Michael being accepted more as a son rather than as a gay man, but the fact still remains that *An Early Frost* portrays Michael and Peter as having a healthy relationship. Peter is even invited by Katherine into her home, and outright accepted by Michael's grandmother Beatrice. Positive outcomes are shown as a result of Michael coming out of the closet, which is something that neither of the other films discussed here do. *An Early Frost* accepts Michael as being a gay man; where it holds reservations is when it comes to the nuclear family construct accepting him. The moves by Katherine, Beatrice, and eventually Nick are positive ones, though the film still maintains that the construct is something queer individuals must appeal to for acceptance.

What results from the position of needing to appeal to the nuclear family construct is that the queer individuals in these films are caught between doing so and remaining in the closet. In each case, remaining in the closet is preferable to the straight family members, at least initially and often throughout most of the runtime of the film. Each film's resolution sees the gay son out of the closet with an uncertain future ahead of them. The gay sons are not the focus of the films though as the concerns of the nuclear family structures come first. Everything is framed in relation to how it affects the nuclear family, and from this perspective, the queer closet remains positive. At the same time, the burden is on the queer individuals to change for their families,

and while change is shown to come on the part of the nuclear family, this change only extends so far. Michael endures his family's homophobia and ignorance, and the same is true for Jeff. Matt has an easier time with everyone but his parents, and in the end he is allowed to continue to be a member of the family as a gay man, but on the terms of his father. All of these are moves by the nuclear family construct to ensure the preservation of the same. This is the result of all of the films being catered towards a heterosexual audience. Each film was exceptional for its network in terms of subject matter for this time slot. As the first entry into queer issues for each network, none of the films shot to fundamentally remake the status quo of the nuclear family, and instead targeted gradual changes.

In the same way, the queer closet is implicitly argued to be a preserving structure of the nuclear family. This structure is most evident in *Doing Time on Maple Drive*, as the revelation of Matt's queerness shatters his family's perception of themselves, and results in the bringing to light of old tensions and conflicts. Throughout all of this, the film is primarily concerned with those around Matt, and not Matt himself. He is shown to be shattered by Allison leaving him, but this is primarily a tool to enhance the effects of his queerness on to his family. But this approach is not exclusive to *Doing Time on Maple Drive*. In *Consenting Adult*, Jeff comes out of the closet seeking help, which is met with a moderate amount of resistance. He is tolerated by his parents so long as he seeks "help" for being gay, but once he stops these actions, ones that would result in the preservation of the nuclear family construct as-is, he is viewed as selfish and expelled from the structure. Tolerance comes eventually, but the film notably bars him from re-entering the construct until after the death of his father, at which time the construct is undergoing a large amount of turmoil as is. It is also notable that the film does not posit Jeff as a potential replacement for his father at the head of the structure, but rather someone who can only return to

his role as a son. Like Matt, he can be accepted, but only in a certain capacity. At the same time, *An Early Frost* does not harbor the same restrictions on Michael as an explicit way, but it does demand that he conform to the nuclear family to a degree. Nick still insists that Michael was his son, but he staunchly holds that Michael has become someone else who he does not know. By failing to fulfill his role as a son in the eyes of Nick, he is barred from being a part of the construct until he does so. Ultimately, Nick settles on the demand that Michael keep fighting as the criteria for acceptance, a trait that he earlier declares to Nick that he taught Michael. Once a member of the family has exited the queer closet, the only way they can reenter the structure is through the approval of the patriarchal head of it.

The primary argument of all of these films is that the nuclear family must negotiate and accept queer individuals in order to account for the shifting dynamics of the nuclear family structure. Though, as noted by Coontz, the nuclear family positions itself to be a natural institution,⁹² queerness is viewed by it as a threat to its status as an institutional state apparatus. If the family fails to reproduce then it cannot remain as a dominant structure.⁹³ The moves towards inclusion by the nuclear families in each of the films are an effort to preserve the nuclear family construct first and foremost, and the arguments made by the films follow this logic. In the process of including the queer members into the nuclear family construct, the construct dictates all of the terms of this inclusion. It is not a negotiation between the nuclear family and the queer members, but rather, a negotiation between the nuclear family and its ideology. The terms laid out between the queer member and the patriarch represent this negotiation, as it allows for the former to exist within the construct while still preserving the nuclear family construct. In this way, the nuclear family construct is the ultimate institution, as it holds precedent over everyone

⁹² Coontz 38.

⁹³ Althusser 19.

involved with it. Changes do occur to the construct throughout *An Early Frost*, *Consenting Adult*, and *Doing Time on Maple Drive*, but they are predicated on changes on the part of the queer individuals as well. How the heterosexual members of the construct are affected is paramount in each case, cementing that these narratives are primarily concerned with the effect of queerness on the nuclear family construct, as well as the preservation of the same construct.

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Chapter II: Heterosexual Imaginings of Gay Men and Gay Spaces: Hollywood Queerness Through the Nuclear Family

Within this case study two films are examined: *Cruising* and *Making Love*. Both films are significant in their portrayals of queer men in relation to heterosexual family constructs, the nuclear family in particular. In examining these films, I incorporate Ashely Lavelle's analysis of the nuclear family construct, as well as Ian M. Harris' examining of male roles in relation to family constructs. All of this is incorporated through the lenses of Raymond Williams and Louis Althusser, and their writings on societal institutions and ideological state apparatuses. Through this analysis, I argue that *Cruising* and *Making Love* offer vastly different portrayals of queer men in relation to the nuclear family construct. *Cruising* offers a flat rejection of the possibility of including queer individuals in the nuclear family. *Making Love*, despite its more positive attitudes towards queer individuals and cultures, takes largely the same stance on the issue of queer individuals in the nuclear family. Queer individuals are rejected from the nuclear family construct in both cases, unlike the films discussed in Chapter 1 which offered avenues of gay men being accepted into the nuclear family. This is due to the motivations of the films, which will be examined later, but the end result is an overall pessimistic tone by the films towards the issue of acceptance, though in the case of *Making Love* this tone does not extend to every issue it addresses. However, *Making Love* does offer a glimpse of an emerging queer family construct, something not seen anywhere else in this chapter or in Chapter 1. This glimpse is brief and not explored, but this move does offer an alternative to the nuclear family construct.

On the January 18, 2020 episode of the *It Happened in Hollywood*⁹⁴ podcast, actor Harry Hamlin spoke to how taking part in the 1982 film *Making Love*⁹⁵ affected his career as an actor. Specifically, Hamlin, who played “Bart” in the film, stated that he believed the film had been released 10 years too early for its audience, and as a result his career as a movie actor had been ended prematurely. “That was the last studio picture I ever did. The door shut with a resounding smash.”⁹⁶ A brief check on Hamlin’s filmography confirms this more or less to be true. Prior to *Making Love*, Hamlin had acted in the leading role in two different films, *King of the Mountain*⁹⁷ and *Clash of the Titans*⁹⁸. Following *Making Love*, Hamlin acted in *Blue Skies Again*⁹⁹ the following year, and beyond that his career shifted to almost exclusively television projects, in line with his assertions. However, it is impossible to know whether or not Hamlin’s assessment of the impact of *Making Love* on his career is accurate based solely on his perspective, and the purpose here is not to do an actor study of Hamlin. Rather, this episode serves as an introduction to *Making Love*, and where it stands as a movie about queer men in the 1980s. Hamlin’s portrayal of a gay man who serves as the entry point into queerness for a member of the nuclear family is not seen as a bad thing by the film, but his overall rejection of family structures is. Here *Making Love* draws the line on its male characters: It is acceptable for men to be gay, but they must still adhere to some form of a family construct. At the same time, the film also distances them from the nuclear family, arguing that they pose a threat to it by way of their unwillingness to stay within heterosexuality.

⁹⁴ Abramovitch, Seth, and Chip Pope. “Harry Hamlin: ‘Clash of the Titans’ and ‘Making Love.’” Mp3. *It Happened In Hollywood*, n.d. Accessed September 11, 2020.

⁹⁵ Hiller, Arthur. *Making Love*. Drama. IndieProd Company Productions, Twentieth Century Fox, 1982.

⁹⁶ Abramovitch, Seth, and Chip Pope. “Harry Hamlin: ‘Clash of the Titans’ and ‘Making Love.’” Mp3. *It Happened In Hollywood*, n.d. Accessed September 11, 2020.

⁹⁷ Nosseck, Noel. *King of the Mountain*. Drama. Polygram Filmed Entertainment, 1981.

⁹⁸ Davis, Desmond. *Clash of the Titans*. Action, Adventure, Family, Fantasy. Charles H. Schnee Productions, Peerford Ltd., 1981.

⁹⁹ Michaels, Richard. *Blue Skies Again*. Comedy, Sport. Lantana, 1983.

In this chapter I explore how *Cruising* and *Making Love* approach the nuclear family construct. In each film, the nuclear family construct is clearly the dominant ideological state apparatus, with queer culture being placed outside of the construct and viewed as subordinate by both *Cruising* and *Making Love*. While *Cruising* seeks to wholly distance the nuclear family from queer culture, *Making Love* explores the possibility of an emerging family structure that alters the nuclear family construct. The emerging family is seen as an acceptable outcome for queer members of the nuclear family by *Making Love*. This new construct both preserves the nuclear family construct and places queer individuals in a similar family structure, satisfying the demands of the film. As noted with Bart, queerness is acceptable, but only when it conforms to a family structure. In *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams argues “definitions of the emergent...can only be made in relation to a full sense of the dominant.”¹⁰⁰ Any family construct emerging from the nuclear family requires definitions of the nuclear family to be clear first. In the case of *Making Love*, the emerging family structure that is briefly examined is defined solely in the terms of the nuclear family construct, such as monogamy and the insistence on remaining within a family structure overall. *Making Love* examines an emerging queer family structure both as a means of accepting queer individuals, and also as a criteria which it places on its queer characters, always in the context of the nuclear family construct. The emerging family examined by *Making Love* also serves to distance queer individuals from the nuclear family construct, and in the eyes of the film this serves as a method of preservation for the construct.

Ashley Lavelle notes that in the United States, queerness has been considered a threat to the nuclear family on the grounds that queerness is “by its nature antithetical to the idea of

¹⁰⁰ Williams 123

children, to the idea of continuity, and finally to the concern about future generations.”¹⁰¹ It is also noted by Lavelle the strict roles placed onto members of the family by their genders and/or positionality. In regard to “The MAN,” Lavelle states that the role is defined as being the “breadwinner; husband; aggressor; patriarch.”¹⁰² Ian M. Harris expands on these archetypes in *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities*¹⁰³. Though these archetypes are not all one-to-one, but they are all contained within Harris’ analysis. Notable among this analysis is that all of these archetypes are constructed around an imagined heterosexual male, one that is also imagined to be a family man. In his section on messaging towards gay men, Harris states “adult gay men might feel alienated from the dominant heterosexual norms for masculinity because of prejudice directed against them and as a result start to generate different masculine identities as they grow older.”¹⁰⁴ He continues by saying “[g]ay men are not seen in popular culture as ‘real’ men because, by having sex with men, they behave like women.”¹⁰⁵

Making Love, as well as the other films discussed in this chapter, adopt a straight lens in their viewing of their subject matter. Here I define the straight lens as being adopted for a perceived heterosexual audience. This lens views heterosexual institutions, such as the nuclear family, intimately, while queer individuals and institutions are viewed at a greater distance. The intimacy described here is defined by the main characters shown being comfortable in spaces of the nuclear family, specifically domestic ones. In contrast, the distance here is defined by a lack of aesthetic warmth in queer spaces. Many scenes in queer spaces take place at night and are

¹⁰¹ Lavelle, Ashley. *Radical Challenges to the Family: From the Sixties to Same-Sex Marriage*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015, 130.

¹⁰² Lavelle, 127.

¹⁰³ Harris, Ian M. *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities*. Gender, Change & Society 1. London; Bristol, PA: Taylor & Francis, 1995.

¹⁰⁴ Harris, 178.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

dark as a result, but sequences where warmth is conveyed to heterosexual spaces are lacking. In a similar way, many of the sequences in queer spaces adopt observational camera techniques, such as showing queer individuals in long shots, never giving them significant intimacy. Taken together, the straight lens is defined by its willingness for intimacy with heterosexual characters, and the distance it enforces with queer characters.

