

# **Visibility Over Seeability: The 2024 Mainstream ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ Discourse Within the U.S. War on Gender**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis critically analyzes the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse of 2024, challenging the celebratory narrative of “visibility win.” Focusing on its construction in popular media outlets and on the social media platform TikTok, the study examines how this visibility is often selective, commodified, and homonormative, particularly within the precarious U.S. socio-political context of ongoing “war on gender” (Butler, 2023). Using critical discourse analysis, the research contrasts the frequently depoliticized representations in mainstream media with the more dynamic and diverse engagements on TikTok. While popular media often reinforced a narrow “lesbian normal” (McNicholas Smith, 2020), TikTok users showed a potentiality to foster a broader communal “seeability” (Hennessy, 1994), critiquing limited portrayals and forging spaces for connection and queer futurity (Muñoz, 2009). This study unearths the tensions between superficial visibility and meaningful recognition, arguing that while mainstream representation can obscure structural issues, digital platforms like TikTok, despite algorithmic constraints (Blackman, 2019), offer crucial sites for community validation and the articulation of alternative lesbian experiences and futures.

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To the lesbian community materialised online, whose presence not yet embodied in the physical spaces of my life. You mattered on these pages

as breath,

as pulse,

as structure.

I offer this work back to you.

To each of you who may read these pages and find a glimmer of yourself—may it nourish something quiet inside, may it join the ongoing collective becoming, and seed another part of the future that has not yet arrived, but has already been felt.

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To the old me who chose to walk  
into precarity,  
into exile,  
into night,  
with nothing but the sound of cutting-open I-word  
yet with the courage to let it become.

To my search for a reflection that didn't flinch.  
To the first lesbian I faced—to me.

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**Figure 2 (page 30):** Screenshot of the TikTok ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ Discover page, detailing the platform’s own heading, descriptive summary, and last update date.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation  
 BIPOC – Black, Indigenous, and People of Color  
 CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis  
 DEI – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion  
 DIY – Do It Yourself  
 LGBTQ+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer  
 MAGA – Make America Great Again  
 NY – New York  
 NZ – New Zealand  
 SF – San Francisco  
 UGC – User Generated Content  
 UK – United Kingdom  
 U.S. / USA – United States of America  
 VPN – Virtual Private Network

## INTRODUCTION

In July 2024, “Femininomenon,” an opening song from Chappell Roan’s album *The Rise and Fall of the Midwest Princess* (2024), which is characterized by explicitly lesbian themes, was used by the USA Vice President Kamala Harris’s office in her 2024 presidential campaign to portray herself as a “femininomenon” needed in the U.S. in contrast to the imagery of Donald Trump (Wickman, 2024). The track appeared to align with Harris’s efforts to connect with younger, LGBTQ+ voters. This political appropriation of an openly queer cultural product did not appear out of place, as it coincided with a cultural narrative that gained significant traction across various media: the declaration of a ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ in 2024 with Chappell Roan being a prominent figure associated with it (Balanesescu, 2024, *Dazed*).

‘Lesbian Renaissance’ was being widely used to describe what appeared to be an unprecedented resurgence of lesbian visibility and representation across music, television, film, and social media (Balanesescu, 2024, *Dazed*). Witnessing the political leveraging of lesbian cultural products like Roan’s song, while concurrently being immersed in online discussions proclaiming this ‘Lesbian Renaissance,’ it struck me that while the progressive political environment, consciously or not, seemed to embrace mainstream lesbian cultural products, the broader discourse celebrating this ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ appeared largely detached from, or silent about, the pressing political issues and struggles confronting lesbian and LGBTQ+ communities in the United States. This initial observation drove my interest in critically examining the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse itself.

This thesis, being informed by the complex interplay between cultural visibility, socio-political environment of contemporary U.S., and the lived realities of marginalized communities, seeks to understand how a phenomenon like the “Lesbian Renaissance” is constructed, circulated, and contested across different media landscapes, and what ideological work this discourse performs. Drawing on critical theories of queer representation, gender, media, and futurity, this research aims to unpack the layers of meaning embedded within this cultural moment. The central research questions guiding this inquiry are:

1. What are the dominant narratives, underlying assumptions, and potential ideological implications of the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse in popular media outlets and on the social media platform TikTok in 2024? What role does this discourse play within the context of ongoing “gender wars” and broader cultural politics in the United States?

2. How is lesbian engagement with the so-called ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ on TikTok shaped by the platform’s algorithmic dynamics, and in what ways might these dynamics constrain the community or enable possibilities for connection and the imagining of queer futurities?

To critically engage with the claim about the existence of a ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ as it manifests on digital platforms, a multi-faceted theoretical apparatus is indispensable. In my research, I integrate critical perspectives on queer representational politics, interrogating themes of commodification (Hennessy, 2000; 1994), homonormativity (Duggan, 2002), the “lesbian normal” (McNicholas Smith, 2020), and crucially, the distinction between mere visibility and the concept of “seeability” (Hennessy, 1994). It further examines the historical and ongoing complexities of lesbian gender nonconformity (Butler, 1993) and the marginalized experiences of butch, stud, and other gender-variant lesbians. This perspective is vital, as lesbian ‘sexed’ bodies whose experiences, desires, and identifications are crucial sites for challenging and potentially reshaping dominant norms of sex, gender, and bodily morphology (Butler, 1993, p. 95). In order to inform the examination of ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse on TikTok, the theories of algorithmic governance will be used to understand how such platforms shape content visibility and community formation (Blackman, 2019; Çömezoğlu et al., 2024). Finally, José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of queer futurity will be introduced to explore how digital spaces might or might not function as sites for utopian aspiration and community building (Muñoz, 2009; Skinner, 2023). Such a theoretical framework underpins the subsequent analysis of contemporary queer, specifically lesbian representational politics within the U.S. media context.

Another vital aspect, which informs and is integrated into all parts of the analysis throughout this thesis, involves contextualizing the emergence of the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse within the contemporary U.S. socio-political landscape, marked by escalating “culture wars” (Hunter, 1991) and a focused “war on gender” (Butler, 2024).

The research design and analytical strategies adopted in this thesis begin with a justification for incorporating a diverse range of media publications on ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ (Appendix 1), alongside an explanation of how these sources will be analyzed in terms of their framing of the discourse. This is followed by a detailed account of the methods used to collect and interpret TikTok content (Appendices 2 and 3), with particular attention to the platform’s algorithmic infrastructure and the participatory nature of user-generated content (Skinner, 2023; Çömezoğlu et al., 2024). The section culminates in an introduction to Critical

Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Norman Fairclough (2003), which serves as the principal methodological approach.

Building on the methodological framework outlined above, the analysis proceeds across two distinct yet interconnected sites where the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ is discursively produced and circulated. First, a critical discourse analysis of mainstream media coverage (Appendix 1) examines how this moment is framed, often as a straightforward visibility success, and interrogates the narrative, stylistic, and ideological mechanisms at play. This includes attention to intertextuality, genre, and the positioning of queer representation within consumer culture, as well as the relative absence or strategic framing of this discourse in conservative outlets. The analysis then shifts to TikTok, where user-generated content offers an alternative space for negotiating the meanings of the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ (Appendices 2 and 3). This section explores how users engage with and co-construct the discourse through platform-specific genres, cultural references, and modes of visibility, while also contending with the algorithmic logics that shape content circulation. Across both sites, the analysis asks how lesbian visibility is produced, mediated, and potentially reimagined.

By examining how the so-called ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ is taken up across mainstream media and TikTok, this research aspires to contribute to broader conversations about visibility, platform politics, and the discursive construction of queer identities in digital culture. The thesis seeks to explore the tensions and possibilities that emerge when marginalized communities navigate algorithmic environments and cultural narratives that both shape and are shaped by them. In doing so, the project hopes to provide a critical lens for understanding how lesbian representation is produced, negotiated, and possibly reimagined within the complex dynamics of contemporary media ecosystems.

# 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 1.1 Queer Representational Politics in the U.S. Context

The representational politics of queer visibility in popular culture in North American has undergone significant transformations and has been subject to ongoing scholarly debates in the past twenty-five years. Understanding this trajectory is crucial for contextualizing contemporary discourses, such as the observations about an alleged ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ in 2024 in the U.S. Studying the trajectory of the changes may reveal recurring patterns of mainstreaming, commodification, normalization, and the persistent tension between an increased media presence and the substantive social and political change. The theoretical frameworks continue to inform the understanding of how queer, specifically lesbian, lives are mediated and understood, given that these theoretical discussions increasingly migrate to and are shaped by social media platforms in the 2020s.

The 1990s marked a seemingly pivotal moment for lesbian visibility in mainstream North American popular culture (Armstrong, 1996, p. 4). This decade witnessed a proliferation of lesbian representations, often heralded as “lesbian chic,” which appeared to signal a new dawn of acceptance and progress (McNicholas Smith, 2020, p. 34). Media outlets began to feature lesbian characters and themes more openly, fostering a celebratory narrative that lesbians were moving “out of the closet and in your face” (Armstrong, 1996, p. 8). Notable examples include the first lesbian kiss on US commercial network television in the prime time series *L.A. Law* (1991) and the first lesbian wedding on network television in *Friends* (1996) (McNicholas Smith, 2020, pp. 34, 36).

This burgeoning visibility was immediately met with robust academic and critical scrutiny. Valerie Leila Armstrong’s 1996 thesis, *Mainstreaming Martina: representing lesbians in the '90s*, drawing on Martha Gever (1994), challenged the “myth of invisibility” contending that lesbians were entirely absent from media prior to the 1990s (Armstrong, 1996, p. 10). Armstrong asserted that lesbians were visible prior to the 1990s but the previous representations often cast lesbians as pathologized figures, deviants, or threats (Armstrong, 1996, p. 10). The shift in the 1990s, therefore, was not merely from absence to presence, but it meant a reframing that presented lesbians as a novel cultural commodity, conveniently erasing this prior history of stigmatization and the ongoing realities of oppression (Armstrong, 1996, p. 10). Armstrong at the same time cautioned that “more is not necessarily better,” and representations lacking overt homophobia do not automatically translate to positive or

empowering images for lesbians (Armstrong, 1996, p. 14). She contended that the heightened lesbian visibility of the 1990s often operated within a limiting discourse of “a homosexuality of no importance,” a framework allowing mainstream culture to acknowledge and consume lesbian difference while simultaneously neutralizing its political significance and its challenge to heteronormative structures (Armstrong, 1996, p. 17).

This critical stance found deep resonance in Rosemary Hennessy’s materialist feminist critique of identity commodification under late capitalism. In works like “Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture” (1994) and *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (2000), Hennessy argues that “for individuals who have access to the circuits of late capitalist consumption, the [non-stigmatizing] visibility of sexual identity is often a matter of commodification, a process that frequently depends on the invisible labor of others” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 148). The “lesbian chic” trend exemplified how lesbian aesthetics or signifiers could be dislodged from their political origins and repurposed for market consumption, potentially by heterosexual audiences seeking a veneer of edginess (McNicholas Smith, 2020, p. 34). Hennessy argued that capitalism appropriates gay and lesbian styles for market purposes while erasing their social and political histories (Hennessy, 1994, p. 33). Such commodification risked divesting lesbian identity of its counter-hegemonic potential by integrating it into the market in a depoliticized manner (Hennessy, 2000, p. 149). Indeed, Hennessy noted Danae Clark’s observation that the intensified marketing of lesbian images was less a sign of growing acceptance than of capitalism’s capacity to appropriate gay styles for mainstream consumption (Hennessy, 2000, p. 149). Thus, visibility within commodity culture could represent a constrained victory only, welcoming queer individuals as consumers. Alexandra Chasin’s work also studied the development of the gay and lesbian niche market in the 1990s, critiquing its assimilationist leanings (Chasin, 2000), as generally understood in critiques of market assimilation.

The 1990s also marked the significant emergence and circulation of “queer” as a term in both activist and academic discourses, signaling a critical confrontation with heteronormativity and a postmodern rethinking of identity and politics (Hennessy, 2000; Walters, 2014). While this change in critical thinking offered liberatory potential, Hennessy cautioned that an exclusive focus on sexuality could obscure crucial intersections with class, race, and gender relations (Hennessy, 2000, p. 150). She critiqued lesbian and gay studies as well as queer theory for often failing to engage rigorously with the historical connections between sexuality and capitalism, cautioning that such omissions reproduce class-based inequalities and marginalizations (Hennessy, 1994, p. 34). For Hennessy, a thorough critique

of sexuality requires examining its material production within broader systems such as capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism within the class system.<sup>1</sup>

The representational tropes prevalent in popular culture in this period, such as the “temporary lesbian” or the token “lesbian kiss episode,” further highlighted the often superficial and conditional nature of this newfound visibility, serving more to titillate or explore lesbianism as a transient phase than to represent enduring lesbian lives (McNicholas Smith, 2020, p. 36). How visibility is conceptualized is of paramount importance for any lesbian and gay political project that has had to fight against heteronormative erasure to even claim public existence (Hennessy, p. 2). The 1990s, therefore, starkly illustrated the complexities of visibility, demonstrating that media presence alone did not dismantle oppressive systems but could, instead, be assimilated by them.

The period spanning the 2000s and 2010s witnessed a continued expansion of LGBTQ+ representation in U.S. media. However, this visibility was increasingly interpreted through the critical frameworks of homonormativity and homonationalism, alongside vigorous debates about the sufficiency of “tolerance” as a political aspiration. Lisa Duggan’s concept of “homonormativity” became a cornerstone for understanding these dynamics (Duggan, 2002, p. 177). Duggan characterized homonormativity not merely as the moment when homosexuality achieves normalcy, but as “a key cultural component of neoliberalism itself” (Duggan, 2002, p. 177). This ‘New Homonormativity’ grasps a form of gay and lesbian politics that upholds and mirrors dominant heteronormative institutions and values—such as monogamy, marriage, domesticity, consumerism, and patriotism—rather than a sexual politics offering a fundamental challenge to them (Duggan, 2002, p. 190). The neoliberal model offers a pathway to inclusion for certain queer individuals only—often white, middle-class, and gender-conforming—at the expense of depoliticization, assimilation, and the silencing of more radical critiques or diverse queer realities (Duggan, 2002; McNicholas Smith, 2020). The intimate relationship between homonormativity and neoliberal ideology is integral to neoliberalism’s focus on individualism and free markets that fostered an LGBTQ+ political climate where success was often gauged by access to consumer markets and integration into state-recognized institutions (Duggan, 2002, p. 179). McNicholas Smith notes that Duggan (2002) defined homonormativity as a shift towards individualized, depoliticized inclusion on normative terms (McNicholas Smith, 2020, pp. 13-14).

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<sup>1</sup> The decade of the 1990s also saw explorations of the tensions and convergences between feminist and queer theories, as seen in collections like *Feminism Meets Queer Theory* (Weed and Schor, 1997), while works like Straayer’s *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies* (1996) applied queer lenses to film analysis, rewriting earlier frameworks.

Building upon Duggan's concept of homonormativity, Jasbir Puar introduces the concept of "homonationalism," elaborated in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007). Puar's work gained significant traction in the 2010s for its analysis of how homonormativity intersects with nationalism and global politics (Puar, 2007, p. 13). Puar contended that in the post-9/11 geopolitical landscape, the acceptance and tolerance of certain gay and lesbian subjects became a hallmark of Western, particularly U.S., "sexual exceptionalism" and modernity (Puar, 2007, p. 39). This projection of "gay-friendliness" is often used rhetorically to distinguish the nation from supposedly "backward" or "homophobic" Others, thereby legitimizing nationalist and colonialist ideologies and interventions (Puar, 2007). Puar describes how "the contemporary emergence of homosexual, gay, and queer subjects—normativized through their deviance...rather than despite it—is integral to the interplay of" these national and biopolitical forces (Puar, 2007, p. xii). Homonationalism thus exposes the ways the inclusion of some queer individuals can be predicated on the demonization and exclusion of others, linking domestic assimilation politics to global power dynamics, involving a biopolitical sorting where certain queer bodies are "folded into life" while others, often racialized, are demarcated for neglect or death (Puar, 2007, p. 9).

Additionally, Angela McRobbie's *In The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (2008) critically examines the shift from collective feminist struggles to individualistic neoliberal frameworks in contemporary gender politics. She explores how feminism has been co-opted by consumer culture and neoliberal ideology, resulting in what she terms a "new sexual contract" under the guise of a 'post-feminist' turn. This contract offers young women opportunities for economic and social mobility but does so under conditions that depoliticize feminism and reassert traditional gender norms. McRobbie explains the appeal of this contract through the concept of "luminosity," where women are spotlighted as empowered, successful individuals in media and popular culture, masking the persistence of structural inequalities.

McRobbie's critique of the co-optation of feminist ideals is similar to the critique of the commodification of lesbian identities within the discourse of the 'Lesbian Renaissance' in 2024. I will adopt her ideas on luminosity to analyze how various media outlets (Appendix 1) created "spotlight" for certain lesbian identities, celebrating them in ways that conform to marketable norms. Her insights into the depoliticization of feminist struggles can help me explore whether the 'Lesbian Renaissance' challenges or conforms to broader capitalist and neoliberal frameworks.

Moving to 2010s, lesbian visibility during this decade mostly outlined homonormative trajectories. Media portrayals increasingly situated lesbian characters within frameworks of stable relationships, marriage (with marriage equality becoming a central political focus at the time), domesticity, and middle-class existence (McNicholas Smith, 2020, pp. 10–12). Exploring the proliferation of such representations, particularly in European and North American television, Kate McNicholas Smith and Imogen Tyler, in their 2017 article “Lesbian Brides: Post-Queer Popular Culture,” introduced the term “the lesbian normal” (Smith & Tyler, 2017, p. 316). They pointed out the history of lesbian visibility aligning with heteronormative ideals, particularly white, middle-class femininity, exemplified by depictions of lesbian weddings that mirror conventional “white bridal culture” with white gowns, flowers, and church settings (Smith & Tyler, 2017, p. 318). This trend, they argue, dates back to the cultural shifts of the 1990s where “polluting stereotypes” of homosexuality were replaced by the idea of “the normal gay” (Smith & Tyler, 2017, pp. 320–321). Smith and Tyler describe this as an effort to claim respectability amid political backlash, particularly under Reaganism in the U.S. (Smith & Tyler, 2017, p. 321). They contend that lesbianism, once linked to feminist critiques of oppressive femininity, was rebranded through a commercialized aesthetic, such as the “chic” identity seen in 1990s media (Smith & Tyler, 2017, p. 321). This “feminisation of the lesbian body involves the abjection of the butch, and the disappearance of the butch/femme couple” (Smith & Tyler, 2017, p. 323), marginalizing butch and masculine lesbians. Citing Alison Rooke, they note that while lesbian feminist bodies historically rejected societal expectations through acts like refusing constraining clothes, this refusal becomes regulated by commodification through “white bridal culture,” stripping lesbianism of its subversive political power (Smith & Tyler, 2017, p. 323).

This normalization is further critiqued for creating new forms of exclusion by Suzanna Danuta Walters, in *The Tolerance Trap* (2014). She observes that emerging gay family images in media often functioned as “sanitizing counterparts” to earlier, more sexually liberationist portrayals, thereby erasing queer differences and feminist critiques of the nuclear family (Walters, 2014, p. 231). This push to be perceived as “just like” heterosexual families risked eroding the specificity and critical potential inherent in lesbian difference, frequently centering whiteness and middle-class values and marginalizing other lesbian experiences (McNicholas Smith, 2020, p. 17).

Eve Ng’s (2013) examination of the U.S. cable channel, Logo’s strategic shift towards “gaystreaming” provides a concrete illustration of these dynamics within media industries. Ng argues that Logo’s efforts to broaden its viewership, partly by appealing to heterosexual

women perceived as allies to gay men, resulted in programming that favored representations aligned with consumerism and palatable, often male-focused, gay identities. This, in turn, further marginalized other queer subjects, including many lesbians, who did not fit this commercially advantageous, homonormative mold, reinforcing the marginalization of sexual and gender expressions falling outside what Gayle Rubin termed the “charmed circle” (Rubin, 1984, cited in Ng, 2013, p. 16).

Walters’ *The Tolerance Trap* (2014) offers a wide-ranging cultural critique, arguing that the prevailing narrative of LGBTQ+ progress towards near-full acceptance was dangerously misleading. She argues that striving for mere “tolerance”—a concept suggesting begrudging endurance—rather than demanding comprehensive equality and genuine integration, represented a political “dead end” (Walters, 2014, p. 15). Walters challenges the celebratory rhetoric surrounding visibility and assimilation, advocating for a persistent drive towards transformative social change.

These questions about lesbian (queer) representation have found further articulation in Kate McNicholas Smith’s *Lesbians on Television: New Queer Visibility & the Lesbian Normal* (2020). Building on her earlier work with Tyler (Smith & Tyler, 2017), McNicholas Smith analyzes contemporary trends, elaborating the term “lesbian normal” (McNicholas Smith, 2020, p. 17). This concept describes a representational mode where lesbians are depicted in ordinary, relatable situations, which can enhance visibility and potentially lessen stigma (McNicholas Smith, 2020, p. 17). However, McNicholas Smith compellingly argues that this normalization is a “double-edged phenomenon”: it often becomes assimilationist, erases difference, perpetuates stereotypes, and aligns with postfeminist and homonormative ideologies, thereby impeding more radical forms of social progress (Smith & Tyler, 2017, p. 3). This “new queer visibility” frequently carries a “post-queer sensibility,” implying that the struggles of queer and feminist politics are largely resolved, reinforcing a narrative of achieved gay rights (McNicholas Smith, 2020, p. 16).

McNicholas Smith outlines core features of “the lesbian normal,” including an aesthetic of normative femininity (“She doesn’t look like a lesbian”), a discursive distancing from certain LGBTQ+/queer/feminist histories and politics (“That’s SO old fashioned”), and a focus on romantic narratives culminating in marriage and motherhood (“happily ever after”) (McNicholas Smith, 2020, p. 17). This normalization frequently centers figures of white, cisgender, and conventionally feminine lesbians, thereby reproducing codes that largely conform to heterosexist ideals of womanhood (McNicholas Smith, 2020, p. 17). At the same time, she acknowledges that the “new queer visibility is not exclusively post-queer” and

moments of radical critique can still emerge within these normative frames (McNicholas Smith, 2020, p. 54).

These moments of radical queer critique are grasped by the concept of seeability. Rosemary Hennessy argues that seeability moves beyond mere presence and interrogates the conditions, frameworks, and processes that allow for the visibility of certain identities, issues, or social relations that are rendered meaningful within the terms of hegemonic socio-historical power structures (Hennessy, 1994, p. 49). Hennessy emphasizes that seeability is not an inherent quality of representation but is actively constructed and oriented towards exposing the dominant logic of the power structures and the prevailing “frames of knowing” (Hennessy, 1994, p. 49). Seeability is the moment that exposes the ideological investments of late capitalism and heteronormativity in systematic rendering or obscuring of non-confirming forms of queer representation/presentation

The concept of seeability is crucial for my research because it provides a critical lens for analyzing representational politics that appeals to and celebrates an alleged ‘Lesbian Renaissance.’ It compels an inquiry that moves beyond simply quantifying visibility (e.g., counting representations or popularity of the lesbian artists as my analysis will show in Chapter 3) to scrutinizing how representations are framed, what meanings are privileged, and whose interests these particular modes of seeing serve. By focusing on seeability, this research can better expose the ways in which power shapes perception, connecting seemingly benign media representations to underlying material conditions and systemic inequalities (Hennessy, p. 41). Ultimately, seeability allows for an understanding of how certain narratives of lesbian visibility achieve dominance while others are marginalized, offering a vital tool for exploring the complex interplay and difference between what is shown and what is understood in the ongoing struggle for meaningful recognition and social justice.

The critiques of commodification (Hennessy, 2000; Hennessy, 1994), homonormativity (Duggan, 2002), homonationalism (Puar, 2007), and the “lesbian normal” allow me to trace down the visibility of queer identities within the discourse of ‘Lesbian renaissance’ where the lesbian figure it prioritizes can be shown to be fetishized in that the “labor that has gone into its production is rendered invisible” (McNicholas Smith, 2020, p. 53), and its dominant logic prevents us from seeing that “most lesbians are leading less glamorous lives than their chic commodity images suggest, and poor lesbians of color are the most invisible and worst off” (Hennessy, 1994, p. 69).

Consequently, any analysis of the claim to an alleged contemporary ‘Lesbian Renaissance,’ especially as it manifests on digital platforms like TikTok—whose complexities

as a rapidly growing social media space for queer individuals will be further considered in Section 1.4—demands a sophisticated, historically informed approach. It requires interrogating not just *if* lesbians are more visible, but *which* lesbians achieve visibility, on *whose terms* this visibility is conferred, what forms of labor or exclusion this visibility might mask or naturalize in the guise of ‘glamour,’ and what power structures are reinforced or challenged through this visibility of queer representational politics. As the very nature of representational politics is fraught, even seemingly positive or empowering representations are susceptible to co-optation by dominant systems, potentially blunting their radical edge and rendering them less meaningful for systemic change than often presumed. The historical precedents of co-optation, assimilation, and the unceasing struggle for authentic, politically engaged, and transformative representation serve as a vital framework that will structure this thesis whose ultimate objective is to analyse the dynamic, non-linear and contradictory connection between media visibility and liberation.

## 1.2 Lesbian Gender Nonconformity

The multifaceted nature of lesbian identity has historically been, and continues to be, subject to processes of simplification, erasure, and marginalization, both within mainstream society and, at times, within feminist and queer movements themselves (Rich, 1993; Butler, 1993). This section of the theoretical framework is designed to reflect on lesbian identities that typically do not achieve mainstream visibility, focusing on their marginalization, with particular attention to butch and stud lesbians, drag kings, trans-masculine and other gender-nonconforming presentations. Central to this exploration is demonstrating how lesbian identity is inextricably linked to, and often a site of contestation for, prevailing notions of gender identity and its performative dimensions, which bear significant, though complex, relationships to transgender histories and experiences (Butler, 1993, p. 336).

In the early to mid-20th century, when lesbianism entered public and medical discourse, it was often through pathologizing or narrowly defined lenses, such as the figure of the “invert” (Vicinus, 1993, p. 456). Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, for instance, portrayed its protagonist Stephen Gordon as a “mannish lesbian,” a depiction that, while a demand for acceptance of innate difference, became a dominant, if limiting, public image (Vicinus, 1993, p. 468). This construction often elided other potential expressions of lesbian identity, particularly those of more “feminine” women attracted to other women (De Lauretis, 1993, p. 179). Contrasted with the more visible, often stereotyped representations were the

largely unwritten traditions of working-class lesbian communities, particularly the butch/femme culture prominent in mid-century bars (Smith, 1989, p. 399). Elizabeth A. Smith highlights that the butch/femme distinction was a complex “system of sexual communication carried out in dress, in style, and in more immediate sexual ways,” a method for lesbians to meet and articulate their desires (Smith, 1989, p. 399). This tradition, however, was often viewed with disdain by the emerging middle-class homophile movement, exemplified by organizations like the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) (Smith, 1989, p. 399). The DOB, striving for assimilation and respectability, often perceived the overtness of butch/femme roles as “impolitic” and damaging to the image they wished to project (Smith, 1989, p. 412). The DOB’s “Statement of Purpose” advocated for “a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society,” directly pressuring butch lesbians to appear more feminine (Smith, 1989, p. 402). This opposition, Smith argues, had roots in the “class-bound and anti-sexual” tendencies of the 1950s and 1960s lesbian movement, which sought to downplay sexuality in favor of emotional commitment and social acceptance (Smith, 1989, p. 414). Sue-Ellen Case describes how DOB members pressured “Toni,” a butch lesbian, to “tone down her dress,” framing her resistance in terms that recalled “colonial missionary projects” civilizing an “inappropriately dressed savage” (Case, *Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic*, p. 58). The vibrant, sexualized expressions of working-class butch/femme lesbians were thus marginalized by a movement prioritizing a more desexualized and “respectable” public face (Smith, 1989, p. 412).

The advent of second-wave feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s brought new frameworks for understanding lesbianism, yet it also introduced new forms of exclusion for already marginalized identities (Smith, 1989; Martin, 1993). Lesbian-feminism offered a powerful political analysis, famously articulated in the concept of “The Woman Identified Woman,” which defined a lesbian as “the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion” (Brown, *The Woman Identified Woman*, cited in Smith, 1989, p. 414). This perspective emphasized political solidarity and sisterhood, effectively desexualizing lesbianism to a degree, which, as Alice Echols suggests, may have been a necessary condition for unity between lesbians and heterosexual feminists in a homophobic climate (Martin, 1993, p. 303). While this framework provided a name and visibility for solidarity among women, the figure of the “woman-identified woman,” often rooted in ideals of romantic female friendship, proved “disabling and reductionist in its own way” for many (Martin, 1993, p. 303). A significant consequence of this new ideology was a vehement critique and rejection of butch/femme roles, which were widely seen by lesbian-feminists as an uncritical imitation of heteropatriarchal relationship structures (Smith, 1989, p. 411). Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon,

in *Lesbian/woman*, characterized butch identity as “false” and irreconcilable with a “true identity as women” (Smith, 1989, p. 411). This feminist analysis rejected all forms of sexual differentiation, equating them with oppressive gender roles (Smith, 1989, p. 411). The conceptualization became an idealized egalitarian relationship, where equality often meant an absence of distinct roles or marked gender expressions (Smith, 1989, p. 412). Certain sexual acts, like tribadism, were disparaged as fulfilling “butch-femme fantasies,” and even discussing dildos in consciousness-raising groups could be unacceptable (Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/woman*, cited in Smith, 1989, p. 412;). This dominant lesbian-feminist ideal of androgyny or woman-identification often implicitly centered a white, middle-class experience, further marginalizing working-class lesbians and lesbians of color whose gender expressions and community norms might differ (Martin, 1993, p. 303). Lyndall MacCowan notes that roles in lesbian relationships were characterized by some lesbian-feminists as “most likely to be found among ‘lower-class [sic]’ lesbians in bars,” linking role-playing to class and a perceived lack of consciousness (Martin, 1994, p. 14).