Historically, *Making Love* is commonly positively remembered as one of the first Hollywood movies to give its queer characters both validity and a happy ending.¹⁰⁶ However, it is a mistake to assume that this movie marks a larger overall trend, or that the messaging in the movie is wholly positive towards the queer community. Despite its positive treatment of its queer characters, *Making Love* falls into the familiar territory of allowing its gay characters to be gay, but only under strict conditions imposed upon them by the heterosexual individuals and communities that surround them. In this case, the imposed conditions are a separation from the nuclear family. However, when considered in perspective to films such as *Cruising*¹⁰⁷, which was released only two years earlier in 1980, *Making Love* is progressive in its handling of its subject matter. But, as Russo argues in *The Celluloid Closet*, this is not the criteria that *Making Love* should be judged on. Russo posits *Making Love* as “...too straight for gay audiences and much too gay for conservative straights.”¹⁰⁸ This argument is well defined by Russo, and while *Making Love* certainly isn't as homophobic as *Cruising*, it is undeniably presented through a

¹⁰⁶ Russo, Vito. *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies - Revised Edition*. Rev. ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1987, 272.

¹⁰⁷ Friedkin, William. *Cruising*. Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller. Lorimar Film Entertainment, CiP - Europäische Treuhand AG, 1980.

¹⁰⁸ Russo, 271.

straight lens. Going beyond Russo's argument, both *Cruising* and *Making Love* approach the relationship between queer men and the nuclear family construct¹⁰⁹.

Both films approach the nuclear family construct on different terms, but at their core, they harbor the same prejudiced fears about the effect of queer men on the nuclear family. These fears center on the idea that queer individuals may compromise the nuclear family structure by way of affecting its priority of reproduction. In the case of each film, gay men are assumed to not have any potential for having children, and the issue is never fully explored. *Cruising* and *Making Love* both present gay culture and gay men through a straight lens, with varying degrees of homophobia and distortion. Both films share a fear of what queerness means for the nuclear family construct as well as an established position of defending this construct first and foremost. However, *Making Love* goes a step further by exploring and rebuffing the idea that a gay man can have any meaningful interaction with the nuclear family, much less be an active part of it. This results in an ambiguous state of existence for the queer male characters, as they are expected by the films to reinforce the values of the nuclear family, while the films also admit that they cannot fulfill their values.

Adapted from the Gerald Walker novel of the same name, *Cruising* centers on the police investigation of a serial killer who is targeting gay men of the New York City underground leather scene. Al Pacino plays Steve Burns, a young cop who is sent undercover on the scene to investigate. The film focuses on his experiences in this effort and he is intended as the audience's proxy the culture the film is exploring. Central to these experiences is Burns' questioning of his sexuality, which grows as he spends more time in the New York City leather scene. But instead

¹⁰⁹ In this chapter, the "nuclear family construct" is understood as the heterosexual monogamous relationship between a married man and a married woman, with the ultimate effect of this relationship being children who will continue this construct in their own respective units. This definition draws on Stephanie Coontz's *The Way We Never Were* for its criteria and understanding of the history of the construct.

of presenting this as a natural process of possible sexual awakening, Burns, and by extension *Cruising*, presents this as a hostile takeover of him an alien force. Burns consistently states that he is losing sense of who he is, and that he does not feel like himself anymore. At the same time, the film does not humanize any of the queer characters that Burns encounters, and it never presents gay culture as anything other than the leather scenes that it focuses on. *Cruising* does state that it is a subculture, but it never makes any moves to go beyond it. While this itself is not necessarily problematic, *Cruising* views the queer leather scene as alien and off-putting to its heterosexual protagonist, through which the “moral” of the film are conveyed. It is this scene that, argues the film, begins to infect Burns and cause him to question his heterosexuality, and because of this there is a danger attributed to queer culture on the part of heterosexual individuals.

Aesthetically, *Cruising* positions itself as a gritty exploration of New York City’s underbelly. Almost every scene is conducted from Burns’ point of view, and those who are members of the gay leather scene that he encounters are never given the same intimacy that he is. The audience is shown their actions, styles, and relationships through the eyes of a heterosexual male protagonist, and as it conveys these things, it sets distance between them and the audience. This distance is created by the film observing these individuals and actions with an unwillingness to become intimate with them. Even when Burns is on the dance floor at one of the clubs, surrounded by queer bodies, the camera singles him out and creates space between him and those around him. He may be partaking in these actions in this environment, but he is clearly set apart to not be a part of any of it. When Burns is not on screen but within the scene, the film moves through various shots of the individuals and actions around him, putting them under a microscope of examination, though never extending this look to define any of these queer bodies

as individuals. They are instead part of an environment where Burns is an outsider, and the film never seeks to make him a part of the culture.

All of this amounts to various ways in which *Cruising* treats queerness as a threat to heterosexual individuals and constructs. The nuclear family is one of the constructs which the film posits to be threatened. As Burns' heterosexuality is argued to be preyed upon, his relation to the nuclear family is shown to be at stake. By *Cruising's* standards, anything other than heterosexuality is unacceptable for a possible member of a nuclear family construct, so Burns is argued to be especially at risk here. In *Cruising*, the nuclear family takes the form of the heterosexual relationship between Burns and Nancy (Karen Allen), his girlfriend. They are not married, nor do they have children, so they fall outside of the nuclear family boundaries outlined by other films such as *Making Love* and the films focused on in Chapter 1. Instead, what is presented in *Cruising* is the potential for the nuclear family construct. Has Burns and Nancy are introduced, they are shown to be in a happy relationship, including being emotionally intimate with each other. As Burns' investigation progresses and he becomes more unsure of his sexuality, their relationship is shown to be strained. This strain is shown by the couple fighting in their few scenes together, as well as Burns not being open with Nancy as to what his investigation is centered on, much less his own struggles with his sexuality. The film frames these developments as the potential of a nuclear family being threatened, and Burns' relationship with Nancy is argued to be valuable and worth protecting, second only to his heterosexuality.

Cruising argues for the preservation of the Burns and Nancy relationship by framing much of the film as an effort by Burns to return to her and their domestic life. The film begins with them living together, and they are shown to be happy and in love through a few brief scenes. As the film progresses, Nancy is largely removed as a result of the focus shifting purely

to Burns and his police work. At this time, Burns is not living with Nancy, and is instead living alone, undercover, in the neighborhoods where his investigation is taking place. As the film progresses, and Burns begins to question his heterosexuality, he briefly returns to and confronts Nancy, attempting to explain to her what is going on without revealing anything. He still clearly cares about her through his desperation to stay with her, but he soon returns to the investigation and she once again exits the movie. The ending of the movie sees them together again, and the film presents this both as what Burns wants, through his clear and voiced happiness at his return, and also as a logical conclusion for the couple. The threat of them being broken apart has not been totally abated, however, as *Cruising* hints that Burns has been negatively affected by his investigation, and in this way the threat to his heterosexuality and relationships remains. At the same time that *Cruising* argues that Burns' heterosexuality and relationships are threatened, gay men are being murdered and Burns is supposed to be finding the killer. However, the straight lens that the film incorporates to view these events, actions, and people is only concerned with how what is being observed affects Burns, and not with the fact that gay men are being murdered. This is the crux of the mystery, but the film is primarily concerned with how its straight main character will maintain his heterosexuality and the effects of this questioning on his heterosexual relationships. The film positions both of these factors as having a negative effect on their relationship, and it is here that *Cruising* approaches queer men in relation to the nuclear family construct.

Cruising positions the relationship between Burns and Nancy as the ideal romantic relationship, and it is the only romantic relationship, heterosexual or queer, that is extensively focused upon in the film. The only other romantic relationship focused on by the film is that of Burns' gay neighbor Ted (Don Scardino) and his boyfriend Gregory (James Remar). This

relationship is presented to Burns and the audience, through friendly conversations between Burns and Ted, as a tumultuous one. *Cruising* devotes little time to this relationship, but the time that it is allotted is centered on how this couple is not a happy one. Ted talks to Burns about how he and Gregory fight, and how Gregory disapproves of his career choices. Later, when Gregory and Burns first meet, Gregory shows animosity towards Burns as he is one of “Ted’s friends.” In contrast, Burns and Nancy are shown to have their problems throughout the film, mostly centered on Burns’ new undercover assignment, but the mending of their relationship is argued to be essential and a high priority. Greven argues that the relationship between Burns and Nancy is shown to be at risk from the onset¹¹⁰, further prioritizing their relationship as it develops over the course of the movie until the film’s conclusion, when they are on their best terms so far, albeit with new secrets on the part of Burns. In contrast, the relationship between Ted and Gregory concludes with Ted murdered. The police believe he was murdered by Gregory, but the film strongly implies that it was Burns who killed him, mostly likely as a result of his experiences hunting the serial killer. The clear contrast at play here established the heterosexual relationship of the film as one with a future and also relatively free of danger, while the gay relationship is shown to be fraught with strife, danger, and ultimately fatal.

Cruising’s conclusion argues for the security of Burns now that he has returned to the heterosexual sphere of the potential nuclear family. However, it offers that caveat that Burns’ investigation and interaction with the gay community has changed him for the worse. *Cruising* adamantly defends the nuclear family as an essential ideological state apparatus, while also positing queer culture and gay men as a threat to it. In the case, of Burns, the film argues that this threat persists even after he has exited the gay leather scene. Near the film’s conclusion, it is

¹¹⁰ Greven, David. *Psycho-Sexual: Male Desire in Hitchcock, De Palma, Scorsese, and Friedkin*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas, 2012, 189.

revealed that Ted, Burns' neighbor at his undercover apartment, has been murdered. The scene follows Captain Edelson (Paul Sorvino), who originally dispatched Burns on his undercover assignment, as he is walked through the crime scene by Patrolman DiSimone (Joe Spinell). During his walkthrough of the scene, DiSimone casually mentions that the apartment next to Ted's is being rented by a "John Forbes," which is the undercover alias Captain Edelson had assigned to Burns. Realizing the implications of this, Edelson is visibly horrified as he takes a final look at Ted's body. The film then cuts to a shot of Burns, from the back, as he casually walks to the entrance of one of the leather clubs he has frequented in his investigation throughout the film.

From this shot, the film cuts to Nancy walking to her apartment the next day. Upon entering, she discovers Burns in the bathroom beginning to shave his face. He explains that he's back from his investigation and asks if he can stay with her. Nancy agrees and Burns tells her that he wants to tell her "everything" about what has been going on. Throughout *Cruising*, Burns has been very secretive with Nancy about his investigation and also about his own struggles with his sexuality, which has led to friction between them. The scene continues with Nancy finding Burns' leather jacket and hat, as well as his sunglasses, in one of the chairs in the apartment. As she begins to examine the gear, the camera cuts back to Burns as he cleans the shaving cream off of his face. As he does this, Burns stares into the mirror in front of him, with his reflection locking eyes with the camera. Burns' stare is emotionless, conveying a difference in him from before his investigation, as well as a difference in how he is presenting himself to Nancy. When he spoke to Nancy earlier in the scene, Burns appears upbeat and even excited, but in his extended stare into the camera, which is cut to multiple times, Burns now seems to be completely detached. Intercut with shots of Nancy trying on Burns hat and sunglasses, it is clear that the

heterosexual domestic space of Burns and Nancy's apartment is no longer free from the external influences of Burns' investigation. In addition to this, Burns is now shown to be himself a potentially harmful influence on this space.

Taken together, these two sequences in two contrasting domestic spaces argue that Burns, and by extension the nuclear family, will be negatively affected by the contact that has taken place between Burns and queer culture, specifically the New York City gay leather scene. Though he has physically exited the scene, he has taken parts of it with him, both physically and behaviorally. But *Cruising* does not frame this as anything other than a case of infection. Like the earlier sequences, here the film argues, by way of the events that transpire and its framing of Burns' leather outfit in his apartment now being handled by Nancy, that the consequences of his time undercover are still ongoing and now directly extending to heterosexual spaces. Throughout *Cruising*, the space of Burns and Nancy's apartment and the spaces of Burns' investigation have been almost completely separated. The one exception to this is midway through the film when Burns, at that point struggling with his sexuality. The scene is brief, and it is clear from Burns' distressed behavior that he does not feel comfortable in the apartment now. With the film's conclusion seeing Burns, now clearly different than he was before, returned to the site of the potential nuclear family, the construct is argued to be at risk. Burns would be the patriarch of this construct, but he is argued to be compromised by the events and portrayals in the film. This extends directly to Nancy as well. Her interactions with Burns' leather gear demonstrate in the eyes of *Cruising* that she is not immune from the compromised nature of Burns. As a result, their relationship, their space, and their future is not in question. The nuclear family construct, at least the one that would be filled by Burns and Nancy, is now directly threatened.