Drag king culture emerges in this period as another significant site where lesbians explore and perform gender, often critiquing traditional masculinity and femininity (Schacht, 2003, p. 75; Horowitz, 2020, p. 55). Horowitz notes how drag can help performers grow and experience gender identities in new ways, with one performer stating drag kinging is “not about feeling more like myself onstage because I don’t feel like a man,” but an opportunity to play a “masculine stereotype” (Horowitz, 2020, p. 55). This performance, often defined in relational contrast to lesbian drag queens who embody traditional femininity (Schacht, 2003, p. 78), allows lesbian drag kings to challenge the sexist actions and dominance of gay men within the court, thereby exposing masculinity as a performance (Schacht, 2003, p. 94–95).

Finally, the late 1980s and 1990s saw the rise of queer theory which offered new analytical tools for understanding the intersections of gender and sexuality. Judith Butler’s work on gender performativity became particularly influential, arguing that gender is not an internal essence but rather a set of reiterated, stylized acts that, over time, comes sedimented into the appearance of a stable identity (Butler, 1993, p. 335). This framework provided a powerful way to understand lesbian gender expressions like butch and femme, not as reflections of an innate essence or as imitations of “original” heterosexual roles, but as distinct performative iterations of gender within a specific cultural-social context (Butler, 1993, p. 335). Butler explored the idea of “being” a lesbian as something that is continuously constituted and negotiated through “repeated play,” where the “I” is “insistently reconstituted as a lesbian ‘I’” through the repetition of sexuality (Butler, 1993, p. 335). This perspective

challenged the notion that lesbian identity needed to be grounded in a singular, authentic experience or a fixed gender presentation (Butler, 1993, p. 331).

The interventions of lesbians of color and working-class lesbians have been crucial in exposing the limitations of universalizing claims about “lesbian identity” or “women’s experience” (De Lauretis, 1993, p. 172). Biddy Martin, drawing on the work of Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa entitled *This Bridge Called My Back*, highlighted how autobiographical writings by women of color challenged identity politics on its very grounds by attending to the “irreducibly complex intersections of race, gender, and sexuality” (Martin, 1993, p. 316). De Lauretis foregrounds Audre Lorde’s “biomythography,” *Zami* (1982), and how powerfully it illustrates the complexities of being “Black, female, gay, and out of the closet in a white environment,” where “Being Black dykes together was not enough. We were different” (De Lauretis, 1993, p. 172). This work underscores that neither race, nor gender, nor homosexual difference alone can constitute individual identity or the basis for social change (De Lauretis, 1993, p. 172).

As I have argued, the main scholarship on non-normative lesbians’ gender identities is focused on butch as a masculine marginalised subject, and there is very little study on BIPOC lesbians who hold various kinds of masculine identities, including ‘stud.’ The term ‘stud’ is primarily used within the Black lesbian community to refer to individuals who present masculinely (diBartolo, LGBTQ Glossary, 2016, as cited in Miller, 2021, p. 2). This masculine presentation is not merely an aesthetic choice but often a form of protest and a way to find solace for Black women who feel a disconnect from mainstream, Eurocentric, and heteropatriarchal definitions of femininity (Miller, 2021, p. 2). The adoption of the term “stud” itself is a reclamation of a word historically used in contexts of heteropatriarchal domination; by using it, stud lesbians reclaim and assert confidence in an identity that exists outside the confines of heteropatriarchal white supremacy (Miller, 2021, pp. 2–3). This identity involves presenting masculinity or androgyny to challenge and resist commodified femininity (Miller, 2021, p. 2). Masculine-presenting lesbians are therefore particularly susceptible to patriarchal backlash especially for undermining the expectation that women should center their lives around men (Manders, 2020, cited in Miller, 2021, p. 3). This creates a paradoxical situation: while masculinity is generally valued in society, the performance of masculinity by a woman’s body is often met with disapproval (Miller, 2021, p. 3). This can lead to a “pseudo-male-adjacency” where stud lesbians might gain some respect due to their masculinity, but this same masculinity makes them vulnerable to stereotypes of Black male aggression, without granting them immunity from sexism rooted in their womanhood (Miller,

2021, p. 3).

In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Judith Butler examines how lesbians are perceived as sexed bodies within a broader social and often homophobic context. Butler notes that homophobia frequently operates by attributing a “damaged, failed, or otherwise abject gender to homosexuals,” often by labeling lesbians as “masculine” (Butler, 1993, p. 243). This societal practice highlights how sexuality is regulated through the policing and shaming of gender, and how the terror associated with homosexuality can also be a “terror over losing proper gender” (Butler, 1993, p. 243). Butler argues that the binary of “masculinized female homosexuality,” alongside “feminized male homosexuality,” is itself a “restrictive spectre” produced by the symbolic order to maintain its own hegemony (Butler, 1993, p. 112).

Butler’s concept of intelligibility is foundational to understanding how certain bodies and identities come to be recognized and valued within a given cultural framework. A body or identity is deemed “intelligible,” or capable of “mattering,” only to the extent that it conforms to prevailing materializing norms, which dictate its viability and recognizability (Butler, 1993, p. 8). This process is not neutral; rather, it actively constructs what is deemed legible and acceptable, simultaneously defining an “outside”—a realm of the unthinkable or abject (Butler, 1993, p. 2). For instance, historical portrayals of lesbian identity, such as the “invert,” or the assimilationist pressures against overt gender non-conforming expressions discussed in this section, exemplify how regulatory norms operate performatively to circumscribe the domain of intelligibility, rendering certain presentations as “unlivable bodies” (Butler, 1993, p. 2).

This exclusionary matrix is fundamental to how subjects are formed and how their existence is perceived. The very constraints that produce intelligible bodies also generate a domain of unimaginable, rejected, and unviable bodies (Butler, 1993, p. 2). This excluded and illegible domain functions as the constitutive outside to intelligibility, perpetually existing at the margins of what is known and acceptable (Butler, 1993, p. 2). The ongoing struggle for recognition by gender-nonconforming lesbians, including butch and stud lesbians, or drag kings, underscores how the unquestioned position of “sex” within the heterosexual binary sustains specific symbolic orders (Butler, 1993, p. 127). Any challenge to this position inherently questions where and how the boundaries of symbolic intelligibility are established (Butler, 1993, p. 8). Consequently, a critical engagement with these mechanisms of intelligibility reveals how certain ways of being are validated while others are delegitimized or rendered invisible (Butler, 1993, p. 8).

The historical entanglement and the ongoing presence of gender variance within

lesbian communities are critical for my analysis that will not only involve the examination of what lesbian identities are visibilised in the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ 2024, but also will involve the analysis of the contemporary “gender wars” in the USA in Chapter 2. It is imperative to understand that intelligibility is not a pre-ordained or static condition but a profoundly political and dynamic field, continuously produced and reproduced through complex operations of power (Butler, 1993, p. 233). This understanding highlights how the rhetoric and legislation targeting transgender individuals, which seek to reinforce the meaning of gender based on 'sex assigned at birth,' invariably implicates and threatens lesbians whose identities and presentations have long challenged this fundamentalist binary, particularly those “illegible” or “unseeable” lesbians in media spaces whose very existence is organized by the fluidity and performativity of gender.

### 1.3 Algorithmic Governance

The emergence of social media platforms like TikTok has profoundly reshaped the landscape of identity presentation and community formation, particularly for marginalized groups such as queer people (Skinner, 2023). For a meaningful analysis of data collected from TikTok it should be recognized that platforms like TikTok are not neutral conduits but are actively shaped by their underlying algorithms and the “politics of data” (Blackman, 2019 p. 22). Algorithms are not merely computational tools but can be understood as “performing entities: actualities that select, evaluate, transform and produce data” (Parisi, 2013, p. ix, as cited in Blackman, 2019 p. 108). This means that TikTok’s algorithms play a crucial role in determining what lesbian content becomes visible and what remains “submerged or hidden by particular regimes of visibility and remembering” (Blackman, 2019 p. 121), or, on the contrary, what gets meaningful community engagement and, as a result, visible in the mainstream. This perspective is crucial for researching the claims to the existence of a ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ in 2024 on TikTok, drawing upon scholarship concerning algorithmic governance, user agency, and the complex dynamics of representation.

This understanding of the politics of algorithms aligns with the understanding of “big data” as both a “technical assemblage” and an “ideological apparatus” that creates new conditions of seeing (Zeffiro, 2019, p. 3). The internet, and by extension platforms like TikTok, operates under a ‘protocological condition’ where “control has existed from the beginning,” rather than inherent freedom (Galloway, 2004, as cited in Zeffiro, 2019, p. 3). Therefore, studying ‘Lesbian Renaissance,’ in which discourse revolves around visibility,

necessitates an inquiry into the impact of these algorithmic controls and data politics (Blackman, 2019, p. 22) on which lesbian narratives are amplified and which are marginalized. Such an analysis includes examining how data traces from lesbian users “potentially accrue ‘after-lives’” (Fuller, 2009, as cited in Blackman, 2019 p. 22) and how such data acquires its own social life, becoming “lively in ways that are difficult to see, comprehend and analyse using conventional qualitative methods” (Beer and Burrows, 2013, as cited in Blackman, 2019, p. 22).

Platforms like TikTok can be understood as “code/spaces,” where software and the production of space are mutually dependent through algorithmic sorting and the digital augmentation of spatial experiences (Kitchin and Dodge, 2011, as cited in Cockayne & Richardson, 2017, p. 3). Simultaneously, these social media platforms function as “orientating devices” that shape how experiences “come to be, and come to be felt on the body,” often obfuscating their own materiality while directing users and determining which bodies are relegated to “shadowy places” from which others are turned away (Ahmed, 2006, as cited in Hewa, p. 2).

This “coding” is deeply biopolitical, managing and categorizing lesbian identities in ways that echo early queer theory’s understanding of sexuality as a produced mode of knowing individuals (Cockayne & Richardson, 2017). The data itself is therefore not neutral but is shaped by and shapes contested socio-cultural politics, raising urgent questions of “Who is identifying whom and for what purpose?” (Dalton and Thatcher, 2014, as cited in Bridges, 2021, p. 3). Algorithmic systems enforce normative frameworks, rendering certain bodies socially legible while potentially excluding others, and platform policies themselves can act as “straightening devices,” an embodied experience that for some users is a “painful blow” (de Certeau, 1984, cited in Cockayne & Richardson, 2017, p. 10). As, for instance, in the article “How butchphobia is thriving on Lesbian Tiktok” (Bruère-Dawson, 2022) highlights a disturbing trend of escalating hatred and discrimination against butch and masculine-presenting lesbians, particularly on the social media platform TikTok. The author observes a proliferation of TikToks that mock or denigrate these individuals, signaling that butchphobia is not only a persistent issue but one that has found a potent new breeding ground online (Bruère-Dawson, 2022) .

Therefore, my analysis of data taken from the TikTok platform will be informed by an interest in how algorithms might reproduce or contest norms within this “queer code/space,” where technologies both proliferate and regulate socio-spatial experiences, and where

sexuality itself functions as a “technology” of coding space with disproportionate effects on those distant from the norm (Cockayne & Richardson, 2017, p 14).

My research, on the other hand, acknowledges that despite these structural constraints, lesbian users on TikTok employ active strategies of navigation and opposition. This active negotiation can be understood by recognizing that digital “code/space” is performatively co-constructed through the interaction between users and technology, embodying what Haraway (1991, as cited in Cockayne & Richardson, 2017, p. 12) terms “cyborg tendencies.”

To analyze these interactions, I shall employ concepts such as Blackman’s (2019, p. 104) idea of “haunted data,” which refers to experiences and remnants of activity made imperceptible or obscured by prevailing data collection and algorithmic systems, essentially becoming spectral elements that trouble automated processes. The analysis in Chapter 4 aims to reveal aspects of lesbian life that algorithms make difficult to discern or comprehend, as Bridges (2021) suggests.

Such a comprehensive theoretical approach enables an examination of how TikTok’s algorithms influence lesbian expression while also considering diverse forms of user resistance. The goal is to reveal both the apparent and the hidden dimensions of lesbian experiences within what Blackman (2019, p. 22) calls the “politics of data.” This understanding can then support initiatives aimed at fostering more just and representative digital environments by operating within the “gaps, silences, interstices and contradictions” of current systems (Blackman, 2019, pp. 203, 207).

## 1.4 Queer Futurities

In order to see how exactly such a digital platform as TikTok can function as a site for utopian aspiration, affective community building, and strategic cultural negotiation, José Esteban Muñoz’s theories of utopian queerness and disidentification will be employed. Together, these perspectives help me to illuminate if and how the claim to a ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ emerging in 2024 on TikTok is not merely a depoliticizing trend, but a discourse of emerging imagining futures.

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Esteban Muñoz explores the concept of queerness as a forward-looking, utopian ideal rather than a fixed or fully achievable reality. He draws his critique from examining “gay pragmatism,” as an assimilationist and present-oriented politics that aims for equality within the terms of existing systems (Muñoz, 2009, p. 21). The vision of queerness as a horizon—a utopian project that is

to emerge in the future—is developed as an alternative to the neoliberal ideas of how “freedom” can be achieved (Muñoz, 2009, p. 32). This perspective positions queerness as an ongoing process of imagining and striving for a world that transcends the constraints of hetero and homonormativity.

The author frames this queerness of futurity as a transformative political project that resists containment within normative timelines. He uses Bloch’s notion of the “not-yet-conscious” that refers to a latent potentiality that points toward a future yet to be realised. Queerness brings a new perspective on temporality in comparison with what Muñoz calls straight time. The latter is conserved in the present and the only future that can be imagined from within this presence is articulated in a series of immediate measurable goals and legislative victories around all kinds of social acceptance of the queer (Muñoz, 2009, p. 22). Through the critique of heteronormative timelines like the conventional rhythms of capitalist productivity and reproductive futurism, the author brings to the fore the notion of queer utopia, beyond being “settled” or “complete” within present systems (Muñoz, 2009, p. 22).

The utopian potential, I would argue, is profoundly fruitful for queer communities because it offers a framework that is inherently anti-normative. Its radical potential lies in its capacity to disrupt existing systems of power, imagine alternatives to oppression, and foster solidarity. This framework will be used in the data analysis to see if some of the TikTok materials are organized by queer “horizontal temporality [that] is a path and a movement to a greater openness to the world” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 25) sidestepping confinement to the normative, usually legal-oriented, goals dictated by state recognition or neoliberal inclusion.

Horizontal temporality steps out of “the linearity of straight time,” that is rooted in heteronormativity, capitalism, and linear progress (Muñoz, 2009, p. 25), while straight time reinforces the narrative that progress is inevitable and that liberation will eventually arrive if marginalised communities conform to normative expectations. Muñoz’s queer horizon opens space for envisioning liberation that transcends the assimilationist narratives used to reinforce violence and systemic inequality. The queer horizon disrupts these narratives by insisting on a future that is not bound by the logic of the present: “The purpose of such temporal maneuvers is to wrest ourselves from the present’s stultifying hold, to know our queerness as a belonging in particularity that is not dictated or organised around the spirit of political impasse that characterizes the present” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 28). It invites oppressed communities to imagine alternatives that are not predicated on conforming to existing systems but on fundamentally transforming them. This perspective is needed in my data analysis in order to see in what kind

of media spaces and how ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ falls into the linear heteronormative timeline and where and how (and if it even can be) a part of horizontal temporality.

One of the significant challenges in applying Muñoz’s framework across diverse contexts is avoiding the universalisation of queer, and lesbian in particular, experience, as LGBTQ+ existence also heavily relies on state regulations and power, and, in current times, not every government is employing homonormativity but actively erases queer existence (Fair Planet, 2024). To address this, the queer horizon must be understood as inherently plural and adaptable. It does not prescribe a single vision of liberation but instead provides a method for imagining futures that are specific to the needs and desires of different communities. While the queer horizon is rooted in futurity, it does not disregard the material realities of the present. Muñoz’s critique of assimilationist politics highlights the importance of resisting co-optation and fighting for structural change, even as we imagine futures beyond the present system. The queer horizon can therefore serve as both a guide for transformative political projects and a critique of present-day strategies that reinforce systemic oppression, where queerness is not an exclusive entity for these utopian imaginations, but an epistemological and ontological tool that can serve as a new way of conceptualising and acting upon life outside of the structures imposed as normalcy.

This conceptual framework finds a compelling parallel in empirical research on digital queer spaces. Claudia Skinner’s dissertation (2023) shows how many queer users gained a deeper understanding of their gender and sexuality through interactions with queer content on the app, sometimes leading to significant personal revelations (Skinner, 2023, p. 62). “Queer TikTok” developed as a distinct online subculture, cultivating a sense of community and shared understanding among queer women and non-binary individuals (Skinner, 2023, p. 27). Creators on the platform actively redefined identity presentation by sharing content that validated queer lives and challenged dominant societal norms, thereby building community resources (Skinner, 2023, p. 12). Ultimately, Skinner posits that TikTok offered these marginalized groups a space not just for identity work and community building, but also for imagining and pursuing “queer utopias” (Skinner, 2023, p. 75).

Taken together, these theoretical and empirical insights provide a foundation for analyzing how the so-called ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ on TikTok may operate not only as a cultural trend, but as a site of queer world-making where alternative futures are imagined, negotiated, and tentatively lived.

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

### 2.1 Lesbian Community and the U.S. ‘Gender Wars’

This section delves into the increasingly precarious position of the lesbian community within the contemporary United States, a landscape shaped by escalating socio-political conflicts broadly termed the “culture wars” (Hunter, 1991). Specifically, it examines how a more recent and intensely focused “war on gender” has emerged as a pivotal battleground within these broader struggles, creating a uniquely challenging environment. The so-called “culture wars” in the United States signify a period of profound societal division, famously articulated by Patrick Buchanan as “a war for the soul of America” during the 1992 Republican National Convention (Hartman, 2015, p. 10). These wars represented clashes between those embracing social changes stemming from the 1960s and those who perceived these shifts as a dangerous departure from traditional American<sup>2</sup> norms (Hartman, 2015, p. 15). James Davison Hunter further characterized this conflict as one where U.S. citizens “most fundamental ideas about who we are as Americans are now at odds,” with the core of political disagreement traceable to matters of moral authority (Hunter, 1991, p. 191).

Within this broader conflict, issues of gender and sexuality became particularly salient and contentious battlegrounds (Hartman, 2015, p. 15) in the 1990s. The feminist and gay rights movements fundamentally challenged “normative America,” upending established sex roles and expectations. This challenge to what many conservatives considered the bedrock of societal order fueled intense backlash, particularly impacting communities, like the lesbian community, whose very existence contests these norms. Debates over abortion, feminism, and homosexuality illustrated the alternative epistemological universes separating the opposing sides, reflecting differing views on life, personhood, and moral authority (Hartman, 2015, p. 159).

These conflicts over gender relations and sexual politics set the stage for an even more focused and expansive “war on gender” in the subsequent decades of the 21st century, creating an environment where lesbian identities, especially those visibly nonconforming, face heightened scrutiny. Judith Butler, in *Who’s Afraid of Gender?* (2024), analyzes how the term “gender” itself has been transformed in the past two decades into a potent and often

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<sup>2</sup> “American” in this instance—and in a few other instances throughout the thesis—is used in accordance with the conceptualisation found in the cited sources (specifically, Hunter and Hartman), where it refers to U.S. citizens. This thesis in general avoids such use of “America” or “American,” as it strives for terminological precision and seeks to acknowledge the broader geographical and cultural scope of the Americas, which encompasses diverse regions and peoples beyond the United States.

contradictory “phantasm” by contemporary anti-gender movements (Butler, 2024, p. 5). This phantasm of “gender” is depicted as a destructive force, variously portrayed as a threat to children, national security, heterosexual marriage, science, religion, and civilization itself. The incoherence of the arguments against “gender” in the 21st century, argues Butler, does not diminish its political efficacy; rather, it allows the anti-gender ideology to consolidate a wide range of anxieties and fears (Butler, 2024, p. 16). This demonization has tangible consequences, fueling policies that restrict freedoms and particularly endanger those whose lives are perceived as inherently “gender deviant,” a category historically and contemporaneously applied to many lesbians (Vicinus, 1993, p. 456).

Crucially, Butler argues that the contemporary “war on gender” extends far beyond concerns about transgender individuals, encompassing a much broader assault against any identity that is seen challenging the heteropatriarchal order, rendering the lesbian community, with its history of diverse gender expressions (Butler, 2024, p. 16).

The anti-gender movement frames gender as a foreign imposition or an alien ideology undermining national identity and traditional values (Butler, 2024, p. 43), resonating with earlier conservative anxieties, such the ones Hartman (2015, p. 15) has pointed out. Butler contends that the intense fear directed at gender serves to displace anxieties from more systemic crises (Butler, 2024, p. 224), making gender and those who embody its perceived transgression—including visibly gender-nonconforming lesbians—convenient scapegoats.

The primary argument by Laura Borchert and Melanie Kreitler in “The Politics of Queer: Interventions in U.S.-American Culture, Media, and Law” highlights the paradox of increasing queer media visibility alongside a growing wave of discriminatory legislation in the context of “gender war” (Borchert & Kreitler, 2024, p. 344). This hostile environment means that visibility for the lesbian community, especially for those who are gender-nonconforming, can trigger conservative opposition and repressive actions (Borchert & Kreitler, 2024). They stress the intersection of politics, media, and law in shaping how queerness—and by extension, lesbian identity—is understood and treated (Borchert & Kreitler, 2024, p. 344).

This interplay of visibility and backlash in the “war on gender” impacting the lesbian community is starkly illustrated by contemporary incidents. For example, in May 2025, a queer couple, both cisgender women, reported being ordered to leave a Boston hotel after a security officer demanded one of the women, Ansley Baker—who was perceived as not conforming to normative femininity—provide identification to “prove” her sex while using the women's restroom (Monteil, 2025). Baker recounted being humiliated and forcibly

confronted (Monteil, 2025). Her partner, Elizabeth Victor, stated they were ejected even after verification, feeling traumatized (Monteil, 2025).

The 2024 U.S. Presidential election cycle featured a pronounced centrality of LGBTQ+ issues, in the national political discourse. This prominence highlights an intense societal debate and strategic political maneuvering on both sides of the campaign. In this politically charged environment, the Democratic and Republican parties demonstrated fundamentally opposing stances. The Democratic Party aimed to solidify its pro-equality position. Its 2024 platform was committed to the “most pro-equality administration in history” and was explicitly opposing bans on gender-affirming care, arguing that the particular decisions should rest with the families and medical professionals (Rauch, 2024). President Biden highlighted his democratic administration's efforts to strengthen LGBTQI+ civil rights, and Vice President Kamala Harris reiterated her commitment to the “freedom to love who you love openly and with pride” (Ballotpedia 2024). This stance marked an ideological evolution, acknowledging the LGBTQ+ electorate's political force although (Rauch, 2024), post-election reports suggested internal Democratic divisions about “reshuffling” approaches to transgender issues, signaling tension between official stances and perceived electoral pragmatism (Mitchell, 2025).

Conversely, the 2024 Republican platform pivoted its focus on an anti-trans politics, largely omitting their key focus on lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals and same-sex marriage in the 2016 elections (Rauch, 2024). The Republican strategy in 2024 employed a rhetoric of moral panic articulated out of claims to “left-wing gender insanity” and “gender indoctrination,” particularly concerning children (Rauch, 2024). The key proposals on their agenda included defunding schools for “gender indoctrination,” banning transgender women from women's sports, and prohibiting taxpayer funding for gender-affirming surgeries (Rauch, 2024). After the inauguration of the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, a “parental rights” narrative was central to the legitimization of a long list of anti-liberal measures (Peters & Woolley, 2024). Project 2025<sup>3</sup> detailed plans to delete “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” from the texts of federal rules (Wendling 2024).

This conservative politicization of transness had tangible consequences. Following Trump's victory, a February 2025 Pew survey showed 71% of LGBTQ+ adults anticipated negative policy impacts on gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals, and 78% expected adverse

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<sup>3</sup> Project 2025 is a comprehensive policy and personnel blueprint developed by conservative groups, led by The Heritage Foundation, aiming to reshape the U.S. federal government along right-wing principles if a Republican president wins in 2025 (Wendling 2024).

impacts on transgender people, as reported by Pew Research Center in “Most LGBTQ adults expect Trump’s policies to affect gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people negatively” (2025). In this new political climate, lesbians faced intersecting vulnerabilities. The “parental rights” narrative and laws like Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill challenged lesbian-led families and fostered hostile school environments (Peters & Woolley, 2024). Conservative definitions of “woman” and Project 2025’s goal to eliminate “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” from legal frameworks pose direct threats (King & Sanatkar, 2025).

Access to TikTok emerged as a significant, multifaceted arena of contestation in the last US presidential elections. Candidate use increased, more so among Democrats (38%) than Republicans (16%) (Gorman, 2024). The platform appeared more receptive to progressive LGBTQ+ viewpoints (Eddy, 2024) but also served as a potent channel for the articulation and perpetuating of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric from conservative influencers like “Libs of TikTok,” who frequently use the “groomer” narrative. This rhetoric, amplified by groups like “Gays Against Groomers,” was linked to real-world harassment (GLAAD, 2024). Republican campaigns contributed to these narratives during the 2024 campaign, reportedly spending nearly \$215 million on anti-transgender ads, positioning “queer” issues at the forefront of political contestation (Schneid, 2024). The polarization heightened the precariousness of LGBTQ+ rights and impacted directly LGBTQ+ well-being.

## 2.2 Approaches to the Selection and Analysis of Media

This research does not center the media products that are discussed as a part of ‘Lesbian Renaissance,’ such as television programs, films, or music videos, but focuses on how they are described, and what effects they are seen to be producing for the lesbian community. That’s why popular media outlets serve as institutionalized platforms that shape and guide the discourse around this cultural phenomena, influencing how audiences perceive and interpret events such as the Lesbian Renaissance. These outlets play a crucial role in framing these events within societal norms and expectations.

The twelve articles collected in the Appendix 1 originate from a diverse spectrum of media outlets, each catering to distinct audiences and potentially contributing their frame of ‘Lesbian Renaissance.’ They are *Dazed*, an alternative style and pop culture magazine which may present the alleged trend within youth culture; *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle UK*, and *Vogue Australia*, major mainstream women’s lifestyle magazines, embedding the discussion within broader cultural and fashion trends; *Her Campus*, a US college-focused online platform,

addressing a younger demographic of college students; *PinkNews*, an influential LGBTQ+-specific media, validating the concept within the community, and *Xtra Magazine*, a Canada-based online LGBTQ platform with significant US readership focusing on culture, politics, health, and relationships; in addition, some general news outlets with varying focuses, namely the London-centric *The Standard* and the UK tabloid *Daily Mail*, which amplifies and potentially sensationalizes the trend of ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ for a mass audience; and the New Zealand’s *Little Umbrella Collective*, a multidisciplinary arts journal, offering critiques from a different geographic and cultural standpoint. The distribution across such varied platforms ensures the permeation of the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ concept among diverse audience segments, shaping its reception and perceived significance.

The corpus includes articles from publications based outside the United States (UK, Australia, NZ, Canada) alongside U.S. outlets. The inclusion of these non-U.S. sources is justified by several key factors that affirm their relevance to understanding the discourse’s impact within the U.S. context. Firstly, several key international publications within the corpus possess substantial readership within the United States. For instance, *Dazed*, with headquarters in New York and London, defines itself as an alternative culture magazine, and identifies the U.S. as a primary audience base alongside the UK and Europe (Dazed Digital, 2008). *PinkNews*, the UK-based LGBTQ+ news outlet, reports that over 60% of its audience resides in the USA<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, *Xtra Magazine*, though based in Canada, reports that 30% of its readership is in the USA (Based on the Website Analysis for April 2025 by SimilarWeb). Furthermore, outlets like *Elle UK* and *Vogue Australia* belong to global media brands with significant reach into the North American market. Consequently, the discourse presented in these non-U.S. publications actively contributes to the media landscape consumed by U.S.-based audiences, directly influencing the conversation within this local sociopolitical context.

Secondly, the articles in the sample exemplify the transnational nature of contemporary media discourse, particularly within the Anglophone world. Fueled by digital distribution and social media, cultural trends and narratives readily traverse national borders, especially across ones where the language of communication is English. The consistent deployment of the term ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ across US, UK, Australian, NZ, and Canadian media publications signifies participation in a shared, interconnected conversation in the Global North around the concept. Therefore, incorporating this international perspective

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<sup>4</sup> “The United States has played a pivotal role in the publisher’s expansion, with American readers and viewers making up more than 60% of PinkNews’ audience” (Oakes 2023).

provides a more comprehensive understanding of the broader discourse as it resonates and is interpreted within the U.S., reflecting how the U.S. culture is discussed both domestically and internationally.

Additionally, to investigate lesbian cultural production in the USA during 2024 operating outside the mainstream ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ narrative, a multi-faceted data collection strategy was employed. This primarily involved systematic online searches using a variety of search engines, targeting keywords related to independent and community-focused lesbian cultural activities across different domains. Search queries included terms such as “independent lesbian film,” “queer film festivals,” “lesbian art exhibitions alternative space,” “lesbian zines,” “underground lesbian music,” “DIY lesbian bands,” and “drag king events, always adding “2024, USA” to each query. This approach was supplemented by targeted explorations of specific online platforms known for hosting independent creators and niche communities, such as *Bandcamp*, *SoundCloud*, digital archives like the *Queer Zine Archive Project* (QZAP), and the websites of LGBTQ+ community centers and alternative art venues. It should be noted that the primary aim of this data is not to provide an exhaustive census of all marginalized lesbian cultural activities in 2024 (that’s why it hasn’t been collected additionally into a table like primary data), but rather to furnish illustrative examples that demonstrate the existence and nature of cultural production beyond the commercially-driven products visible in the mainstream.