Because of the adherence to nuclear family in *Cruising*, the plotline of Burns himself possibly being gay, or as the film would have it, “catching gay”, is given an additional level of maliciousness. Like the films discussed in my previous chapter, *An Early Frost*¹¹¹, *Consenting Adult*¹¹², and *Doing Time on Maple Drive*¹¹³, the possibility of a male character being bisexual is strictly ruled out in this film. *Cruising* accomplishes this by presenting any convergence of queer culture with straight individuals as a negative, and also by not presenting any bisexual characters. The lone possible exception to this is a pair of police officers in the film’s opening, one of which who is later shown to solicit gay sex. The officers are introduced by their misogynistic rantings about the women in their lives, positioning their dissatisfaction with heterosexual relationships as a driving factor into the queer landscape. The officer who is shown as a red herring throughout the film, DiSimone, is never shown to “return” to heterosexuality. Instead, once he is positioned in the queer landscape, the film does not allow him to leave. Furthermore, he is shown to be more comfortable in the gay leather scene than Burns, and by keeping him in the scene, *Cruising* maintains its strict ban on bisexuality.

The other blending of queer and straight-dominated spaces are similarly coded as negative. In relation to the sequence wherein the police interrogate Skip (Jay Acovone), who they suspect is the serial killer, Greven likens their tactics to a blending over of the queer SM scene into police tactics.¹¹⁴ This blending results in an overall negative experience, as the police essentially torture the young man, determined to make him miserable simply because he is a gay man, unconcerned with the factor of his guilt. Once the scene concludes and Skip is released,

¹¹¹ Erman, John. *An Early Frost*. Drama. NBC Productions, 1985.

¹¹² Cates, Gilbert. *Consenting Adult*. Drama. The Starger Company, David Lawrence and Ray Aghayan Productions, 1985.

¹¹³ Olin, Ken. *Doing Time on Maple Drive*. Drama. FNM Films, 1992.

¹¹⁴ Greven, 194.

order is returned to the police station. Another example of the “taint” of queerness, according to *Cruising*, is when Burns raises his questioning of his sexuality to Captain Edelson. This turns their interaction from a neutral one to a negative one immediately, and in addition to reinforcing the film’s fear of queerness, it argues that these two spheres cannot coexist in the same space.

The fear of encroachment reinforces *Cruising*’s position that any movements by what it has deemed to be queer culture towards what it posits as straight spaces, in this case Burns’ apartment, are detrimental to the construct embodied by the straight space. As the film has ruled out the possibility of bisexual men, any movement by Burns towards queer culture, or any move by queerness into Burns’ heterosexual space is also determined to be a threat to the nuclear family construct; the implication being that if Burns ceases to be heterosexual and instead becomes a gay man, he is breaking the possibility of the construct for him. As Burns is the only male with a heterosexual relationship in the film, he is the film’s only possibility of the nuclear family construct and its continuation, and as a result the maintaining of his heterosexuality is *Cruising*’s primary concern in relation to him. This also results in any threats to Burns’ heterosexuality as deemed by the film to be deemed negative in general.

In addition to this fear of encroachment, *Cruising* does not offer or explore the possibility of an emerging family structure from the nuclear family construct. Williams states that emergent structures have “...new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships are continually being created.”¹¹⁵ But for *Cruising*, “new” as it relates to the nuclear family is seen as an entirely bad thing. And the film never gives any of its queer characters enough agency to posit for a new family structure. This is further reinforced by the murder of Ted in the film’s finale, as his relationship with boyfriend Gregory is the closest thing *Cruising*

¹¹⁵ Williams 123

has to a real queer relationship. By leaving Ted dead, and with Burns back in a heterosexual sphere with the film warning about the potential influence of queer culture and sexuality on the nuclear family, *Cruising* ignores any possibility of an emergent family construct, while also further pushing the nuclear family construct forward.

In contrast to *Cruising*, *Making Love* takes a more neutral approach to queer relationships in relation to the nuclear family, but it also posits this construct as the ideal, with this idealism in part informing the film's exploration of emergent structures from the nuclear family. The film centers on the relationship of Zach (Michael Ontkean) and Claire (Kate Jackson). The film initially follows them as they buy their "dream" house, settle into their high-paying careers, and talk very often of starting a family. Everything is positioned by the film to be ideal and near-perfect for them. The first act of the film is entirely Zach and Claire living a comfortable, loving, and safe life, with nary a negative aspect to be found. This all changes when Zach encounters and begins a friendship with Bart (Harry Hamlin). Their friendship soon blossoms into a secret relationship between the two of them as Zach's closeted queer feelings reemerge in the light of Bart's open queerness. Eventually, Zach reveals that he is gay to Claire, and the two agree to separate. The conclusion of the film places Zach now living in New York City, (he and Claire lived in Los Angeles for the other parts of the film), and he now has a new partner. He encounters Claire again at a funeral of one of their old friends, and he subsequently meets her family, which is composed of her, her husband, and their child. The final shot of the film is Claire, alone, crying as Zach departs for the airport after meeting her family.

Making Love steadily and firmly pushes back against Zach being too close to the nuclear family construct, as once he accepts his queerness he is viewed by the film as incompatible and even destructive to a heterosexual family structure. Another key scene arguing this is when Zach

ends his relationship with Claire. Prior to this scenes, Zach as come out as gay to Claire, as well as admitted that he has been engaging in a relationship with someone else. Zach has also ended his relationship with Bart before this, and Claire has taken some time to try to understand what Zach is going through by talking with other gay men. The scene in which Zach and Claire end their relationship begins with Zach returning to a hotel room he has been staying at, as he has moved out following his initial coming out to Claire. Zach enters the room to find Claire waiting for him. They then begin to discuss their relationship, sitting on the floor facing each other.

“I think we can make it work Zach,” Claire begins. “No,” he replies, “it can’t work.” Claire insists that they can “get help” and there are plenty of “good psychiatrists.” “Its not an illness. I am not going to change,” responds Zach. The two pause for a moment before continuing. “Alright,” Claire continues, “then we’ll accept it. We’ll accept it and we’ll live with it. I know there are other marriages that do.” Zach insists this would not be fair to either of them, and that Claire has to let go of the relationship. Following this, Claire gets up and walks to another part of the room, separating herself physically from Zach. Zach gets up from the floor and sits on the bed and she stands, not facing towards him. He tells Claire that he has heard of an open position for him in New York and he asks Claire what she thinks of it. Claire responds that they would be lucky to have Zach, but it would also mean that they two of them would not get to see each other “very much,” as they are currently residing in Los Angeles. “That’s right,” Zach responds, “Its too easy to fall back into each other and we would keep ending up where we started.” Zach insists that they cannot have contact for an unknown period of time. Claire does not respond to this, and the scene ends.

The framing of Zach and Claire in this scene does not reveal any power structures between them, but rather the possibility of their relationship continuing. When the scene starts,

they are level, facing each other. But as it progresses and Zach makes it clear that he has no intention of letting their relationship continue, Claire pulls away physically. She does not directly face Zach for the rest of the scene. Her movement away from Zach is the inverse of the eventual action by the couple, as Zach will be the one leaving, and her staying put. However, her movement represents the end of her engagement with the family her and Zach have created. Their distance also represents the future of their relationship. They never come back together in the scene, and Zach states that they never will.

Zach's arguments in this scene present him as a negative presence to the nuclear family construct, and especially to Claire, who is later seen as a part of a nuclear family. While Claire is clearly willing to engage in and promote an alternative family structure, Zach does not allow this and *Making Love* never presents an alternative family structure other than Zach's queer relationships. Instead, Zach argues for a binary of family structures. The nuclear family structure on one side and queer relationships on the other. The two cannot blend and this is further reinforced by the physical distance that Zach imposes between himself and Claire. Following this scene, Zach and Claire are only together again in the context of Claire's new family. While the binary structure argued for by Zach does allow for queer family units, this still works to preserve the nuclear family construct in a way that is actively alienating to those who do not fulfill the requirements of the heterosexual family construct. Zach's concern that staying in an alternative family structure would not be fair to him are valid, but this is largely overshadowed by the overall focus on Claire, who's relationship with the nuclear family construct is argued to be essential to preserve.

Initially, *Making Love* approaches its story beats from the perspective of Zach, but as he begins to embrace his queerness, the film shifts more and more to the perspective of Claire.

There are early scenes from Zach's perspective of the queer community near him, and all the sequences between him and Bart are through his lens. But as he pulls away from Claire, the film stays with her. She becomes proxy for the audience as she tries to come to terms with Zach's sexuality and with the queer community in general. The goal of this move is twofold. It allows the audience to maintain a slow drip of discovery when it comes to queerness and the queer community, instead of the film eventually taking place outside of the heterosexual sphere that Claire remains a part of. The second goal is that it keeps the perspective of these events as that of the nuclear family. After Zach embraces his queerness, Claire is the only member of this construct left in their relationship, and her heterosexual perspective aligns with that of the audience that the film presumes it will have, while also reinforcing the construct she represents. Her eventual establishment of a nuclear family structure post-Zach is further reinforcement of this representation. This does not mean that the film condemns Zach for his queerness, but it does evidence the lens through which the film approaches its subject.

When it was released in 1982, *Making Love* was breaking new ground in the Hollywood mainstream in terms of its content. Screenwriter Barry Sandler has mentioned that casting the role of Zach was difficult. The role was offered to several actors including Harrison Ford, Richard Gere, and Michael Douglas, the latter of which nearly accepted before being talked out of it by "his people."¹¹⁶ He also mentions that Harry Hamlin was told not to take the role by numerous influences.¹¹⁷ The result of the casting, with Michael Ontkean and Harry Hamlin fulfilling the roles of Zach and Bart, respectively, results in straight actors playing all of the

¹¹⁶ Sandler, Barry. How Making Love Changed Us. Interview by Jeremy Kinser, July 14, 2012. <http://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/film/2012/07/14/how-making-love-changed-us>.

¹¹⁷ Sandler, 2012.

prominent gay roles, and Sandler does not mention any gay actors being offered either of the roles.

Regardless of the casting choices, the legacy of *Making Love* is generally considered to be a positive one. In a 2012 interview, Sandler said that he received “hundreds and hundreds” of letter from gay men, thanking him for the film and how they were portrayed in it.¹¹⁸ Other events celebrating fan letters and the legacy of the film have been held¹¹⁹, and *Making Love* has been called a “landmark” Hollywood film for how it portrayed its gay characters¹²⁰. At the same time, Russo argues that the film built its characters and its narrative on the “false premise” that “gays basically just like straights.”¹²¹ He continues to say that though *Making Love* was initially very popular at the box office, it eventually dropped off due to word-of-mouth accounts of it being “dull.”¹²² The differences of memory point to what the film meant to different people, and also how the perception of the film has evolved over time. Russo’s account is from the perspective of the late 1980s, whereas the other accounts evidenced are from the early 2010s. Regardless, the film was not protested as *Cruising* was two years prior,¹²³ nor was it apologized for being shown by various bookers.¹²⁴ Numerous LGBTQIA+ groups organized a nationwide boycott and protest of the film leading up to the film’s release and subsequent distribution.¹²⁵ From a contemporary perspective, both films have similar arguments about the relationship of gay men to the nuclear

¹¹⁸ Sandler, 2012.

¹¹⁹ Mills, James F. “Making Love: WeHo Revisits the Landmark Gay Film With Fan Letters.” *WEHoville* (blog), June 20, 2013. <https://www.wehoville.com/2013/06/20/making-love-weho-revisits-the-landmark-gay-film-with-fan-letters/>.

¹²⁰ Russo, 271.

¹²¹ Russo, 271-272.

¹²² Russo, 273.

¹²³ Mitzel. “Speaking Out; Boycott Cruising and Join the Picket Line - ProQuest.” Accessed September 9, 2020. <http://www.proquest.com/docview/199356770?accountid=14556>.

¹²⁴ Jefferis, Jonna. “‘Cruising’ Sparks Booker Apologies, Patron Complaints - ProQuest.” Accessed September 9, 2020. <http://www.proquest.com/docview/1505918269/fulltextPDF/1B9A411096D84746PQ/1?accountid=14556>.

¹²⁵ Mitzel, *ibid*

family. However, *Making Love* does not take the antagonist tone towards gay men and gay communities that *Cruising* does, though it still contains messaging that prides the heterosexual nuclear family over everything else.

Textually, the largest piece of evidence for how *Making Love* prides the nuclear family is how the film presents the encounter between Zach and Claire's family. Zach is clearly happy for Claire when they meet years later, and he congratulates her on having what she always wanted. But Claire's family stands in stark contrast to Zach's own life. They live in what appears to be an ideal domestic sphere. They have a comfortable house, a large yard in which Claire and her husband play with their child, and they are shown to be happy and in love. In contrast, Zach is shown to have his new partner in New York City, but beyond this the audience is shown little about his sphere. It is mentioned that he is still working as a doctor, but his apartment is never shown to any great extent, and the relationship between Zach and his partner is not explored. Zach is alone at the funeral in this sequence as well, clearly standing apart from the world that he once inhabited, which is here composed of various old friends and coworkers. He is out of the closet, but this action has clearly left him isolated. Because of this, the film's exploration of Claire's family is an argument by *Making Love* as to what Zach could have had. In this moment, Zach's happiness with his current living situation and partner are not acknowledged, and instead what is focused upon is only the nuclear family, and the happiness stemming from it. The nuclear family construct is held to be ideal here, Claire is clearly happy and the entire first act of the film centers on Claire and Zach working to create exactly this life for themselves because they value it so much, but in the film's conclusion Zach is not shown to be equally as happy though he is outside the construct. But rather, the film does not allow him to spend much time observing it

before pushing him away, and the final shot of the film is Claire mourning for him due to his separation.

The separation of the couple that is mandated in *Making Love*'s final act is further reinforced by actions taken by Zach earlier in the narrative. When Zach and Claire discuss the future of their relationship, she raises the possibility of them staying together, that he might love both her and Bart. But this prospect is swiftly shut down by Zach. He says that it "would not be fair to her," and he insists that they separate. While this is Zach's decision, this move by him demonstrates *Making Love* embracing the trend of its gay male characters being wholly isolated from any female characters that they may have once found attractive. Like *Cruising*, the possibility that Zach could be bisexual is impossible for the film. Gay men are allowed to be gay men, but as a result each of these films mandate that their involvement in the nuclear family construct be totally severed. Zach can be with Claire, or he can be with Bart, but any other existence is not allowed. The failure of these films to validate bisexuality is in line with larger trend of a failure to acknowledge the legitimacy of the orientation, argues Israel and Mohr.¹²⁶ The authors also note that the bisexual orientation of an individual may often result in them being viewed as less reliable in a monogamous relationship.¹²⁷ *Making Love* follows this line of thinking as well. Though the film does feature Zach cheating on Claire with Bart, the goal of the narrative is for him to realize his sexuality, and so the film excuses this to a large degree, but only so long as Zach ends up where the film believes he should be. He must be on one side of the binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality for the sake of the film's view on him and the nuclear family construct that he is leaving. Israel and Mohr also note that bisexual individuals

¹²⁶ Fox, Ronald, ed. *Current Research on Bisexuality*. Florence, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ku/detail.action?docID=1166552>, 119.

¹²⁷ Fox, Ronald, *Current Research on Bisexuality*, 122.

may not be viewed as “committed to the lesbian and gay community politics.”¹²⁸ *Making Love* does not present the possibility for Zach to be bisexual as it views this as a complication to his identity, one that the film does not wish to deal with. It instead wishes for him to essentially be a heterosexual man in how he is portrayed, with the slight detail that he is actually a gay man.

Because of how the film wishes to place Zach, *Making Love* stresses that he appreciates the values of the nuclear family construct even when he is no longer within it, in this case, monogamy. *Making Love* also uses the moment between Zach and Claire, as well as several other scenes involving Zach and Bart, as a way to reinforce the monogamy that is essential to the nuclear family construct. Zach ultimately ends his relationship with Bart because Bart does not wish to settle down with him, and instead prefers his current lifestyle, which involves multiple partners. Zach is committed to monogamy, which he has experienced with Claire, and this divide results in Zach choosing not to further their relationship. Though little about Zach’s relationship at the film’s conclusion is revealed, he and his partner are shown to be living together, positioning them as having taken a step that he and Bart never did.

It is through the values of the nuclear family construct that *Making Love* explores the emergent family structure, which it in turn uses to reinforce the nuclear family construct. Zach does leave the nuclear family, but his new structure is posited as valid by the film. Though the nuclear family construct is still held as an ideal structure, by positioning himself in a structure emerging from it, Zach fulfills the demands of the nuclear family construct and of *Making Love*. His queerness is acceptable to the film, but only so long as he exists within a monogamous partnership that echoes the nuclear family construct. Therefore Bart is ultimately removed from

¹²⁸ Ibid.

the film, as he does not accept any family structure, and this departure is too radical for *Making Love*, which still seeks to use the nuclear family construct as a standard for its characters.

Making Love does accept Zach as a gay man, but it does so as long as he conforms to certain terms. Central to this is his upholding of the nuclear family construct, which he does by separating from Claire, allowing her to form a new nuclear family around herself, and by adhering to the values of the construct in his queer spaces, evidenced by his commitment to monogamy and family. In contrast, *Cruising* does not accept Burns as a gay man, but it holds the nuclear family in a similarly high regard. Ultimately, both films subjugate any exploration of queerness, queer issues, or queer community to the need to uphold the nuclear family construct. This subjugation does not necessarily mean that these two films do not care about the other issues that they explore. Sandler states that he wrote *Making Love* due to a desire to write a Hollywood movie that portrayed gay people in a positive light.¹²⁹ The film may accomplish this in some respect, but it comes at the cost of Zach's relationship to those in the nuclear family construct, such as Claire. Zach cannot be gay and within the construct at the same time. Zach's new relationship is never stated to be part of the nuclear family construct, and the film never explores it so any additional evidence is lacking. However, given that gay relationships have been shown to be outside of the nuclear family realm earlier in the film, it follows that Zach's new relationship is outside the core construct, but also notably emergent from it. At the same time, *Making Love* still upholds strict mandates for how Zach is allowed to exist, as the preservation of the nuclear family construct comes first.

The primary concern in both *Cruising* and *Making Love* in regard to Burns and Zac is that they must be either heterosexual or gay. This clear binary denies any possibility of bisexuality

¹²⁹ Sandler, 2012.

for both men, and as a result the conflict of the men trying to exist in two different spheres arises. Were either film to consider these characters as bisexual, and by extension accept them as bisexual men in the nuclear family, the conflict would be resolved. But neither *Cruising* or *Making Love* ever raises bisexuality as possibility. *Making Love* comes close in this regard, as it is clear that Zach loves both Bart and Claire at the same time, and Claire even raises the possibility of him remaining in the nuclear family. Zach rejects Claire's proposal and as a result he exits the nuclear family construct. This results in the forming of his emergent family structure, but even here bisexuality is seemingly absent. *Making Love* uses this new family structure as a method of accepting Zach, but even here the film maintains a distance between him and the nuclear family. Bisexuality would not be as much of a resolution in *Cruising*, as the film rejects any form of queerness through Burns' own fears about his sexuality and the film's coding of queerness as something one can catch. But bisexuality is still rejected, meaning that the topic is never raised, as it would complicate the vision of the heterosexual nuclear family that the film posits as the goal for Burns and Nancy.

In order to understand the scrutiny placed on Burns and Zach, it is advantageous to return to Harris and his work in *Messages Men Hear*. The fundamental misunderstanding of queer men by heterosexual society and heterosexual standards that Harris points to highlights how the films *Cruising* and *Making Love* misunderstand their queer characters. In the case of *Cruising*, this manifests as an outward homophobia, one that often equates gay men to women. The opening sequence of the film features feminine-presenting men being harassed by cops. The film never bothers to focus on how these characters identify, they may be trans women, they may be men in drag, *Cruising* does not care and instead only wishes to use these two characters as evidence that the gay men lack masculinity in the eyes of the film. The masculinity that *Cruising* values is

what Burns presents, and this masculinity is resistant towards any sort of “encroachment” by queerness. Other versions of masculinity throughout the film, evidenced by the patrons of the various gay bars that Burns visits, are presented as parodies of his presentation. One example of this is the “Cop Night” that one of the bars is hosting when Burns visits. Gay men are shown to be in a similar mode as Burns, but they are not Burns because they are not heterosexual, which is what *Cruising* is most concerned with.

By denying bisexuality to both men, both films avoid redefining the boundaries of the nuclear family construct. But, seeing as bisexuality would not result in a failure to reproduce the conditions of the family in accordance with Althusser¹³⁰, the unwillingness to adjust the boundaries must then be centered on monogamy. If monogamy is removed from the nuclear family construct, then the conditions of its reproduction may be stated to be at risk, as now the family unit is no longer a core family unit. Accepting members who are openly bisexual, especially in accordance with what Claire suggests in *Making Love*, where she posits that someone can feel the same way about two different people at once, would necessitate monogamy as being removed for at least some members of the construct. By removing monogamy, one of the core values of the nuclear family in accordance with Coontz’s definitions¹³¹ would cease. As neither film is willing to offer fundamental changes to the nuclear family construct, any potential for Burns or Zach to be accepted as bisexual is removed. This unwillingness stems from how both films hold the nuclear family to be a historical institution and an ideological state apparatus. In both cases, this places the nuclear family as an institution that cannot or should not change due to its alleged fundamental nature, and as a result individuals are excluded from it if they do not fall in line with its values.

¹³⁰ Althusser 48

¹³¹ Coontz 80

It is this insistence on fixed roles and presentations for the male characters that results in *Cruising* and *Making Love* pushing for a fixed stance on either side of the binary, as well as their insistence on the values of the heterosexual nuclear family construct as a guideline for the characters of the film, which leads to positioning of the construct as an absolute point of defense. The nuclear family provides masculine archetypes, first the son and then later the patriarch, for the men who are a part of it to fall in line with, and this is the only guideline for masculinity that either of the films are willing to condone. As a result, any actions that may result in either of the men falling out of the construct cannot be condoned and are even rebuked. These guidelines mandate that Burns and Zach be heterosexual before all else, with the other qualities following. Neither *Cruising* nor *Making Love* cast extensive value on anything besides heterosexual family values, with the former film positing any alternative to be a negative regardless.

The failure of *Cruising*, and to a limited degree *Making Love*, to define masculine roles for their male characters outside of the nuclear family construct, results in the condemnation for stepping outside of this role. This is different, but still related to, the defense of the construct practiced by both films. Burns is wholly defined by his role as a heterosexual male, both in his performance and also his career, which is filled with primarily men such as him. It is implied by his superior that he cannot remain as a police officer, especially in his current investigation if he is in fact a gay man. Being gay would also result in a severing of his relationship with Nancy, completing a fundamental uprooting of his life and his identity. However, this result is not an inevitable outcome of Burns' queerness, but the film never sets any expectations or positive roles that fall outside of a role within the nuclear family construct, and is fundamentally unwilling to provide male roles, queer or not, that are blatantly outside the construct and that it is willing to place its protagonist in. Because of this, *Cruising* mandates that Burns, and by extension any

male protagonist, remain strictly within the nuclear family construct or this character cannot be the protagonist, as it does not have any roles deemed to be positive determined for them.