Finally, the content analysis of these media outlets reveals an overwhelming focus on the U.S. popular culture across the entire corpus, making the collected articles relevant sources for understanding how the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse manifests, particularly concerning its impact and interpretation within the United States. Regardless of the publications’ origin, discussions frequently center on North American artists such as Chappell Roan, Billie Eilish, and Reneé Rapp; USA-produced films like *Drive Away Dolls* (2024), *Bottoms* (2023) and *Love Lies Bleeding* (2024); and major American cultural events including Coachella<sup>5</sup>, Lollapalooza<sup>6</sup>, and Gov Ball<sup>7</sup>. This U.S.-centred gaze anchors the discourse firmly within its cultural production. While there are slight divergences in non-U.S. publications, they tend to be geographically specific examples rather than a fundamental difference in the

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<sup>5</sup> Coachella is a large annual music and arts festival held in Indio, California. It features performances by major artists across genres like pop, rock, hip-hop, and electronic music, alongside art installations and fashion. It’s known for its cultural influence and attracts global attention (Britannica, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Lollapalooza is a major annual music festival featuring a wide range of genres including rock, hip-hop, pop, and electronic. It originated in the U.S. and now has international editions, known for its diverse lineup, large crowds, and cultural impact (Britannica 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Gov Ball is a major multi-day summer music festival featuring a mix of pop, indie, hip-hop, alternative, and electronic acts held in New York City, USA (Culgan, 2023).

events and figures mentioned in the discourse. For instance, articles from the UK place notable emphasis on the BBC reality show *I Kissed A Girl* (2024) (Balanesco, 2024, *Dazed*; Wilkinson, 2024, *Elle*) and specific London lesbian bars like La Camionera (Hunt, 2024, *The Standard*), or discuss London Fashion Week trends (Van Dyke, 2024, *Dazed*). Similarly, the New Zealand article uniquely incorporates local context, such as referencing the takatāpui community (Kennedy, 2023, *Little Umbrella Collective*). These variations add local context or color but do not substantially shift the overall focus on the U.S.-centric cultural events and figures when producing the meaning of 'Lesbian Renaissance' across the corpus. Therefore, these articles collectively may serve as primary sources for analyzing this discourse.

In the next step of analysis it is imperative to situate it within the prevailing socio-political currents of the highly polarized United States, as it was established in the previous section. To achieve this, the methodological framework should be extended to examine the reception—whether through direct engagement or notable omission—of specific cultural elements associated with the 'Lesbian Renaissance' (as identified in the primary data) within conservative and Make America Great Again (MAGA) aligned media. This approach is crucial because the initial media coverage defining the 'Lesbian Renaissance' predominantly originates from left-leaning outlets, necessitating an analysis of how these cultural elements are perceived in contrasting ideological spheres.

The primary research interest lies *not* in how conservative media directly addresses the concept of a 'Lesbian Renaissance' itself—a term whose currency within such circles is presumed to be limited—but rather in how these media outlets and their audiences engage with, or ignore, specific cultural products and public figures that have been identified by mainstream and other commentators as central to this perceived phenomenon.

The initial phase of data collection involved a comprehensive global internet search. This search was designed to detect any form of right-wing commentary or reaction related to the discrete cultural items and personalities frequently cited in discussions of the 'Lesbian Renaissance.' The search parameters specifically included the names of artists such as Chappell Roan, Billie Eilish, and Renee Rapp; cinematic releases like *Bottoms* (2023), *Drive Away Dolls* (2024) and *Love Lies Bleeding* (2024); and television programs such as *The Ultimatum: Queer Love* (2023). These specific entities were selected based on their consistent foregrounding in external analyses defining the 'Lesbian Renaissance' (Appendix 1). The aim was to cast a wide net for any discernible conservative or MAGA-aligned responses to these individual cultural productions or figures, irrespective of the media source's prominence.

However, this initial broad-spectrum search for diffuse right-wing commentary on these specific cultural elements during 2024 did not yield substantial or patterned results. Consequently, a more focused, second phase of data collection was implemented. This subsequent step concentrated specifically on prominent and influential conservative and MAGA-aligned media organizations. The core objective here was to ascertain whether these particular high-profile platforms—including, but not limited to, *Fox News*, *Breitbart News*, *The Daily Wire*, *One America News Network* (OANN), and *Newsmax*—provided any coverage, discussion, or significant mention of the aforementioned cultural products and figures. To ensure a systematic and transparent classification of the selected media outlets as right-leaning, I used the AllSides Media Bias Chart. AllSides provides a widely recognized framework for evaluating political bias in the media (2019). Their methodology for assigning bias ratings (e.g., Left, Lean Left, Center, Lean Right, Right) is multi-faceted, incorporating several distinct approaches to achieve a balanced assessment.<sup>8</sup>

Searching through the key right-wing media outlets to determine the extent and nature of their engagement (or lack thereof) with cultural products or figures linked to ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ and allows for an assessment of how they are received, framed, or omitted within influential conservative discursive spaces.

Overall, this approach to data selection and analysis will help to not only look into how ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ is framed within left-wing and queer-friendly outlets and how they construct the discourse around this cultural moment, but also situate its emergence and reception within the broader discourse of a polarized U.S. society.

### 2.3 Approaches and Limitations of the Analysis of TikTok Content

The selection of TikTok as the primary data source for this investigation is deliberate. Social media platforms increasingly function as crucial arenas for the shaping of contemporary cultural trends and the facilitation of community formation. TikTok, in particular, stands out as a significant locus for the genesis and negotiation of such cultural phenomena (Skinner, 2023; Çömezoğlu et al., 2024). Its capacity to host distinct online communities and discourse networks, primarily through features like hashtags, alongside the rich multimodal nature of its

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<sup>8</sup> This includes conducting blind bias surveys where participants from across the political spectrum rate content without knowing the source outlet. Furthermore, it employs a multipartisan editorial review process, where a politically diverse team analyzes news reporting for various indicators of bias. Their system also integrates community feedback and references other third-party analyses, aiming to provide a robust and nuanced evaluation of media positioning. The consistent classification of the mentioned outlets within the “Right” or “Lean Right” categories by AllSides affirms their selection as representative sources for analyzing conservative and MAGA-aligned discourse (AllSides, 2019)

user-generated content (UGC), combining visual, textual, and auditory elements of signification, renders the platform exceptionally suitable for in-depth qualitative analysis (Skinner, 2023; Çömezoğlu et al., 2024).

My approach to data collection was significantly shaped by an understanding of TikTok's algorithmic architecture and its profound influence on content visibility, an aspect thoroughly explored by contemporary research (Çömezoğlu et al., 2024, p. 5). It should be acknowledged that most of the recent scholarship is mostly focused on TikTok's data practices from the perspective of potential privacy implications, user consent, algorithmic manipulation, and societal changes (Çömezoğlu et al., 2024; Clario, 2024; Zulkifli, 2022; Grandinetti & Bruinsma, 2023), and the findings of these research contribute to understanding that TikTok as a medium poses a challenge on how the data published by users should be accurately collected and studied, as the platform employs “sophisticated data mining, predictive analytics, and trend prediction techniques” to shape user experiences (Çömezoğlu et al., 2024, p.3), therefore, the researcher's experience as well. In this light, I designed a methodical data collection strategy of TikTok videos, intended to navigate these algorithmic influences and secure a dataset of maximal feasible representativeness for the subsequent analysis.

The first thing that should be mentioned here is that TikTok as a platform itself acknowledged ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ significance by curating a dedicated discover page for “#lesbianrenaissance,” gathering 74.8M posts and framed it as a “vibrant resurgence of lesbian art and culture” exerting an influence on mainstream society (Figure 1 & 2), underscoring the scholarly imperative for its examination, while also reinforcing the platform's role in the reiteration and promotion of the discourse. However, this curated discover page was last accessible on April 28th, 2025, and was subsequently removed; it is no longer available online. Despite the removal of the dedicated page, platform searches for the “#lesbianrenaissance” hashtag and related terms continue to yield thousands of videos, which now collectively function as an archive rather than an actively platform-promoted, ongoing trend.

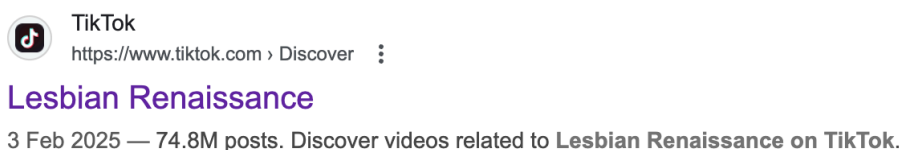


Figure 1. TikTok's Discover page for the 'Lesbian Renaissance,' indicating 74.8M related posts, as presented in a Google Search result

## Lesbian Renaissance ▲



Discover the vibrant resurgence of lesbian art and culture, celebrating the lesbian renaissance and the impact on mainstream society! lesbian renaissance art movement, resurgence of lesbian culture, impact of lesbian renaissance

Last updated 2025-04-28

Figure 2. Screenshot of the TikTok 'Lesbian Renaissance' Discover page, detailing the platform's own heading, descriptive summary, and last update date.

The empirical data was collected from June to December 2024. Each month, I collected three to four videos appearing under the hashtag “#lesbianrenaissance,” as well as through general searches for “lesbian renaissance” and “#sapphicrenaissance.” My initial explorations during the first two months indicated minimal differences in search results across these terms daily and weekly, leading to my decision to perform a monthly data collection. This approach was further necessitated by TikTok's algorithmic structure, which tends to display less directly relevant content beyond the initial few search results (first 3-4 posts), a characteristic confirmed during preliminary search attempts.

Regarding the geographical distribution of the data, I deployed a Virtual Private Network (VPN) address to assess potential variations in search results, as TikTok collects this as my personal user data (Çömezoğlu et al., 2024, p. 2). A predominant pattern emerged wherein most creators engaging with the hashtag appeared to be based in the USA, UK, or Canada, and their content frequently referenced cultural events and figures from the U.S. (Appendix 2).

As a result, a dataset of 25 videos from 22 distinct creators was compiled – disregarding some overlaps in video appearances across the seven months. It was collected in Appendix 2, including the information about the authors of the videos, captions, video description and a full transcription where needed.

Furthermore, I considered co-occurring hashtags within those TikTok posts, such as #lesbian, #wlw (women loving women), #lesbiansoftiktok, #queer, #lgbtq, and #sapphic. The strategic inclusion of these co-occurring hashtags, alongside broader 'Lesbian Renaissance' searches, proved essential for identifying videos that contributed to the discourse beyond explicit mentions of this cultural moment, thereby revealing how the discourse itself was expanded and directly shaped. The complete dataset of videos informing this analysis is collected in Appendix 3 with six more illustrative video selections.

Another limitation inherent to the platform and the chosen methodology of data collection must be acknowledged: TikTok's algorithmic content curation inevitably influences the visibility of posts, potentially introducing a bias in the sample towards contents prioritized by the platform. Furthermore, the very volume of the hashtag content within the limitations of a master thesis necessitated a purposeful sampling, resulting in a case study rather than an exhaustive representative study. Finally, the ephemeral nature of social media content as part of platforms' 'big data' also presents challenges for longitudinal consistency and replicability (Zeffiro, 2019, p. 3).

## **2.4 Critical Discourse Analysis: Exposing the Ideological Work Performed by Texts**

This thesis adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as developed by Norman Fairclough (2003) for its primary methodological framework to investigate the multifaceted meaning of 'Lesbian Renaissance,' analyzing its articulation and contestation within contemporary popular media outlets and the digital media space of TikTok. This methodology facilitates a critical examination of how language functions not merely as a tool for communication but as a social practice that actively constitutes identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and beliefs (Fairclough, 2003, p. 24; van Dijk, 2015, p. 467) caught at the intersection of multiple relations of power. The core objective is to move beyond the interpretations of 'Lesbian Renaissance' articulated as naturally a moment of visibility win and uncover, instead, the underlying power dynamics, ideological constructions, and the ambiguous implications of the popular cultural visibility for lesbian communities in the current socio-political and digital landscape.

The main tenet of CDA is that texts are an integral part of social events, which are themselves shaped by broader social-cultural practices and, ultimately, by social structures of power relations (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 21–23). This means that the meaning of any particular concept is emergent and relational in the sense that it is negotiated between social actors according to conventional logics that are effects of power relations. In this research, the analysis is focused on the concept 'Lesbian Renaissance' in the center of a particular popular cultural discourse produced and reproduced in specific media articles published in 2024 and its circulation in user-generated content on TikTok in the same period, which are conceptualized as a series of interconnected social events in the field of the (social) media. The thesis studies the social practices of media production in two moves. First, the analysis is concerned with the ways mainstream pop culture outlets construct, frame, and disseminate

narratives about a ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ in the Global North, celebrating it as a straightforward “visibility win.” Second, it investigates the ways the online media community of lesbian creators engage with the concept on TikTok, exploring how much the users embrace the dominant discourse or articulate, negotiate a potentially resisting meaning, problematizing the ideological investments of ‘visibility,’ which will result in making structural inequalities across the various lesbian groups seeable. Ultimately, my aim is to focus on how the discourse of lesbian renaissance contributes to the establishment and maintenance of hegemony, or alternatively, offers avenues for counter-hegemonic discourses of struggle (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2015). CDA, is particularly relevant for my research as it is concerned with addressing social problems of inequality from the perspective of the relatively dispossessed (van Dijk, 2015, p. 467), such as the ideological limits of a selective visibility that masks inequalities or ways of understanding of lesbianness according to the celebratory logic of the dominant discourse of commodification.

To deconstruct these complex dynamics, the analysis centers on Fairclough's concept of “orders of discourse” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 24) understood as the structured networks of social practices in their linguistic dimensions of meaning making that govern how the articulation of “Lesbian Renaissance” is re/presented in the chosen media outlets. An order of discourse encompasses three distinct but interrelated elements, in my case the discourse of Lesbian Renaissance articulated in popular media outlets and in the field of digital social media, more specifically TikTok. The three constituent elements of any discourse are: actual “discourses” (particular ways of representing social reality), “genres” (conventionalized ways of interacting through language), and “styles” (linguistic means of enacting social identities) (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 24-26). These components function to privilege certain linguistic and representational choices while marginalizing others, thereby shaping and controlling the range of linguistic variation permissible within specific societal domains, such as the institution of the media (Fairclough, 2003, p. 24). This study investigates how this “social organization and control of linguistic variation” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 24) concerning the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ is enacted and recontextualized on TikTok. I shall first analyze my data from mainstream popular cultural media in Chapter 3 to explore what genres the particular media outlets utilize when making a claim to the unprecedented existence of a ‘lesbian renaissance’, such as news reports, cultural commentary, and opinion pieces (Fairclough, 2003, p. 26), which can enact a form of cultural gatekeeping through their established status. These genres have acquired the meaning of ‘defining the meaning of a given concept’, hence when they conceptualize the phenomenon through the frame of celebrity success and market viability, it

endorses market values as naturally desirable. Subsequently, I will analyze the expressions found on TikTok in Chapter 5. This social media platform is characterized by a wider array of genres, including personal testimonies, music-driven trends, critical analyses, and promotional content (Fairclough, 2003, p. 26). They are more heterogeneous and affectively charged expressions, while potentially fostering a sense of self-worth and recognition and circulating alternative knowledge challenging the logic of commodification. I am going to do that in order to critically assess how such social actions and knowledges might challenge existing power structures while partially being implicated in the platform-specific dynamics of the dominant ideological negotiation. I shall consider the role of algorithms in shaping access to videos on ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ as a form of discursive control.