In the case of *Making Love*, Bart is defined as a masculine role that is outside of the nuclear family construct, both in terms of his relationship lifestyle and his queerness. This lifestyle is not condoned, however, as Zach is placed as Bart's chance to rejoin a nuclear family construct or sorts. Once Bart rejects Zach's offer, their relationship ends, and the movie does not follow Bart any further. He is shown maintaining his lifestyle, which *Making Love* does not overtly condemn, but the film is clearly more interested in the nuclear family construct and how Zach can or cannot operate within it, than any potential alternative masculine identities he may don. Zach carries the banner of the nuclear family construct throughout the film, and even as it becomes increasingly clear that he can no longer exist within it, he continues to promote the values. The effort by *Making Love* to impart the values of the nuclear family, heterosexual relationships, monogamy, child-rearing, onto all of its character implies how the film values this construct, and its insistence on keeping Zach within these values underscores how the film is unwilling to place him elsewhere.

Making Love positions Bart to emphasize that the nuclear family construct is the primary criteria by which all of its characters, in this case its male characters, will be judged by and possibly accepted on the terms of. The film is positive and accepting of Bart as a queer man, but it does not extend this same courtesy to his decision to life outside of the construct. Zach experiences the same treatment, but because he works to maintain the nuclear family construct, with the change that he is a gay man, *Making Love* accepts him beyond the point that it does with Bart. *Cruising* does not have a "Bart" character, the entire queer community is instead positioned as a counter to Burns, but because of this, and *Cruising's* own homophobia, there are not any

positive alternatives to Burns, or any other paths for him to take. This is the key difference between the two films in terms of how they approach not only their characters, but also the reproductive nature of the nuclear family. *Cruising* views Burns as the only avenue for the nuclear family construct, and as a result the construct is argued to be very weak and patriarch-centered. In contrast, *Making Love* sees the construct as more resilient. It does not center on the patriarch figure; Claire continues the construct after Zach leaves.

The nuclear family construct is the defining feature of Burns in *Cruising*. With the film overtly promotes the construct, the prevalence of the nuclear family in this narrative is an example of conservative heterosexual values being applied to situations well beyond their boundaries. Burns could just as easily be a police officer who has a sexual awakening while on an undercover assignment, or something who comes to understand queer culture and individuals better, but instead he is overtly presented as someone who must resist the infection of this sphere that runs counter to who he is as a person. This is a direct result of *Cruising's* need to position the nuclear family structure, the construct that Burns is moving towards at the beginning of the film, as the only positive outcome for him. *Making Love* and Zach offer a more complicated picture of how male roles may or may not be accepted when they fall outside of the construct, but the nuclear family remains the most important institution in the eyes of the film. Zach is removed from Claire, in terms of their relationship by his insistence that they separate, and geographically by his move to New York City while she remains in Los Angeles, as a means to preserve the position in the construct that she represents. His removal from Claire is also a form of boosting the construct, as by doing so, Zach removes any potential obstacles she might face, at least in the argument of the film, as she seeks to start a new nuclear family for herself. Her success in this endeavor at the film's conclusion signals that Zach's efforts were correct and in

line with the bolstering of the nuclear family that *Making Love* requires. The ending of the film belongs to Claire as she mourns Zach's absence from the construct that they had once envisioned together, while not outwardly acknowledging his happiness and contentment in his new sphere.

Writing in reference towards family attitudes in 1963, Coontz states “[m]arriage, after all, was central to everyone’s establishment of adult status and identity.”¹³² She expands on this statement, noting how her and her various female coworkers encountered marriage and the expected cycle of “[falling] in love, got married, had sex, and bore children.”¹³³ It is clear that the expectations of family are different for women than they are for men in the era, and the purpose here is not to dilute this. However, Coontz makes it very clear that regardless of the gender of the participants, the family construct is of central and abundant importance. Coontz continues her analysis by jumping ahead to 1983, at which point she notes how the attitudes and realities of family have changed among the same group of women. “The separation of sex, marriage, and childrearing is most dramatically demonstrated in the new legal and social definitions of family that have emerged over the past two decades.”¹³⁴ The broader implication is that the family, through a series of gradual changes, is no longer the conservative, rigid construct that it was imagined to be in 1963 and earlier. Despite these changes, which Coontz identifies as being readily apparent in 1983, in the midst of *Cruising* and *Making Love*, these values are not represented. Instead, the films hold on to residual values of a prior era, while insisting that they apply to the times at which they were respectively released. This is apparent to different degrees in *Cruising* and *Making Love*, but both of them still view the nuclear family as being the dominant construct. The nuclear family certainly still existed and was dominant in the 1980s, but

¹³² Coontz, 169.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Coontz, 171.

both films represent it as the only family structure worth exploration, and in *Cruising's* case, consideration. This is furthered by the stance that the only way the male characters may exist is within the nuclear family construct, a point rebuffed by Coontz's analysis in both eras.¹³⁵

The unwillingness to adapt or accept by each film highlights a projection of values by *Cruising* and *Making Love*. This is not a phenomenon exclusive to these two films, but in this case, it comes at the cost of unfairly representing the queer cultures that both films are seeking to explore. Both narratives begin with the pre-inclination to defend and push nuclear family values, values that are imagined as much more universal than they actually are, and the result is that the queer individuals and cultures encountered in these narratives are immediately displaced in a negative sense. This is somewhat resolved in *Making Love*, as the film does seek for him to be portrayed positively but *Cruising* never corrects this negative perception.

While both *Cruising* and *Making Love* hold the nuclear family construct as a dominant ideology, the moves made by the latter film help push it out of the homophobia which dominates *Cruising's* portrayals. These moves include approaching queerness and queer individuals as legitimate and not a predatory entity. The other move is to show, though briefly, an emergent family construct outside of the nuclear family construct that is not condemned. *Cruising* and *Making Love* also differ in their positioning of their male characters. While much of *Cruising* centers on the potential of Burns "catching" queerness and therefore being ousted from the potential of the nuclear family, *Making Love* follows Zach as he comes to terms with his sexuality and exits the construct as a result. The accepting of a possible emergent structure here is the more progressive move made by either film, and though *Making Love* never explores Zach's live outside the nuclear family construct, it does accept that it exists. The exploration

¹³⁵ Coontz, 169, 170.

queer topics, as well as the acknowledgement and condoning of an emerging queer family structure, was rare for Hollywood when *Making Love* was released in 1985, and in this way it is progressive as well. Regardless, the predisposition towards the dominant structure approach of the nuclear family harms the film's exploration. As a result, *Making Love*, and *Cruising* as well, explore their topics from the perspective of the nuclear family, and thus a heterosexual lens that warps all of the topics approached.

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Chapter III: Remembering Masculinity: Reconstructing the Performance of Spalding Gray

Following the glimpse of the emerging queer family construct in *Making Love*, here I look at Spalding Gray and his existence within the same kind of construct. As a bisexual man, one who was ultimately married and had children with his partner, Gray embodies an emerging family construct somewhat different from the nuclear family construct, but still linked in some of its structuralisms. Gray himself approaches his bisexuality in relation to his family structures in his monologues, and in doing so he often adopts a playful tone to interact with constructs such as heterosexual masculinity, family structures, and patriarchy. However, these aspects of Gray are misrepresented in the 2010 documentary *And Everything Is Going Fine*,¹³⁶ which seeks to explore Spalding Gray's life, but at the same time closets his queerness and places him firmly in the nuclear family construct, ignoring any existence of an emerging queer family structure or his bisexuality.

In this case study it is my intention here to take the presentation of Gray formulated by the documentary *And Everything is Going Fine*, examine the structure of this formulation, and contrast it with earlier filmed monologues and how both approach Gray's queerness and masculinity through various structures. In addition to *And Everything Is Going Fine*, I also examine *Terrors of Pleasure*,¹³⁷ an earlier monologue that is not a documentary, but rather a filmed performance of Gray supplemented by dramatizations of his described actions. Finally, I also briefly incorporate *Sex and Death to the Age 14*¹³⁸, a filmed monologue of Gray's, as well as

¹³⁶ Soderbergh, Steven. *And Everything Is Going Fine*. DVD, 2010.

¹³⁷ Schlamme, Thomas. *Spalding Gray: Terrors of Pleasure*. Comedy. Home Box Office (HBO), Program Development, Vanguard Films, 1988.

¹³⁸ Weissman, Dan, and Brad Ricker. *Sex and Death to the Age 14*, 1982.

*Gray's Anatomy*¹³⁹ and *Swimming to Cambodia*.¹⁴⁰ These two latter films are both monologues by Gray that are given additional cinematic flourish, such as dramatizations of his stories, supplemental footage edited into the monologues, and location changes of Gray himself. In the case of the *And Everything Is Going Fine*, I further posit that the lack of endorsement of Gray's bisexuality, the closeting of it, is a conscious decision to "preserve" Gray's masculinity in the eyes of the nuclear family construct, as an open acknowledgement would be feared to push Gray beyond the framework described by Jeffords and into a position of non-masculine contention. By taking this action, *And Everything Is Going Fine* ostensibly closets Gray, taking advantage of the open-secret structure by not manipulating Gray as an individual, but rather strategically positioning information about him. I argue *And Everything is Going Fine* approaches masculinity, specifically Gray's masculinity, through Bly's structure as described in *Iron John*. I also approach this manipulation of Gray in terms of how it relates to the heterosexual nuclear family construct, and how this construct is used to place him within a role that both mandates him to be heterosexual, as well as restrict and define him as a man. These moves by *And Everything is Going Fine*, fueled by the desire to promote the construct of the nuclear family, stand in contrast to many of the earlier, more independent works about Gray, where, if not directly approached, Gray's sexuality was not often treated as an aspect of him that required negotiation.

And Everything Is Going Fine takes Gray's on-stage performances as evidence of who he was in his private life. The stage footage is combined with numerous news interviews and profile pieces to present a more complete vision of Gray, but this comes at the cost of the manipulation

¹³⁹ Soderbergh, Steven. *Gray's Anatomy*. Comedy, Drama. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Independent Film Channel (IFC), 1997.

¹⁴⁰ Demme, Jonathan. *Swimming to Cambodia*. Comedy, Drama. The Swimming Company, 1988.

of his identity, as well as little delineation between the portrayals by Gray that were for the stage and those that were taking place in his private life. Gray's statements about himself on-stage are taken the same as Gray's statements in interviews and with his family. Ultimately, all of this is a performed version of Gray by Gray himself, but *And Everything Is Going Fine* never concedes this, and instead argues that the presented portrayals penetrate Gray's performances and explore him as a person instead of just as a performer. By never offering a caveat to the displayed performances or the arguments made by them, the film offers an argument about Gray that is irresponsible and inaccurate, as it never concedes the performative nature of what is being shown. Without this caveat, the *And Everything Is Going Fine* proclaims itself to be an accurate portrayal, while in reality severe complications to this claim exist, which are never acknowledged.

I argue that *And Everything Is Going Fine*, through its own selective memory and portrayal of Gray, seeks to reclaim him for the nuclear family construct. The film embarks on this reclamation while ignoring how Gray did not seek to remain in this construct both through his own admissions and his identity as a bisexual man. In this examination, I look at how *And Everything Is Going Fine* places Gray in the queer closet for the sake of a simplified and unified portrayal of a very complex figure. This closeting misunderstands Gray's bisexuality to be complicating to its portrayal of him, as *And Everything Is Going Fine* wishes to show Gray as a heterosexual patriarch, and goes beyond simply ignoring his sexuality to actively misrepresenting him as a bisexual man. Instead, *And Everything Is Going Fine* offers a manipulated portrayal of Gray, one that pulls away from his identity as a bisexual man and instead places him in the nuclear family in an attempt to appeal to presumed heterosexual

audiences. In doing so, the documentary reinforces the hegemony of the nuclear family construct in accordance with Williams' definitions.¹⁴¹

I examine the vision of Gray posited by *And Everything Is Going Fine* in contrast with Gray's own portrayals of himself, primarily from *Terrors of Pleasure*. This is conducted through Susan Jeffords' *Hard Bodies*, Eve Sedgwick's *The Epistemology of the Closet*, and Robert Bly's *Iron John*. Each author offers a different vision of masculinity in relation to sexuality. Here I argue *And Everything Is Going Fine*'s closeting of Gray is an attempt to push him into the masculine patriarch ideal of the nuclear family, which may be understood through these authors. Finally, I place how the work done by *And Everything Is Going Fine* approaches the nuclear family construct as an ideological state apparatus in line with Althusser's¹⁴² definitions. This approach regresses the attitude of the documentary to that which films such as *An Early Frost* were seeking to move away from. By reaffirming the queer closet as a wholly desirable construct in favor of additional mailability and acceptance towards queer individuals by the nuclear family, *And Everything Is Going Fine* becomes totally exclusionary towards queer individuals in their relationships to the nuclear family construct.

This positioning of Gray also places him within the construct of the nuclear family, which is in line with the construct of the male binary. The nuclear family construct also hinges on the prospect of the binary of sexuality. Heterosexual individuals are allowed into the nuclear family construct, as they are capable of replicating the construct according to its values, while queer individuals are excluded for a perceived failure to fulfill the same reasons. Individuals who are bisexual, such as Gray, do not neatly fall into the nuclear family construct binaries, and as a

¹⁴¹Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature (Marxist Introductions)*. Marxist Introductions. Oxford: University Press, 1977, 115.

¹⁴² Althusser, Louis. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. London ; New York: Verso, 2014, 77.

result are excluded, or their sexuality is distorted. However, by dulling the acknowledgments of Gray's queerness, *And Everything is Going Fine* portrays Gray as an acceptable member of the nuclear family construct. Though the film does not hide Gray's lifestyle prior to his marriage, which was not in line with the nuclear family construct, the showcasing of his existence with his wife and his children idealizes him as the patriarch of this heterosexual structure.

The nuclear family construct also offers an explicit endorsement of the queer closet. The latter construct allows for queer members of the nuclear family to continue to exist within the heterosexual construct, while at the same time not bringing any complications to the nuclear family itself. As a result of this, by placing Gray within the nuclear family, as *And Everything is Going Fine* does by way of its selective portrayals, Gray is not expressly restricted in the eyes of the film by his queerness. However, the stipulation is that his queerness remains closeted, and his membership into the nuclear family construct hinges on this. Failure to remain closeted goes against the nuclear family's restriction on queerness, as according to the construct's definitions, queerness represents a threat to ability to continue. In a specific sense, Gray's bisexuality would exclude him from the role of patriarch.

In her 1994 book *Hard Bodies*, Susan Jeffords compares the discourses on 1970s masculinity from the perspectives of Robert Bly in *Iron John* and former President Richard Nixon. Jeffords contends that both men believe that the United States became "soft"¹⁴³ in the 1970s through a variety of factors, but that the unifying principle is a failure of masculinity.¹⁴⁴ This same failure is further argued by the two to be embodied in Jimmy Carter's presidency, before being rescued by President Ronald Reagan, who's performance bore into existence the

¹⁴³ Jeffords posits the "hard" body as a masculine position of strength through assertiveness, family-oriented values, and militarism, while the "soft" body lacks these characteristics. Jeffords 13

¹⁴⁴ Jeffords, Susan. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994, 7.

“hard body.”¹⁴⁵ This definition, to borrow from Bly, constitutes a man who has undergone “a second birth.”¹⁴⁶ Bly continues that this second birth must come from a man, and that this process “change[s] the boy to a man.”¹⁴⁷ Through this framework of masculinity and masculine growth, Bly is arguing for masculinity by way of men, for men. The exclusionary nature of this premise is immediately apparent, as it contends that men who have not been raised by men are lacking a fundamental aspect of their masculinity, one that can only be obtained by men. The nature of Bly’s definition focuses masculinity on fulfilling the roles of father and sons in the nuclear family, ultimately positioning the patriarch as the ideal role for a male figure in the construct. Any other roles, or a lack of this role, are seen in Bly’s definition to be the male figure falling short.

Jeffords links this definition of masculinity to various Hollywood iterations of “hard bodies” throughout and following the Reagan presidency, but even here masculinity is largely being defined as falling into two main categories: visible, and heterosexual. The nature of the masculinities described by Jeffords is that they openly display the “hard” characteristics. These characteristics include the outward presentation of masculine-defined traits, such as being physically fit, displaying leadership traits, and a propensity towards violence as a solution to presented issues. These characteristics are drawn from the films that Jeffords’ figures come from. These hard bodies include such figures as John Rambo, John McClane, and Martin Riggs. They, (the stars of *First Blood*, *Die Hard*, and *Lethal Weapon*, respectively) are all part of the heterosexual hegemony, and they all embody the two traits of visibility and heterosexuality as part of their defining characteristics. Masculinities that exist outside of these two areas are

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Bly, Robert. *Iron John: A Book about Men*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1990, 16.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

largely not encompassed by Jeffords' refutation of Bly, nor does Bly himself spend any significant time contending with how those who are not one of the two falls into his framework.

The visible nature of masculinity as posited by Jeffords necessitates that the male figure externally embody the patriarchal traits. These traits include visibly heading the nuclear family construct, and in this way being a father figure. This role is necessary for the reproduction of the nuclear family construct, and as Althusser notes, the family must focus on this necessary task of reproduction.¹⁴⁸ However, as it has been discussed in previous chapters, the rigid adherence to this policy by the nuclear family results in the excluding of members and potential members. And, as this case study will demonstrate, it results in the erasure of identity of members who do not strictly adhere to the masculine structures required by the construct.

These masculine structures are also largely defined by the nuclear family construct. The patriarchal nature of the nuclear family necessitates strict definitions of masculinity, which are in accordance with the definitions presented by Jeffords, and the result of this is an exclusion of masculinities that fall outside of its boundaries in any way. Heterosexuality is required by the construct, and here it becomes apparent how Gray falls outside of this definition. Gray is not a unique case either, and because of this the queer closet becomes a useful apparatus for the nuclear family construct. The queer closet allows for queer individuals to exist within the construct, while at the same time not jeopardizing the regulations of it.

Into this conversation I insert Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*. In this book, Sedgwick approaches sexualities that are both queer and lacking visibility, a contrast that I employ here for the sake of providing an alternative to the masculinities that have and are represented in the capitalist construct that is Hollywood, as well as an alternative to those posited

¹⁴⁸ Althusser 77

by Bly. Sedgwick posits queerness as “*the open secret*”¹⁴⁹ in relation to how the closet functions. The closet, as a construct, is not a purely opened or closed item, but rather one that applies differently to different aspects of an individual’s day-to-day performance. I have selected the works on Spalding Gray, specifically his monologues, and their ever-shifting relationship to his queerness in order to examine external perspectives on this mode of masculinity, and how perspectives that favor the nuclear family construct force Gray’s mode of masculinity and sexuality into strict categories. Gray’s work exists at a notable point between the visible and the invisible, as his works were seen and recorded, but his relationship to more mainstream institutions such as Hollywood existed in a fluctuating and non-comprehensive fashion. Because of this, he is an ideal subject to explore the masculinities not encompassed by Jeffords, as he exists at a distance from the masculinities examined in *Hard Bodies*. This distance is comprised of many things, including factors such as ideology, age, and literal space, but importantly, not time. At the same time that films such as *First Blood*, *Die Hard*, and *Lethal Weapon*, all covered by Jeffords, were being released, Gray was presenting his monologues about himself and his life, and through this, his masculinity which contrasted with these images.

I position Gray’s on-stage masculinity as performative in terms of his relationship to the patriarch role and the nuclear family construct. While his masculinity in private, off-stage life may and likely was different than that of which he revealed on-stage, the concern here is his positioning of himself in relation to other performances of the nuclear family construct. Gray performs himself across his monologues as needed in a way that positions him explicitly counter to the subjects, other than himself, which he happens to be focusing on. This tactic creates an intended distance between Gray and the subject matter, allowing him to commentate on it more

¹⁴⁹ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, 22.

easily. The end result is a flexible portrayal of his masculinity, one that pivots slightly from situation to situation but never falls into Jeffords' category of "hard." These pivots include references to his sexuality, as well as his relationship to his own security in his performance as a man. As these performances were just that, performances, it is unwise to take them as representative of Gray as a complete person, and not just his on-stage persona. Many of Gray's monologues were written or co-written by Renée Shafransky, Gray's longtime girlfriend and collaborative partner, so they can safely be said to be a product of multiple voices and not solely Gray's own self-reflexivity. Gray's performance is a combination of several factors of his identity, and by adding or removing elements to and from this combination, new performances and identities are unlocked. This action is unproblematic until elements are added or removed by those other than Gray in cases where he is not involved, and then in turn argued to extend beyond the sphere of the stage performance and into Gray's personal life and complete identity, as the documentary *And Everything Is Going Fine* does.

The 2016 *Documentary Now!* episode *Parker Gail's Location is Everything*¹⁵⁰ parodies Spalding Gray's *Swimming to Cambodia*. Though the purpose of this parody is the structure of Gray's monologues rather than just the content, the ways in which this episode remembers Gray and his performances is notable in that it allows the character of Parker Gail (Spalding Gray) to be looked at and perceived by others around him. Much of Gail's monologue consists of his describing his actions in what is seemingly a normal day for him, but with each new event, individuals that he mentions as a part of his monologue are present to his presentation and challenge him on his version of the events and his perceptions of them. These perceptions are conversational, as though they contradict what Gail says about himself and others, they are done

¹⁵⁰ Buono, Alexander, and Rhys Thomas. *Parker Gail's Location Is Everything*. Comedy, 2016.

so directly towards Gail, and he is allowed to pivot and counter if he pleases. Gail is clearly wrong about the facts of his stories at numerous occasions throughout his monologue, and the counters and contradictions are plentiful, they never move to misrepresent Gail, instead only correcting him where needed. Gail's masculinity is not a subject of the piece, but his performance is. How Gail presents the actions and people around him is constantly called into question, and as a result his credibility is questioned. And though he is contradicted and reconstructed, these moments never reconstruct who Gail is. He is still in charge of his own presentation, something that later pieces remembering Gray take away from him. I argue that this removal of agency is for the purpose of reconfiguring Gray's masculinity into a binary structure, simplifying it and bringing it more within the "hard body" structure.

Here I contend that Gray's on-stage performance in *Terrors of Pleasure*, as well as *Sex and Death to the Age 14* and *Swimming to Cambodia*, may be viewed as a combination of the structures posed by Jeffords and Sedgwick, both that of the heterosexual male posited in *Hard Bodies*, and that of the contentiously closeted male explored in *Epistemology of the Closet*. This marriage is not a purely harmonious or disharmonious one, as Gray, and notably others who have approached Gray's works, move back and forth from the acknowledgment of Gray's bisexuality to positioning him as a straight man. As noted by Robinson and Hockey, "gender itself is the outcome of performance rather than a fixed property of the individual."¹⁵¹ And Sedgwick posits "that in twentieth-century Western culture gender and sexuality represent two analytic axes that may productively be imagined as being as distinct from one another as, say, gender and class, or class and race."¹⁵² This definition indicates a gap between bisexuality and the role of patriarch,

¹⁵¹ Robinson, Victoria. *Masculinities in Transition*. Genders and Sexualities in the Social Sciences. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 121.

¹⁵² Sedgwick 30

but Gray is never afforded this. In accordance with Sedgwick, Gray's bisexuality should not affect perceptions of him as a masculine figure. These two aspects of him should be considered independent from one another, but this distinction does not occur in the case of *And Everything Is Going Fine*. Instead, his bisexuality is linked to his performance of gender, so closely that as he is not heterosexual, he cannot fulfill the patriarch role. In the case of Gray's 1988 monologue *Terrors of Pleasure*, Gray does not mention his bisexuality at all. Here his presentation is predicated on the prospect of property ownership, more specifically in the case of him presenting himself as a yuppie from New York City seeking to purchase a cabin in the upstate area. He presents himself as a man outside of his comfort zone, driven there by his own insecurity in his masculinity as he finds that he does not "feel like an adult."¹⁵³ This need is contextualized against Gray stating that he was not married and didn't have a family, positioning himself as someone whose identity is being challenged by external expectations. These expectations of family implicitly point to the nuclear family construct, and Gray links adulthood to the fulfillment of this construct and the archetypal roles that it harbors. However, here Gray offers a clear example of his resistance to the construct by way of his playful nature of approaching it, and also his own self-awareness of how his pursuits are being driven by his own desires and how these pursuits are shaping him. *Terrors of Pleasure* does not dwell on it long, it is important to note that the end of this story Gray is not settling into the nuclear family. Gray's sexuality never enters *Terrors of Pleasure*. He does acknowledge his girlfriend Renee on more than one occasion, implicitly positioning himself as a straight male, but his bisexuality is not ever referenced.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Gray's first monologue, *Sex and Death to the Age 14*, explores Gray's relationship with his bisexuality, as well as the closet, in a way that foreshadowed later approaches. In the monologue, Gray recounts his first attraction to a boy and how he did not take any action to further the relationship outside of his awareness that he was attracted to him. The purpose here is two-fold: to examine the factors influencing this decision, and to examine how this experience is portrayed in the monologue. In terms of the former purpose, it is clear that Gray could do little to further the relationship. He was at a conservative Christian Scientist camp at the time, and he was also unsure of how to proceed with a potential relationship. The second factor is far more notable, and one that is more emblematic of later portrayals by Gray and others. Gray spends little time recounting the attraction, and the whole mention of it is condensed into barely one minute. The account is also surrounded by Gray talking about heterosexual relationships, with him mentioning his various girlfriends immediately prior to the episode, and his moving into accounts of his uncle and the fact that he was married to three different women across his life immediately after. This positioning is crucial, and here I argue, along with examples to be provided by other monologues by Gray, that it is a form of closeting.