Central to this methodological approach is the analysis of specific ways of representing (Fairclough, 2003, p. 26) the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ and lesbian identity more broadly, which means the exploration of the perspective or framing of the concept. I shall identify and critically examine competing discourses, such as the pervasive discourse of “visibility as inherent progress” in mainstream media coverage. I shall juxtapose it with other potential discourses emerging from the TikTok data, to see if there is any that critiques the commodification of lesbian identity and highlights the exclusionary structures of normative visibility. The stake of my analysis lies in the fact that discourses are understood not just as abstract ways of talking, but as forces actively shaping “the material world, of other social practices, reflexive self-representations of the practice in question” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 26). Finally, CDA analysis considers styles as “ways of being” or the “discoursal aspect” of social and personal identities (Fairclough, 2003, p. 26). Consequently, I shall examine the more formal styles of the media outlets and their authors as well as the diverse, often more personal and informal styles adopted by TikTok creators and their contribution to the articulation of particular lesbian identities and subjectivities.

As in CDA meanings are argued to be heterogeneous, articulated out of said and unsaid elements of meaning (Fairclough, 2003, p. 40) I shall also analyze assumptions to explore their significant ideological role as what is “unsaid, but taken as given” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 40) may result in naturalizing unequal relations of power. For instance, the assumption that increased popular cultural visibility of lesbian popular cultural artists automatically translates to improved material conditions or social acceptance for all lesbians is one of the key ideological components celebrating commodification that this thesis exposes. Simultaneously, the process of recontextualization, “the appropriation of elements of one social practice within another, placing the former within the context of the latter, and

transforming it in particular ways in the process” (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 32-33) is also relevant for me to understand how the mainstream discourse is recontextualized on TikTok and what changes this may result in.

Furthermore, Fairclough's approach provides tools not only for examining what is explicitly stated in texts but also for interrogating what is significantly absent, and how these absences contribute to the construction of meaning and the performance of ideological work (Fairclough, 2003, p. 37). The “significant absences” are not neutral or accidental but are often strategic, reflecting how texts navigate or conform to dominant social norms and political pressures - such as the conspicuous omission or downplaying of Chappell Roan's overt engagement with drag performance in many mainstream media portrayals of her role within this renaissance (see Section 3.4 for its analysis). Given the intense politicization of drag within the contemporary “war on gender” (Kennicott, 2025), analyzing this absence allows for an interpretation of this omission as a discursive strategy of homonormativity. By scrutinizing such absences, the methodology aims to expose how the media texts might inadvertently or deliberately reinforce dominant ideologies and contribute to a selective, and potentially sanitized, visibility that characterizes the mainstream narrative of the ‘Lesbian Renaissance,’ ultimately revealing how normative pressures shape representations even in moments of apparent cultural celebration. As a result, the analysis bridges the “micro-level” of specific textual features and interactions with the “macro-level” of societal power structures and inequalities (van Dijk, 2015, p. 468), demonstrating how everyday discursive practices surrounding ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ are implicated in the broader reproduction or contestation of social norms related to gender and sexuality.

### 3. 'LESBIAN RENAISSANCE' ARTICULATED IN POP MEDIA OUTLETS

#### 3.1 Introduction

The term 'Lesbian Renaissance' emerged in 2024 as a descriptor for a perceived resurgence of lesbian visibility and representation across various cultural industries, including music, television, film, and social media in predominantly—though not exclusively—U.S. popular culture (Balanesu, 2024, *Dazed*). This cultural moment is marked by the mainstream success of openly lesbian artists, musicians, and creators as well as the proliferation of lesbian narratives in popular media, referencing the rise in popularity of artists like Chappell Roan, Billie Eilish, and Reneé Rapp, alongside the release of films such as *Drive-Away Dolls* (2024), *Bottoms* (2023) and *Love Lies Bleeding* (2024), and reality shows like BBC's *I Kissed a Girl* (2024) and Netflix's *The Ultimatum: Queer Love* (2024) (Balanesu, 2024, *Dazed*). The prevailing shared stance on this alleged renaissance across the various pop media outlets (Appendix 1) can be summarized as follows: although queer women have long been part of the cultural landscape, the recognition and representation they are receiving in 2024 is more significant than ever.

This chapter undertakes a critical discourse analysis of how the meaning of 'Lesbian Renaissance' is articulated in the corpus of the twelve articles from diverse popular media outlets (Appendix 1) in their reflections on different media genres—specifically popular music, television series, feature films, and fashion..

My central aim is to explore the network of meanings of 'Lesbian Renaissance,' paying particular attention to the tension between the dominant narrative celebrating heightened visibility as inherently indexing 'progress,' and the critiques and ambiguities embedded within this framing. Adopting the framework of critical discourse analysis, primarily informed by Fairclough (2003, pp. 25–29), I am examining the interplay of genres (how media formats shape the message), competing discourses (different ways of representing lesbianism, visibility, and success), and styles (constructions of identity for figures discussed and implied audiences). Crucially, the analysis will investigate intertextuality (how various texts reference and dialogue with one another) and assumptions (taken-for-granted ideas) to uncover shared narratives and potential ideological underpinnings that shape the discourse of 'Lesbian Renaissance' (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 39–55).

The analysis will be focused on the examination of how queer visibility functions within consumer culture, exposing the material realities obscured and the ways of welcoming lesbians primarily as consumer subjects (Hennessy, 1994). Furthermore, it will also explore

the extent to which the kind of visibility celebrated aligns with, rather than challenges, dominant heteronormative institutions (Duggan, 2002), pointing out how these representations contribute to a post-queer sensibility—often through figures of the ‘lesbian normal’ (Smith & Tyler, 2017, p. 315). Finally, the chapter will situate this media discourse within the broader, polarized socio-political landscape of the contemporary United States. I will consider how (much) the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse constructed in mainstream popular media interacts with, is received by, or positioned relative to the specific dynamics of the ongoing “culture wars” (Hunter, 1991).

### 3.2 Media Outlets Contextualised

The twelve articles I have collected (Appendix 1) originate from a diverse range of online publications, both in terms of the location and genre of the media outlets (see section 2.2). To fully grasp the nuances of this discourse, it’s important to consider its origins. Understanding the genre of the publications disseminating these articles—their typical audiences, editorial stances, and reach, along with the potential perspectives of the authors—provides crucial context. This background helps reveal potential motivations or biases, clarifies how the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ narrative might be framed differently across platforms, and illuminates how the circumstances of its production shape the discourse’s meaning and potential impact, particularly within the U.S. political landscape of 2024.

The analysis of the actual location/the column of the twelve articles were published within their respective outlets reveals a significant pattern. The discussions surrounding the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ appear predominantly within columns dedicated to “Life & Culture” (*Dazed*; *Elle UK*; *Her Campus*), “Fashion” (*Dazed*), “Celebrities & Entertainment” (*Cosmopolitan*; *Her Campus*), “Identity” (*PinkNews*), “Going Out” (*The Standard*), “Femail” (*Daily Mail*), “Culture/Features” (*Vogue Australia*), “Articles & Essays” (*Little Umbrella Collective*), and “Culture/Rainbow Rewind” (*Xtra Magazine*). The consistent placement of the articles within these cultural, lifestyle, and entertainment frames, rather than in news or explicitly political columns, constructs the phenomenon primarily as a matter of cultural significance speaking to a reader interested in being ‘in the knowing’ of changes, trends, and key figures in popular culture. This framing positions the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ not as a marginal topic but as a noteworthy fact of development within the mainstream cultural landscape, while embedding it within everyday discussions of popular music, film, fashion, and social life, thus legitimizing it as a topic worthy of consideration.

The authorship of these articles further contributes to the discourse's multifaceted nature. Contributors range from specialized culture critics (e.g., Miriam Balanescu, Isobel Van Dyke, El Hunt), staff writers for major platforms (e.g., Samantha Olson, Alice Wade), and editors/critics focusing on cultural trends (e.g., Anna Govert), to journalists focusing specifically on LGBTQ+ issues (e.g., Emily Maskell) and student writers (e.g., Healey Kohn, Joanne Joseph). Notably, some authors bring an explicit personal perspective, identifying as lesbian or woman who date women (e.g., Sophie Wilkinson, Ella O'Keeffe), lending experiential authority to their analyses. This diversity in authorship yields a range of perspectives, from celebratory affirmations amplifying the "renaissance" narrative (e.g., Balanescu, Maskell) to critical interrogations questioning the term itself, highlighting historical precedents, noting the limitations of current representation, emphasizing the persistence of lesbophobia, or exploring more complex and potentially 'toxic' dynamics within representation (e.g., Olson, Kohn, O'Keeffe, Wilkinson, Govert). Understanding these varied authorial positions and the editorial contexts of the publications is indispensable for deconstructing how the 'Lesbian Renaissance' is being framed and interpreted within contemporary media.

The diverse authorial perspectives—ranging from cultural critics and staff writers to LGBTQ+-focused journalists, some self-identified lesbians providing experiential accounts, and student writers (Appendix 1)—enrich the discourse with varied nuances and levels of critique. However, these contributions largely operate within the established generic frames and the dominant U.S. centric cultural focus. This convergence is further solidified by the imagined readership of the publications, which primarily target young, female, and/or queer audiences interested in consuming popular culture (evident in outlets like *Dazed*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle UK*, *Her Campus*, *PinkNews*, *Xtra Magazine*), who are likely situated within a broadly progressive or left-leaning political sensibility when it comes to sexual politics. The framing of 'Lesbian Renaissance' primarily within cultural genres of lifestyle, entertainment, fashion is therefore particularly impactful for this demographic. Far from being apolitical, this cultural discourse actively shapes political understanding and subjectivity for young, left-leaning audiences. For this group, cultural representation often functions as a primary site for identity validation, normalization, and gauging social progress regarding LGBTQ+ rights (Daniel Mendelsohn, quoted in Steven Seidman, 2004, p. 1). Seeing lesbian visibility celebrated within familiar cultural contexts—music charts, popular TV shows, fashion trends—can foster feelings of inclusion and affirm lesbian identity as part of the

contemporary social fabric, influencing attitudes and bolstering LGBTQ+ equality as a political value (Steven Seidman, 2004; Smith & Tyler, 2017).

Engaging with these cultural narratives, presented by seemingly aligned media sources, becomes a significant mode of political engagement for this audience. The media discourse shapes how they understand the possibilities and pitfalls of visibility politics, informs their critiques of mainstream culture, and contributes to their developing political consciousness regarding queer issues. The discourse, therefore, does important political work by defining the terms through which progress is to be understood and debated within these influential cultural spheres. The alignment between authorial positioning, generic conventions, and an imaginary readership of relatively specific, left-leaning audience demographic reinforces the construction of ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ as a significant cultural event with tangible political implications, understood and debated primarily through the lenses of representation, identity politics, and mainstream visibility prevalent within these interconnected Anglophone media circles.

### **3.3 Lesbian Renaissance as a “Visibility Win”**

The phenomenon referred to as the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ is not merely presented as a popular cultural fact; it is saturated with values that vary according to how media outlets frame and interpret this moment. Therefore, in this section, I want to analyze the perspective from which the concept is interpreted and gets its meaning, specifically in relation to popular music, television series, and film. I will conduct a critical discourse analysis to explore the framing of lesbian visibility as progress, while also paying attention to the differences and possible critiques of this visibility present within the discourse. I will analyze these representations through the critical lenses of ideology critique, commodity culture, and homonormativity to understand the broader social and political implications of the visibility on offer in mainstream popular media.

The analysis will attend to the intertextuality of the articles (how texts draw upon, incorporate, and dialogue with other texts) and the assumptions at work (what is taken as given or ‘unsaid’) (Fairclough, 2003, p. 39). Assumptions are particularly important here as they often carry ideological weight, constructing a ‘common ground’ that can serve to maintain existing unequal power relations and even represent them as desirable (Fairclough, 2003, p. 55). This analysis aims to uncover the network of meanings constitutive of the

‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse, shaped by the social structures of commodity culture controlling the representational practices of the media outlets (Fairclough, 2003, p. 24).

Before that, it is important to note that the tendency in media outlets to categorize figures and their cultural products (like, Billie Eilish and her song “Lunch”) and movie characters under the umbrella of a “lesbian” renaissance, despite potential ambiguities or lack of explicit self-identification by these individuals/characters as “lesbian,” significantly complicates the very notion of such a renaissance by potentially imposing a monosexual framework that overlooks plurisexual identities (Bollas, 2023, p. 441). This practice risks obscuring the complexities of individual sexual experiences, a concern central to Bollas’s (2023) discussion of “hegemonic monosexuality” which critiques the discursively produced demarcation between sexualities (p. 442). The assumption of a definitive lesbian identity, without acknowledging the possibility of bisexuality or other plurisexual identifications (while still using interchangeably “lesbian” and “queer women” in every article in the data sample), can be interpreted as a manifestation of “monosexism,” the stigmatizing attitudes held by both heterosexual and homosexual individuals towards “non-monosexual” people (Bollas, 2023, p. 441, citing Roberts et al., 2015). Consequently, a “lesbian” renaissance narrative that uncritically applies the lesbian label might inadvertently perpetuate an ontology where “monosexuality is not only normative, compulsory, or dominant,” but one that “does not even allow room for deviating from monosexuality” (Bollas, 2023, p. 443), thus failing to capture the potential diversity of sexual expression among the artists and characters it seeks to celebrate.

Across the diverse media genres represented in the data, a dominant narrative emerges: the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ of 2024 signifies an unprecedented and positive surge in the visibility and mainstream acceptance of lesbian figures, themes, and aesthetics. This celebratory framing aligns with the historical trajectory of lesbian and gay politics, which, as Rosemary Hennessy notes, “has had to combat the heteronormative tyranny of the empirical in order to claim a public existence at all” (Hennessy, 1994, p. 31). The sheer volume of representation highlighted appears, on the surface, to fulfill the desire “to feel that media validation, to feel that we were visible,” a hunger articulated by earlier generations (Daniel Mendelsohn, quoted in Seidman, 2004, p. 1). This moment is frequently framed as a triumphant arrival, a “sapphic tsunami” (Maskell, 2024, *PinkNews*), where lesbian identities are no longer confined to the margins but are actively shaping, and integrating into, popular culture.