However, this example is notable as it is an instance where Gray approaches his queerness as not being an obstacle to his masculinity. Instead, he importantly describes the relationship as a challenge to other's perceptions of his masculinity, not his own. This distinction is key to understanding how Gray frames his own performance, and how it is framed by the larger body of work both by and about Gray. In the space of the stage performance, Gray plays with the interaction of masculinity and sexuality, free from the constraints imposed by the nuclear family construct, and in line with Sedgwick's assertion that the two may operate at a distance from each other. In the case of *And Everything is Going Fine*, a posthumous

documentary about Gray comprised entirely of archival footage of him, Gray's masculinity is on full display. This display includes focusing on Gray's heterosexual interests, as well as his children, while minimizing or completely excluding any features of Gray that would challenge this; these features include the fact that Gray was bisexual. *And Everything is Going Fine* includes only a single mention of Gray as a bisexual man. This mention comes over halfway through the film and in the mode of a selected clip of one of Gray's monologues in which he describes an encounter with another man while on vacation. Gray himself frames the encounter as moment of comedy in the monologue, but the documentary does not frame it at all outside of Gray's own assertions. The moment appears without context, unlike much of the structure of the documentary, and as soon as it is over, it is truly gone. No other mentions of Gray's queerness exist in *And Everything is Going Fine*, a documentary that sets out to surmise Gray's body of work and life as a whole through his own words, and this singular instance is surrounded by mentions of Gray's heterosexual partners.

The positioning of these selected sequences of Gray's life is notable in the fact that it seems to be compensating for the singular mention of Gray's bisexuality. The mention is followed by almost nothing other than focus on Gray as a man with a wife and children. This focus is a response, as it seeks to cement Gray's masculinity, itself fearing that acknowledging Gray's bisexual interests has jeopardized Gray's position as the patriarch of the nuclear family, and therefore repair work must be done so that he does not lose his patriarch status in the eyes of the audience. It should be noted that *And Everything Is Going Fine* is not the only instance of Gray's family being pushed to the forefront of his work. Gray himself centered one of his later monologues, *Impossible Vacation*, around his family, and *And Everything is Going Fine* only uses clips of Gray to talk about him, so this is not to say that the material is fabricated in any

way. Rather, this is a strict case of tactical positioning. The documentary never states that Gray's bisexuality does not exist, but it works to erase it by largely ignoring it and then smothering the mention with evidence of Gray as a patriarch figure, a position it links with heterosexuality. In this way, the documentary links gender roles in the nuclear family with sexuality, and as a result positions itself against Sedgwick's structuring of the two axes.¹⁵⁴ The enforcing of this erasure in turn reinforces the nuclear family's hegemony. The values of the nuclear family construct are presented as "the effective social order" as stated by Williams¹⁵⁵ and the result is the reaffirmation of the construct as the dominant family structure.¹⁵⁶ Gray himself is a member of the emerging family structure in line with Williams' definitions,¹⁵⁷ but *And Everything Is Going Fine* does not acknowledge this, nor does it seek to approach anything other than the dominant structure. The emerging family structure that Gray is a part of is outside of the nuclear family construct. Because of the focus of *And Everything Is Going Fine*, which only presents the nuclear family construct and no other family structures, the emerging structure into which Gray is a member is ignored. As a result, film continues to hold Gray to the standard of the nuclear family construct and its view of sexuality and gender.

The incorrect holding of the position that sexuality and gender are linked is one of the dominating factors that results in *And Everything is Going Fine* ardently defending Gray's masculinity by burying what it considers to be compromising facts about his sexuality. The other clear factor resulting in this decision is an insecurity on the part of the film, and one that in fact results in the former factor, is that the documentary believes that Gray's masculinity is a defining factor of legitimacy for him. By staking a claim on the value of Gray's masculinity, the

¹⁵⁴ Sedgwick 30.

¹⁵⁵ Williams 115

¹⁵⁶ Ibid 123

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

documentary returns its perceptions of it to those described by Jeffords. This is evidenced throughout the film by *And Everything Is Going Fine's* focus on Gray in relation to his family structures. The film contains numerous clips of Gray talking about his heterosexual partners, as well as ones of Gray with his children. As *And Everything Is Going Fine* seeks a visible heterosexual masculinity for Gray, one that is free of features it considers to be compromising. Its focusing on these features seeks to place Gray closer to the hard body type, though it never fully reaches that point due to Gray's own observations about this construct. Gray is not a hard body in the sense described by Jeffords, and the *And Everything Is Going Fine* understands this. It also understands that Gray's place in time, the 1980s and 1990s, implicitly positions him against the hard bodies of the era, and the constructs presented by them. "[T]he late 1980s and early 1990s saw a reevaluation of that hard body, not for a return to the Carter soft body but for a rearticulation of masculine strength and power through internal, personal, and family-oriented values" argues Jeffords¹⁵⁸. The work done by *And Everything is Going Fine* is done in an attempt to bring Gray more in line with these ideals and closet his queerness in such a way as to not explicitly deny it, but to simply push it to the side and ignore it. The problematic implications of this move are clear, and this attempt at repositioning should be compared to Gray's own monologues.

In *Swimming to Cambodia* Gray presents himself and performs his masculinity in a blend that does not closet or compromise his identity, but also does not overtly focus on his sexuality. This monologue demonstrates Sedgwick's statement that gender identity and sexuality are two separate entities, and on the whole the closet is not on display here. Gray comments that a man he met on the train was "cute enough" at one point, and there are also multiple mentions of

¹⁵⁸ Jeffords 13.

Gray's girlfriend. Nothing is focused on in the same way that it is positioned in *And Everything is Going Fine*, which is to say that nothing is compensated for. Gray consistently remarks on individuals that he encounters and the situations that he finds himself in, but his positioning of himself is that of an apolitical individual. As he states at one point, he "hasn't ever voted." However, the film does include a very matter-of-fact dive into the history of the United States in Southeast Asia, delivered by Gray, which positions him as opposed to the dominant narrative of necessary military intervention in the region, and pushes Gray into the role of a part of the counter-culture, or at least against the policies of the United States military. This places Gray outside of the cultural space marked by Jeffords as being part of the Reagan Revolution¹⁵⁹ and thus further away from the hard body masculine ideal followed within.

The other significant instance of Gray positioning himself as being outside of the masculine ideal is in *Terrors of Please* with the aforementioned voiced insecurities. This position is much more overt, and it is also the defining feature of the entirety of the monologue. Gray's bisexuality is not spoken to or given voice, but his masculinity is the focus of the monologue and the conflicts detailed within it. He constantly positions himself against other male bodies, and he contrasts himself and his performance of masculinity with theirs. Most of these men are described by Gray to be much closer, if not within, the hard body mold, and because of this Gray is constantly kept out of it, though he represents himself as trying to find his way in. This particular dichotomy is presented as leading to Gray struggling to find a place in the Hollywood landscape, an environment he always maintains he does not fit into or belong. His attempt at Hollywood success ends unsuccessfully, and the monologue concludes with Gray essentially back to his original position.

¹⁵⁹ Jeffords 13.

In monologues such as these, Gray demonstrates his willingness to approach the definitions and expectations that are placed on him. This approach takes the form of Gray playfully interacting with the definitions, often sending up his own failure to conform to these definitions. This is especially true of *Terrors of Pleasure*. Gray's stated insecurity with his conformity to the nuclear family construct spirals far outside of simply trying to purchase a cabin, indicating the playful nature of the approach Gray is taking. Gray is also not expressly a member of the nuclear family construct in *Swimming to Cambodia* or *Terrors of Pleasure*, but his relationship with Renee is heavily featured, implying the potential for the creation of the construct. Through all of this however, any obligation Gray might feel, such as his statement at the beginning of *Terrors of Pleasure*, is strictly playful.

However, *And Everything Is Going Fine* takes a different approach to Gray's performances. Instead of reading them at Gray's own commentaries on the subjects, the documentary presents them as a window into Gray's internal and personal feelings. As mentioned previously, *And Everything Is Going Fine* presents all media of him in the same context. Whether it be his monologues, interviews, or other footage, it is all presented equally with no regard to the original context. By not contextualizing any of the pieces of media it uses, *And Everything Is Going Fine* presents its view of Gray as unperformed, that is, that everything is true and free from Gray's own performances. This would be unproblematic if the documentary were attempting to present how Gray presented himself in the public sphere, but this is intention is never stated. Instead, *And Everything Is Going Fine* presents and understands Gray to be exactly who he presented himself as, while ignoring the performative nature of him and the concepts, such as gender and masculinity, that he was approaching. This results in Gray's playful approach to masculine and heterosexual concepts being discounted and instead taken as a

testament to Gray's adherence to them, when in fact this is not true. This misunderstanding by the film informs the problematic nature of *And Everything Is Going Fine's* decision to closet Gray and erase his bisexuality. As the film does not understand Gray's performances to be just that, performances, by not approaching Gray's masculinity as performative, *And Everything is Going Fine* also does not understand gender and sexuality to be performative overall. *And Everything Is Going Fine* operates on absolute assumptions of how roles in the nuclear family must be performed in order to preserve the nuclear family, and as the documentary cannot conceive of Gray as a force counter to the nuclear family construct, it works to bring him in line through a forced closeting of his performed sexuality, along with an increased focus on Gray's familial and heterosexual relationships.

It is important to take a moment to assess how Gray is portrayed in *Gray's Anatomy*. The film is also directed by Steven Soderberg, the director of *And Everything is Going Fine*, and it was released theatrically in the United States. Unlike the other film, however, *Gray's Anatomy* is not a documentary, but rather a monologue by Gray given additional visual flourish. Gray is hardly ever in the standard monologue space in this film, as he is instead mobilized throughout a variety of settings for the sake of cinematic flourish and keeping the film visually interesting. Gray's sexuality rarely makes any overt entrances into the monologue, and when it does, it is in line with other monologues such as *Swimming to Cambodia* or *Terrors of Pleasure*. The prospect of queerness is never raised, and though Gray does express insecurities throughout the monologue, these are in relation to his health as opposed to his masculinity. Gray is implicitly heterosexual by way of mentions of his girlfriend and his interests in other women, but these relationships are scarcely focused on as well.

It is important to briefly mention Gray's personal journals and the feelings of his sexuality reflected in them. In *The Journals of Spalding Gray*,¹⁶⁰ Gray makes apparent his own insecurities about his masculinity and sexuality. This is presented in conjunction with his own feelings on his monologues that he was constructing at the time, making clear that these two aspects of Gray's life were at least somewhat interwoven. However, *And Everything Is Going Fine* never approaches this side of Gray, and it instead views Gray's masculinity and sexuality and unquestionable. As this case study is focused on the on-screen perceptions of Gray, and his own personal feelings on his identity are numerous, complicated, and not entirely well-documented, it would be irresponsible to structure this argument based on his journals and not on his performance, and as a result they will not be approached here. *And Everything Is Going Fine* views Gray's masculinity as free from insecurities, and how this relates to Gray's own performances is examined here.

The masculinities described by Jeffords do not suffer insecurities, at least in relation to their identities. In regard to Bly, he argues that by way of nurturing from older men, a boy will become an affective man who performs his masculinity in an acceptable way.¹⁶¹ There is not room for insecurities under Bly's structure if this path of nurturing is followed correctly, but only if the boy is unable to break free of the influence of his mother and become a man molded by other men. A failure to do so results in the soft masculinities that *Iron John* argues against and seeks to correct. There is not any room in Bly's argument for functional masculinities outside of the "hard" ones, and this results in a lack of space for men like Gray to exist. This is not to argue that Gray was raised by his mother but still became a man. Rather this is a pushback on Bly's argument on the whole. The binary created by Bly's structure neglects numerous possibilities of

¹⁶⁰ Gray, Spalding. *The Journals of Spalding Gray*. 1st ed. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2011.

¹⁶¹ Bly 15

male development and creates a false notion of masculinity, one that many people, including Gray, cannot be viewed through.

However, *And Everything is Going Fine* takes a similar approach as Bly to Gray's molding as a male figure. Though numerous sequences are included of Gray speaking of his mother, most of these are in relation to his mother's mental illness and eventual suicide. Visually, Gray's mother is absent. She is never shown in the documentary in any form, and the only information that is given about her comes from Gray. But, the documentary does take the time to show Gray's father in the form of a news story segment documenting a conversation between the two of them. This moment is brief, but like the singular instance of Gray speaking about his queerness, its presence is important. Gray is framed as having a healthy, growing relationship with his father, notably one of the few men other than Gray to be given a voice in the documentary, while his mother if not argued to be an unhealthy influence, is given an influence that is distinctly coded as volatile and terminal by way of her own struggles with mental illness. Because of these presentations, the film falls into Bly's structure in its presentation of Gray's masculinity. He is not insecure in his masculinity as he is argued to have a healthy relationship with other nurturing male figures, in this case, his father. As with Bly's writing, this creates a binary for Gray. He must either be completely within the confident male structure, or he is none of these things. Gray is distinctly male, and the film does not argue otherwise, so it reduces anything it considers to be compromising in order to not have Gray fall on the other side of the binary. This includes Gray's bisexuality.

The mandates by the nuclear family on its male members, specifically the father, allow for a neat definition of Gray by the film. The fixed nature of the nuclear family goes against the

analysis of gender performance by Robinson and Hockey,¹⁶² resulting in a mandate that takes the performance out of the hands of the individual, and instead fits them into a rigid archetype.

Though he is clearly more than an archetype, by placing him within it, *And Everything is Going Fine* appeals to the sympathies of the film's presumed audience. This audience is imagined by *And Everything Is Going Fine* to be heterosexual, as evidenced by the film's argument of Gray being heterosexual, the foregrounding of the nuclear family construct, and the film's denial of the existence of emerging family constructs, which Gray was a part of. The dulling of Gray's queerness is necessary to the purposes of the film, which in this way is acting on the interests of the nuclear family construct.

Sedgwick states “[t]he most dramatic difference between gender and sexual orientation – that virtually all people are assigned to one or the other gender, and from birth – seems if anything to mean that it is, rather, sexual orientation, with its far greater potential for rearrangement, ambiguity, and representational doubleness, that would offer the alter deconstructive object.”¹⁶³ The positioning of Gray's sexuality and gender as being intrinsically linked, by *And Everything is Going Fine* and by Gray himself at times results in a rigid fixation of his identity. He cannot be fluid in his presentation as this rigidity forces him to stay virtually within the structure as described by Bly. The lack of fluidity results in the false belief by *And Everything Is Going Fine* for need of compensation of Gray's masculinity. Here the strength of the archetypes described by Jeffords are at their most apparent. Even though these descriptions are rooted in and based around the 1980s and various visible masculinities, their influences persist beyond this into the early 2000s. Though *And Everything is Going Fine* never raises the prospect of this hard body masculine archetype, the films subordination to Bly's structure, a

¹⁶² Robinson, 121.

¹⁶³ Sedgwick, 34

structure that works to support the masculinities within Jeffords' description. Jeffords understands this in her assessment of Bly, and because of this understanding the two may be safely linked together. What is missed in assessments by such films as *And Everything is Going Fine* is that there are presentations of masculinity that are not molded by the structure described by Bly or representational of those examined by Jeffords. Gray, with his playful approaches to masculinity, presents a performance that is emblematic of this gap.

As stated, Gray engages with queerness, heterosexuality, and masculinity in a playful and satirical nature when he chooses to engage with them, and they are never the crux of his monologues. Instead, they are just supplemental material to other focuses by him. It is unfair to expect Gray to always present his sexuality, and so the instances of his not mentioning his bisexuality should not be labeled as closeting in the overt sense. *And Everything Is Going Fine's* usage of materials showing Gray with his family as evidence against his queerness is irresponsible in this way and serves as an example of the incongruous nature of Bly and Sedgwick's structures. While Bly is working in gender theory and Sedgwick in queer theory, both understand and posit a vision of performed masculinity. Bly's structure of the male figure needing to fulfill the roles of father and patriarch persists across the body of Gray's work, but Gray himself examines this structure rather than taking it at face value. But *And Everything Is Going Fine* also takes this structure, but it takes it as absolute, and the result is an enforcement of roles and values onto Gray that he did not fit into. The disharmony resulting from Gray's work and the imposing of Bly's structure onto presentations of him by other works results the approach to his queerness that is taken by *And Everything is Going Fine*. Misunderstandings of masculine performance and fluidity fuel these approaches, and it is unfortunate that the documentary is so committed to this structure that it fundamentally misrepresents Gray and his

performance for the sake of forming a justification of him that is not necessary anywhere but within Bly's structure.

Alternative approaches to masculine performance, ones that allow for a non-binary take on the performance of this identity, would not necessitate the fundamental misrepresentations of Gray that take place. But no such work is to be seen here, and instead *And Everything is Going Fine* holds Gray to be either completely within the performance of masculinity or outside of it. The "outside" is undefined by Bly except that it results in a non-functional masculinity, as Bly cannot imagine a structure where one can be masculine, but not fulfill the patriarch and father roles in the family construct. The nuclear family construct is more direct about those who fall outside of the nuclear family construct. Members who are not part of the sexuality binary are not permitted to be members of the nuclear family construct. The same is true for those who do not follow other characteristics of the role they should fulfill, and these characteristics and roles are based around patriarchal structures. Regardless, portraying Gray free of the structure of the queer closet, a construct supported by the nuclear family, would result in his exclusion from the latter construct, and a state of flux for his identity according to the rules of *And Everything is Going Fine*. The documentary judges the prospect of this to be worse than the misrepresentation of its subject. What results is a rigid conformance to Bly's structure, positing a sole vision of masculinity, and a disregard for alternative performances and approaches. Sedgwick posits the alternative with her structure of the closet, and though she does not define masculinity with her structure, it allows for masculinity to exist in a performance that does not exist within the rigidity of a binary system, ideal for a better understanding of gender performance, and for understanding Gray as a whole. As Sedgwick's structure posits sexuality and gender to be considered

separately, there exists room within it for the emerging family structure that Gray is a part of, as opposed to Bly's structure, which adheres to the nuclear family construct almost exclusively.

Ultimately, *And Everything Is Going Fine* does not allow for performances of gender and sexuality that fall outside of the rigid guidelines of the nuclear family construct. Sedgwick's structure necessitates that gender and sexuality be viewed separately from one another, and were the documentary to adopt this structure, it would resolve *And Everything Is Going Fine's* desire to force Gray into the nuclear family construct while also closeting him. But, as this structure is not adopted or approached by the documentary, Gray is placed in contrast to a binary structure. As he does not neatly fit into either side of it as a bisexual man, *And Everything Is Going Fine* chooses to closet Gray, rather than approach a nonbinary construct. The result is a portrayal of Gray that adheres to constructs and structures which he creatively approached in his own works, and one that is fundamentally inaccurate as a result of its exclusions.

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Conclusion

The analyses presented in this thesis highlight the nuclear family construct, its relation to the queer closet, and its relation to queer family members. Each chapter highlights a different way in which these relationships have been explored on screen. Chapter 1 focuses on made-for-television movies to highlight how some television networks initially addressed the relationship between the nuclear family and queer men in the mid-1980s and beyond. Chapter 2 explores how this same relationship was represented in films made for theaters as opposed to the small screen. Between these two case studies, it is clear that the made-for-television films of Chapter 1 are more positive in their explorations of gay men in relation to the nuclear family construct as opposed to the theatrically-released films of Chapter 2. While films presented in Chapter 1 such as *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult* argue for the ultimate acceptance of gay men into the nuclear family, both films in Chapter 2 argue for a separation of gay men from the nuclear family construct. However, *Making Love* argues for an emerging queer family construct, albeit sparingly, something that is never considered in any of the films discussed in Chapter 1. Chapter 3 takes a different approach, exploring this relationship through the lens of a single performer, Spalding Gray, and how he defined his relationship to the nuclear family as a bisexual man in contrast to how others defined it for him. The emerging queer family construct is explored in more depth here, but at the same time it is clear that the documentary, *And Everything Is Going Fine*, ignores the existence of the emerging queer family construct that Gray himself lived. This absence is due to the adherence to the nuclear family construct by the documentary, and its willingness to bend its subject matter to fit into the nuclear family construct.

I have focused on the particular relationships between the nuclear family and queer men to explore how the nuclear family dictates role fulfillment on the part of all of its members,

specifically focusing on demands of its male members. The nuclear family demands the fulfillment of the role of son, father, and patriarch by its male members. The collective goal of these roles is to ensure the continuation and replication of the nuclear family construct, with the role of the patriarch being the most important in the films examined here. However, queerness complicates this role-fulfillment and my analysis focuses on how the films navigate the positioning of their queer male figures. In each case, the nuclear family is favored as an existing construct, but the ultimate placement and method of doing so varies. This disposition to favor the nuclear family construct is the result of numerous factors, but in the case of these films, it is the result of their favoring of the status quo, defined here by heterosexual patriarchy over any other possible established social formations or relationships. This move marginalizes queer individuals and cultures, which results in an echo chamber of reassurances to the construct that it is enforcing. This reproduction is most clearly evidenced in Chapter 1 as the nuclear family is shown to enforce its hegemony by way of its patriarchs dictating terms of acceptance of its queer members. In Chapters 2 and 3 we see evidence of breaking this mold, as emergent family constructs are increasingly acknowledged, with Spalding Gray's family as evidence of this, but with the documentary *And Everything Is Going Fine* almost completely ignoring this aspect.

Taken together, the three chapters demonstrate shifting representations of queer men in relation to the nuclear family construct, and how these attitudes did and did not represent an emerging queer family construct to film and television audiences. The willingness of characters in *An Early Frost*, *Consenting Adult*, *Doing Time on Maple Drive*, and *Making Love* to accept queer members into the nuclear family construct regardless of the role of the patriarch is indicative of a shift in representations of queer members within nuclear families on screen. None of the queer sons in these film and television productions may ever fulfill the role of patriarch,

but in the case of the film presented in Chapter 1, queer men remain sons . In contrast to these three films, *Making Love*, *Cruising*, and *And Everything Is Going Fine* all contain queer male characters who are viewed as detrimental to the nuclear family construct, even, as is the case in *Making Love*, they are otherwise accepted as gay men. In the case of the latter three films, all of which represent a social distance between queer men and the nuclear family, the tone of this representation is clearly more regressive. Despite these differences, the common representation across all of the films is that the nuclear family must now account for potential queer members, and that this accounting cannot take the form of denial of the existence of these members. In each case the boundaries and criteria of the nuclear family construct are tested and shifted, though this does not always result in acceptance.

Building on the analysis presented in this thesis, I intend to continue the exploration of queer individuals and identities in relation to hegemonic structures of heterosexual identities. The nuclear family construct provides one dynamic to explore, but there are others that I wish to understand as well. Mainstream media portrayals of gay men provide particularly notable points of exploration as the traits applied to gay men by many films run counter to what is argued to be “masculine” by the same pieces of media. However, I do plan to expand my understanding beyond representations of queer cisgender men, as I wish to explore how films similar to the ones I have examined in this thesis approach queer masculinity as performed by non-male identifying individuals, and challenges to the nuclear family construct’s notion of heterosexual femininity. Queer femininity provides another angle from which to examine the nuclear family. Finally, I would like to expand on this thesis to continue to explore emergent family structures, as my exploration here was limited.