The music industry is repeatedly cited as central to this phenomenon. Queer female musicians and what is considered to be openly “lesbian” work are gaining “unprecedented visibility” in mainstream pop culture. For example, Chappell Roan, who is referred to as “pop’s new girl of the moment,” is argued to have become a prominent figure in this renaissance (Balanesescu, 2024, *Dazed*). The articles frame Roan’s success—fueled by a “raunchy, camp aesthetic” and songs exploring compulsory heterosexuality like “Good Luck, Babe!” (Balanesescu, 2024, *Dazed*; O’Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*; Joseph, 2024, *Her Campus*)—as indicative of a broader cultural moment where lesbian artists can carve out mainstream success, a trajectory that was, as claimed, “unthinkable” just a few years ago (Balanesescu, 2024, *Dazed*).

Roan’s embrace of this camp aesthetics while achieving mainstream success, exemplifies the complex negotiation of queer styles within commodity culture; while potentially disruptive, such aesthetics can also be readily absorbed and marketed, becoming part of the ‘lifestyle’ packaging of identity (Hennessy, 1994, p. 57). Notably enough, in the whole corpus of articles, Chappell Roan has never been named as a drag queen as she calls herself (Sim, 2024), except for a passing mention in *Cosmopolitan* as “outfitted in her signature drag-inspired style,” (Olson, 2024), a phrase that does not fully portray her to be indeed a drag queen.

Chappell Roan’s ability to captivate huge festival crowds with openly “queer performances” is presented as a symbolic cultural shift where lesbian identities integrate into mainstream music culture (O’Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*; Balanesescu, 2024, *Dazed*). This moment is hailed for the alleged break-through in that artists openly expressing sapphic themes are no longer marginalized or erased (Kennedy, 2023, *Little Umbrella Collective*). At the same time, the articles fail to recognise drag within those artistic expressions, signalling that the focus on representation of the “marginalised” is reconfigured and limited to what can keep the focus on the “palatable,” namely, lesbian–queer figures that and as such can be brought to the mainstream and framed as a “win.” In the context of the U.S. “gender wars” this framing of the musician figure is important. It can promote the particular lesbian presentation of commodification that can be uplifted in the articles gathered in the data, while downplaying drag to something as “aesthetic” if at all, rather than discussing it as a matter of identity beyond the stage. Although Roan’s drag performance is made visible but not made seeable as the artist’s sense of self, made non-desirable and meaningful (Hennessy, 1994, p. 49). This strategic differentiation reveals political tension between her drag visibility and unseeability within the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse, suggesting a potential media inclination to

present a version of this renaissance and of prominent figures within it, that aligns more comfortably with normative and perhaps less controversial depictions of lesbian identity, thereby sidestepping direct confrontation with a highly polarized aspect of current socio-political discourse.

Similarly, Billie Eilish's single entitled "Lunch" (2024), openly addressing queer sexual experiences, is named as a major sapphic milestone. Eilish, a global superstar, is claimed to blur the line between mainstream pop and queer representation, proving that queer narratives are becoming more acceptable and celebrated at the highest levels (O'Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*; Balanescu, 2024, *Dazed*). The widespread acceptance allegedly signals a shift where sapphic love is no longer confined to niche genres (O'Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*). The framing of Eilish's hit song as proof that "queer narratives are becoming more acceptable and celebrated" reflects a collapse the meaning of 'queer' into 'lesbia,' while also shifting the discourse towards what Steven Seidman terms the normalization of gay identity I within popular culture, where LGBTQ+ figures "step forward as 'normal' human beings" deserving recognition (Seidman, 2004, p. 13).

The presence of other artists like Renée Rapp, Muna, and the celebration of established figures like Tracy Chapman further cement the idea that queer music and lesbian identities are now integral to the musical zeitgeist (O'Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*; Maskell, 2024, *PinkNews*; Joseph, 2024, *Her Campus*). As Maskell states, these artists are "proving queer women know how to get you dancing... and perhaps crying" (Maskell, 2024, *PinkNews*). This prominence marks an alleged departure from the industry's tendency to suppress queer identities (Balanescu, 2024, *Dazed*). The success of independent artists like Boygenius and Muna attempts to underscore how 'Lesbian Renaissance' is propelled by both artists and growing audience demand, allegedly indicating a change where queer artists shape music culture rather than being seen as a niche market (Maskell, 2024, *PinkNews*; Balanescu, 2024, *Dazed*). Queer women artists are claimed to be "actively reshaping what mainstream pop culture looks like" (Maskell, 2024, *PinkNews*). The success of artists like Muna after being dropped by major labels, alongside the rise of figures like Roan, as framed, speaks to the potential for queer artists to navigate or bypass traditional industry constraints, while this independence often still operates within the broader logic of the culture market, where visibility itself becomes a valuable commodity (Hennessy, 1994, p. 32).

Television programs are similarly depicted as embracing lesbian subjectivity, particularly through reality shows and scripted dramas. BBC's *I Kissed a Girl* (2024), the first reality dating show exclusively featuring lesbian women, is highlighted, with ratings

“significantly higher than its all-male predecessor” (Balanesu, 2024, *Dazed*). Its success is presented as a moment that showcases lesbian love openly celebrated, featuring “relatable femmes and butches finally doing what we’ve seen the straights do for decades now” (Wilkinson, 2024, *Elle*). Presenting lesbian relationships within the familiar, mainstream genre of the reality dating show, featuring “relatable femmes and butches,” however, functions to normalize lesbian experience by aligning it with established heteronormative formats and further, expected family building and domesticity (Smith & Tyler, 2017; Duggan, 2002), which derives from the aims of “straight” dating predecesing shows.

In some articles it is noted that this mainstream framing marks a departure from tragic or hypersexualized portrayals, instead presenting lesbian relationships as normal and relatable (Balanesu, 2024, *Dazed*; O’Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*; Wade, 2024, *Daily Mail*). The show’s popularity, confirmed by a second season commission (Maskell, 2024, *PinkNews*), is seen to underscore media recognition that lesbian relationships resonate with audiences starved for visibility (Balanesu, 2024, *Dazed*). Shows like *The Ultimatum: Queer Love* (2023) and *The L Word: Generation Q* (2019-2023) are also mentioned for featuring diverse queer casts and avoiding stereotypes, emphasizing “joy,” “personal growth,” and “the complexity of queer identities” (Balanesu, 2024, *Dazed*; O’Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*). While the move away from tragic tropes is significant, the articles’ emphasis on some “widely appealing joy” and “personal growth” can easily fit within a homonormative framework that prioritizes palatable, non-threatening representations over more complex or politically challenging narratives (Duggan, 2002, p. 179). This kind of visibility, geared towards demonstrating similarity and relatability, mirrors what Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner critique as attempts to integrate queer life into a ‘zone of privacy of normative intimacy,’ rather than radically challenging those norms (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 558).

The film industry’s role is also framed as pivotal by promoting narratives diverging from tragedy or exploitation, characteristic of the previous trends (Balanesu, 2024, *Dazed*). Films like *Drive-Away Dolls* (Ethan Coen, 2024), *Bottoms* (Emma Seligman, 2023), and *Love Lies Bleeding* (Rose Glass, 2024) are highlighted for presenting lesbian relationships with depth, humor, and humanity, often avoiding the male gaze (Balanesu, 2024, *Dazed*; O’Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*; Wade, 2024, *Daily Mail*; Kennedy, 2023, *Little Umbrella Collective*; Joseph, 2024, *Her Campus*), even though one of the directors—Ethan Coen—is a man, and none of those articles are discussing in depth what they mean by “depth” and other signifiers of this allegedly improved film representation. *Bottoms* is praised for treating lesbian relationships seriously yet with lightheartedness (Balanesu, 2024, *Dazed*). *Love Lies*

*Bleeding*, starring Kristen Stewart, is framed as a "landmark achievement" (O'Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*), diving into complexities beyond romance. This "new wave" in the mainstream film industry is seen to be significant because "these are queer stories...being told by queer women," marking a shift from earlier films often directed by men (Kennedy, 2023, *Little Umbrella Collective*). These claims reflect a broader feminist and queer political investment in challenging dominant narratives by enabling marginalized subjects to control their own representation (Becker et al. 1995, p. 26). The mainstream success of such films suggests that lesbian stories are no longer confined to subcultures but are worthy of major releases, given the same narrative weight as heterosexual love (O'Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*; Maskell, 2024, *PinkNews*). The trend is seen as demonstrating a sustained movement bringing queer women's stories to the forefront, allegedly serving as powerful tools for social change (Maskell, 2024, *PinkNews*).

Additionally, from a slightly different point, Anna Govert in *Xtra Magazine* highlights another representational trend in film production: an "unexpected influx of complicated, messy relationships between equally as complicated and messy women," citing examples like *Agatha All Along* (2024) and *House of the Dragon* (2022). She suggests this trend of representing "heroes, antiheroes and villains alike" allows queer women the "luxury to be just as horrifying and heartwarming as their heterosexual counterparts," moving beyond the pressure for purely "palatable, positive representation" that followed earlier backlashes against negative portrayals (Govert, 2024, *Xtra*).

In sum, the discourse constructed in the articles suggests that the new kind of lesbian stories and characters are visible on the screens together with the women, who directed those stories and gained power over the production process, fits into the post-feminist narrative. However, Angela McRobbie argues that post-feminism operates precisely by appearing to 'take into account' feminist gains, such as female success, only to incorporate them into individualistic narratives that suggest feminism is 'no longer needed' or has been superseded (McRobbie, 2008, pp. 11–12). I would argue that celebrating these "new" lesbian narratives on the screen and the directorial successes of the creators of these films as inherent progress without interrogating the broader structural conditions of their production and success and the gender hierarchies within the film industry, fits the post-feminist logic, potentially masking ongoing barriers and contributing to the 'undoing' of a collective queer critique.

Across these diverse genres—popular music, television programs, mainstream films,—the articles predominantly construct 'Lesbian Renaissance' as a significant victory for visibility. Mainstream presence is consistently framed as inherently progressive, equating

increased representation with broader social acceptance and equality. This optimistic framing resonates strongly with Smith & Tyler’s concept of the ‘lesbian normal,’ which describes the emergence of lesbian representations that, while visible, often affirm rather than challenge the norm (Smith & Tyler, 2017, p. 315). The parallel is evident in how the articles frequently highlight figures and narratives that fit comfortably within existing mainstream structures: pop stars achieving chart success through established industry pathways (Roan, Eilish), reality shows adopting conventional dating formats (*Ultimatum: Queer Love, I Kissed a Girl*), and films succeeding within familiar genres (*Bottoms* as teen comedy, *Love Lies Bleeding* as thriller). I would argue that, while the articles celebrate a perceived breakthrough in popular cultural representation, the dominant narrative that potentially can further construct a specific, normative, version of lesbian identity that merits further critical examination.

While there is a general agreement in the articles on a positive shift towards increased lesbian visibility in 2024, the discourse is not monolithic. Some differences and critiques emerge, particularly concerning the nature, depth, and beneficiaries of this “renaissance.” I noticed that a couple of articles in their narration about the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ question *who* benefits from this ‘Lesbian Renaissance,’ pointing towards limitations and potential pitfalls inherent in the *model* of visibility. Some of the articles point out that representations remain “far focused predominantly on white, cisgender and able-bodied women” (Kennedy, 2023, *Little Umbrella Collective*) and bring recurring critique is that the visibility championed often remains narrow and exclusive.

As Balanescu (2024, *Dazed*) points out, this surge in lesbian visibility often comes with limitations, particularly regarding who gets to be visible. The focus on mainstream, marketable queer identities—those that align with societal beauty standards and are palatable for mass consumption—often leaves out the rest (Balanescu, 2024, *Dazed*; O’Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*). The authors say that the celebration of queer pop stars is tempered by the fact that many queer women, especially women of color, working-class women, trans and non-binary individuals, still do not see themselves represented in mainstream popular culture and media (O’Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*; Kennedy, 2023, *Little Umbrella Collective*). This narrow focus exemplifies the frequent critique within feminist and queer studies that mainstream visibility politics often centers unmarked identities (white, cisgender, middle-class) while marginalizing those at the intersections of multiple oppressions, thereby fragmenting potential solidarities (Lorde, 1993, p. 395, on the ‘mythical norm’).

The analysis of the media discourse reveals a recurring theme concerning the limitations of contemporary lesbian representation. Specifically, five of the twelve examined

articles (Balancescu, 2024, *Dazed*; O’Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*; Kennedy, 2023, *Little Umbrella Collective*; Wilkinson, 2024, *Elle*) highlight the ongoing inadequacy of visibility politics in capturing the heterogeneity of lesbian identities. While acknowledging the symbolic gains associated with the mainstream success of queer celebrities and media narratives, these critiques underscore that such visibility frequently fails to encompass the lived realities of lesbians situated outside dominant racial, socioeconomic, and able-bodied norms. This discourse implicitly suggests that achieving more diverse representation would somehow validate current representational strategies, positioning incremental inclusion as a sufficient political victory. Such framing reinforces the logic of representational politics, celebrating existing visibility while merely advocating for its expansion to include a wider array of identity markers. However, while the imperative for greater diversity is undeniable, this focus on visibility risks functioning as a performative gesture rather than a catalyst for substantive change. By concentrating on the symbolic level, these articles, despite their potential to amplify marginalized voices (including BIPOC, disabled, and independent creators), often adopt a reactive stance, awaiting the emergence of already-validated diverse figures into the mainstream news cycle instead of proactively centering perspectives currently rendered invisible (a point further elaborated in the Section 3.4). Consequently, the emphasis remains on achieving varied forms of visibility within existing power structures, potentially circumventing the more challenging work required to address underlying structural inequalities.

Another point of contention revolves around the very concept of “renaissance.” Samantha Olson, for example, explicitly challenge the novelty implied by the term and argues vehemently against it in *Cosmopolitan*, stating:

This exact cultural phenomenon has happened so many times... The cycle is always the same: A big lesbian-coded artist and a few other minor sapphic cultural moments hit the mainstream, and articles and posts proclaiming a lesbian cultural takeover make a splash... And then we forget. (Olson, 2024, *Cosmopolitan*)

She points to previous moments labelled “Lesbian Chic” in 1993 and “lesbian chic, part deux” in the 2000s (*The L Word*), arguing that framing 2024 as unique dismisses consistent queer contributions to popular culture.

Similarly, Healey Kohn asks, “Is this anything new?”, emphasizing that “queer people have always existed, whether they have been getting praised for it or not” (Kohn, 2024, *Her Campus*). Kohn’s emphasis on historical continuity aligns with historical constructionist arguments within queer studies, which posit that identities and communities exist prior to their mainstream recognition or naming (D’Emilio, 1993, p. 468, discussing the historical conditions for gay identity). Kohn connects the current moment less to a renaissance and more to a shift where queer people are “finally allowed to have happy endings” in fiction, contrasting with historical narratives mandating tragedy (Kohn, 2024, *Her Campus*). This perspective reframes “renaissance” not as an exceptional, sudden cultural bloom but as a gradual, and perhaps overdue, shift in narrative possibilities away from compulsory tragic endings enforced by historical publishing and societal norms. However, within their texts, 2024 still is argued to have marked the year of lesbian *visibility* in pop culture, whether it is a gradual change or another loop of lesbian popularity in the media.

Furthermore, underlying the celebration, a couple of authors express caution or critique regarding the implications of this heightened visibility. Sophie Wilkinson in *Elle*, while acknowledging the positive change from the scarcity of representation she experienced (“in my day... I had to slog away at cobbling together a sense of my own culture”), argues that a renaissance isn’t enough: “I want a revolution” (Wilkinson, 2024, *Elle*). She points to the persistence of lesbophobia, particularly male entitlement fueled by mainstream pornography’s misrepresentation of lesbian sex, and the real-world violence faced by lesbians, suggesting that surface-level media celebration doesn’t equate to fundamental change or safety. Ella O’Keeffe echoes this caution in *Vogue Australia*, noting that while the “lesbian wave” feels exciting, “people who hold homophobic and lesbophobic views aren’t going to catch up quite as quickly” (O’Keeffe, 2024, *Vogue*). She highlights how online abuse targets lesbians who reveal relationship complexities, suggesting that “out of the shiny spotlight of the pop lesbian renaissance, lesbophobia continues to rear its ugly head.” This contrasts with the more uniformly optimistic takes found in the rest outlets. However, the tension between the perceived “visibility win” and the need for a structural change is non-existent in the articles. These comments are usually placed at the end of the pieces and incomparable to the amount of the attention the authors pay to bringing all the examples of how big and great the lesbian representation came to be in 2024. Although the articles discussed above do mention limitations in the face of persistent societal prejudice and complex power dynamics, they fail to present it as indeed an issue, because celebrating newfound mainstream presence is outweighing. The concerns of the authors about lesbophobia in society reads more like a

footnote—something that we all know is happening and that’s why it should be mentioned in the article that talks about lesbians.

Ultimately, the discourse surrounding the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ reveals a complex interplay between increased visibility and the persistent influence of dominant socio-political structures. The emphasis on palatable and marketable lesbian identities within the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ is frequently presented as a sign of social progress. However, as Fairclough (2003) argues, such constructions of progress can function ideologically to reinforce the existing power structures (Fairclough, 2003, p. 55). This dynamic is central to understanding how hegemony operates in the chosen media representation of lesbian identities, and it may overshadow critical points of underlying gender power relations, ultimately hindering more radical challenges to the status quo, which will be analysed further in the next section.

### **3.4 Unseen Cultural Activities Outside the Logic of Visibility**

While the dominant media discourse of the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ in 2024 is heavily focused on mainstream pop culture successes, this narrative offers an arguably sanitized and depoliticized view of lesbian cultural production and community engagement. This section argues that by prioritizing high-profile, commercially viable figures and events framed as a “visibility win,” the articles in my sample largely fail to engage with the breadth and depth of lesbian culture operating outside these circuits. This selective focus, far from being neutral, reinforces a depoliticized version of lesbian identity rather than addressing the diverse realities of the community. Despite occasional acknowledgments within the articles to the effect that mainstream representation lacks intersectionality, there is a missed opportunity to utilize these media platforms to highlight the less visible, often low-budget lesbian events, figures, and cultural products that also flourished in 2024.

Contrary to the impression given by a solely mainstream focus, lesbian cultural activity that operated within more independent and community-focused circuits during the same period might reveal platforms for voices and experiences often marginalized by commercial interests and the drive for broad appeal. Examining less visible spheres like independent film, alternative art spaces, underground music scenes, and niche online communities, can reveal a complex cultural landscape resistant to simplistic narratives of mainstream triumph.

Independent cinema in 2024 showcased lesbian and queer narratives that, despite attention in some circles, remained largely outside mainstream distribution channels, and,

non-existent in the articles that covered the Lesbian Renaissance phenomenon. Short films found their audience through queer film festivals and specialized platforms. Festivals like Reel Resilience Circa 2024 featured documentaries on specific lesbian histories from previous years (*Lesbians in Boystown*, 2022, dir. Betsy Kalin; *Old Lesbians*, 2023, dir. Meghan McDonough), while virtual events like SaFFlicks showcased international sapphic shorts, including U.S. productions like the animation *The Butch & The Baby Daddy* (2023, dir. Barb Taylor). The comedic short *12 angry lesbians* (the only movie released in 2024, dir. Patrice Leung), focusing on lesbians of color, gained recognition primarily through festival feedback (Gregory, 2024). These platforms, while vital, often cater to audiences already actively seeking queer content, highlighting the distribution challenges faced by independent creators and they didn't reveal much content produced by or featuring lesbians, which can also be a matter of accessibility of the public data on the Internet.

Parallel trends were visible in the visual arts, where community-driven spaces and independent publications provided essential platforms for marginalized lesbian artists. Dyke+ ArtHaus in Philadelphia emerged as a significant force, deliberately centering dyke-identified artists, particularly those over 40, through exhibitions like "20 OVER 40" and collaborations such as "Silver Legs, Uncrossed" at the William Way LGBT Community Center (DykeArtHouse, 2024). These initiatives actively countered ageism and invisibility within the art world and LGBTQ+ spaces, focusing engagement within specific community circuits rather than pursuing mainstream art world attention. Other projects, like SaveArtSpace's "Self Affection" (NY opening June 7, 2024) featuring artists such as Nigerian-American Adesewa Adekoya on Brooklyn billboards (SaveArtSpace, 2024), and Arts + Public Life's "Never So Free" (October-December 2024) series in Chicago focusing on Black and Brown queer artists (So Free, 2024), utilized alternative methods to showcase artists at the intersections of race, queerness, and marginalization.

Independent zines seem to be as well crucial for disseminating the work of underrepresented lesbian artists. *WMN zine*, for instance, dedicated itself to featuring lesbians often excluded from mainstream narratives, including rural, disabled, older, immigrant, trans, and non-binary lesbians.<sup>9</sup> Regional projects like *The Queer South Zine*<sup>10</sup> documented lesbian

<sup>9</sup> WMN zine is a project primarily manifesting as a printed publication that features and promotes the work of lesbian artists and poets, particularly those who are underrepresented or marginalized within broader LGBTQIA+ media, viewing its physical presence as an essential act of resistance and a means to ensure the permanence of their contributions (WMN - Lesbian Art and Poetry, 2024).

<sup>10</sup> The Queer South is a new zine founded by University of Arkansas students designed to uplift, empower, and combat the erasure of LGBTQ+ southern voices by providing a platform for their stories and art, with an initial focus on what the queer South means to them (Oakes, 2023).

artists within specific geographical or subcultural contexts, operating within niche but dedicated networks. Given their pre-2024 origins, the continued operation of these zines exemplifies sustained cultural production within specific lesbian communities, distinguishing this ongoing work from phenomena posited as uniquely characteristic of 2024.

The music scene had its own lesbian underground, without any trace of a specific spike in music production in 2024 or in 2020s in general, as well. There has been no data found that would reveal any sort of “unprecedented” number of new lesbian artists emerging in this industry. Even artists gaining some online traction, like the band *76th Street* via TikTok (@76thstreetofficial, 2025, TikTok), often relied on DIY touring and promotion within specific community networks. These scenes were supported by independent media like the *GREEBO* zine (Oli Greebo, 2024, Reddit) and podcasts like “Two Dykes and a Mic” (Player FM, 2025) or blogs featured on Autostraddle (Tima, 2024), which often spotlight independent artists. Smaller, community-focused events, hosted at spaces like Dyke+ ArtHaus or local LGBTQ+ centers, and dedicated festivals like *She Fest* in San Diego or the *Stargaze LGBTQ+ Music & Camping Festival*, provided performance and gathering spaces outside mainstream circuits. Independent artists with smaller followings also utilized platforms like SoundCloud and TikTok to share their work directly with listeners, contributing to the cultural tapestry without widespread fame.

Last but not least, given the significant historical involvement of lesbian communities with drag king culture, where performers often explore gender and identity through masculine presentations, this art form holds considerable cultural weight (Horowitz, 2020; Schacht, 2003) and should be looked into as well. Despite drag kinging often operating outside mainstream visibility compared to queening, it represents a persistent and valued performance practice within lesbian and related subcultures.

Even as queens grow ever more popular and widely accepted, drag kings remain largely invisible outside of lesbian and transmasculine communities. Even among queer women and trans men, kinging remains something of a subculture within a subculture (Schacht, 2003, p. 96).

Therefore, investigating drag events, even those not explicitly stated to be centered on lesbian identities, is crucial for understanding a vital, ongoing element of lesbian cultural history and its contemporary underground expressions.

The specific search for drag kinging events and news revealed that the scene in the U.S. in 2024 demonstrated notable energy characterized by significant anticipation for heightened media representation, particularly through the announcement of the forthcoming

*King of Drag* television series (Molina, 2024). Other key developments included specialized king-focused festivals and showcases, alongside established competitions such as the 28th Annual SF Drag King Contest, which signal continuity within the community. The influence of nationally recognized performers like Landon Cider also appeared significant in shaping the landscape. Furthermore, ongoing drag king performances in 2024 often included events whose announcements and framing explicitly highlighted diverse identities, such as non-binary performers, BIPOC artists (including specific showcases for Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month), trans masculine individuals, and women.

The above results of my research underscore the continued existence of underground lesbian, drag, and trans cultures, which remain largely unacknowledged within the prominent ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ narrative. This exclusion is particularly deliberate in the case of drag; as explored in the discussion of the Chappell Roan persona in Section 3.3, the subversive potential of drag seemingly challenges established notions of lesbian normativity, leading to its omission from what is seen as lesbian cultural production.

My analysis of lesbian cultural production outside the mainstream ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ narrative in the USA during 2024 reveals a landscape characterized more by ongoing community engagement than unprecedented proliferation of individual artists winning visibility. While the evidence I have gathered points to activity across independent cinema, alternative art spaces, underground music scenes, and niche online platforms, much of this cultural work remains difficult to comprehensively track through general internet searches, including its notable absence from the media outlets. Indeed, a targeted review of publications by both the specific media outlets (Appendix 1) and the individual authors responsible for the articles thematizing ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ yielded no significant coverage of, or deeper engagement with, these broader community events and figures that exist outside the mainstream spotlight.

Films screened primarily at festivals, art exhibitions in community-focused galleries, self-published zines, and independent artists utilizing platforms like TikTok or SoundCloud illustrate a diverse cultural ecosystem operating parallel to, yet separate from, the commercially visibilized phenomena celebrated as the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ in the media. This separation appears linked to the perceived lack of immediate monetizing capacity inherent in many of these independent and community-based activities, rendering them “unseeable” or unworthy of coverage within commercially driven media platforms. The mainstream media outlets (Appendix 1), despite sometimes acknowledging their own diversity deficits, still prioritize high-profile, financially viable, and often normatively aligned

cultural products and figures. This selective focus, concentrating on a marketable “tip of the iceberg,” fails to engage with the breadth and depth of lesbian cultural life. By neglecting to see their platforms to explore these less commercially legible facets, the media outlets reporting on the “renaissance” paradoxically reinforce the market logic and homonormative tendencies they might superficially critique (Hennessy, 1994, p. 69). Consequently, the heralded ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ appears less a reflection of broad community flourishing and more a contained, commercially mediated event accessible primarily to a privileged segment, rather than representing or fostering a truly expansive moment for diverse lesbian communities.

### 3.5 Selective Visibility Within Right-Wing Anti-Gender Politics

So far I have focused on how the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse was constructed and debated primarily within mainstream media outlets. However, no discourse exists in a vacuum; its meaning and impact are shaped by the social contexts and political struggles in which it circulates (Fairclough, 2003, p. 24). Therefore, I am going to situate the discourse of ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ within the highly polarized political landscape of the United States (Borchert & Kreidler, 2024, p. 344), more particularly within conservative and Make America Grate Again (MAGA) aligned media. This section investigates how the cultural products and figures central to the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ narrative are discussed or ignored by such media to reassess the notions of a “visibility win” for lesbians within the official context of contemporary anti-gender politics in the Trump regime.

To assess the specific targets and framings within right-wing discourse during 2024, I conducted a systematic search targeting commentary potentially originating from or amplified by prominent conservative and MAGA-aligned media outlets and platforms, such as *Fox News*, *Breitbart News*, *The Daily Wire*, *One America News Network (OANN)*, and *Newsmax*. Additionally, the global Internet search, aimed specifically to identify explicit anti-lesbian rhetoric or significant commentary reacting to the cultural phenomena associated with the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ (not the term itself)—including figures like Chappell Roan, Billie Eilish, and Reneè Rapp, films such as *Bottoms* (2023) and *Love Lies Bleeding* (2024), and shows like *The Ultimatum: Queer Love* (2023), as they were the most univocally cited by all the articles about the Lesbian Renaissance (Appendix 1).

Despite the targeted searches, I could not detect a significant articulation of a widespread, explicit anti-lesbian rhetoric around the specific cultural figures and products in

the prominent conservative sources in 2024. While the general polling data confirmed broadly negative views towards LGBTQ+ people among many Republicans and Trump supporters (as noted in Pew Research, June 2024; Brookings, Oct 2024), the overwhelming focus of active political attacks, legislative efforts, and pointed media commentary centered intensely on transgender people and the concept of “gender ideology,” deploying the key rhetorical tool used globally and increasingly within the U.S. by conservative and religious groups to frame feminism and LGBTQ+ rights as dangerous threats to family, tradition, and society (Butler, 2024). Against this backdrop one cannot interpret the lack of a specific anti-lesbian focus as a sign of tolerance or acceptance for lesbians over gender variant people, seemingly validating the “visibility win” narrative. Such surface-level interpretation would overlook the strategic dynamics of the ongoing U.S. culture wars that involve conflicts over fundamental moral visions and the very definition of American identity, fought through symbolic battlegrounds over gender (Hunter, 1991, pp. 42–49):

Across the world, various forms of nationalism effectively seek to expel gender from the idea of the nation, suggesting that equality and freedom reigned before this “intrusion” made it seem otherwise (Butler, 2024, p. 60).

Rather than genuine progress for lesbians, the intense focus on anti-trans politics alongside a relative lack of explicit lesbophobia is more accurately understood through Judith Butler’s (2024) critical frameworks analyzing power, visibility, and political strategy around ‘gender.’

First of all, the apparent ‘acceptance’ of certain highly visible, often commercially successful lesbian figures in the left-leaning media can be explained through the lens of “the new homonormativity” by Lisa Duggan (2002). The visibility and acceptance are granted to segments of the gay and lesbian community who align with dominant neoliberal values – emphasizing domesticity, consumption, and assimilation into existing institutions like marriage, while implicitly or explicitly distancing themselves from more radical critiques or marginalized queer identities (Duggan, 2002, pp. 179–181). This creates a conditional acceptance, often favouring white, conventionally attractive, and economically stable individuals (what exactly as we saw in the analysed articles in previous sections), which can make lesbians seem integrated while the system continues to target others, particularly transgender people. This dynamic is trapping LGBTQ+ politics within a framework where

visibility is valued over substantive change, a phenomenon Suzanna Walters calls the ‘tolerance trap’ (Walters, 2014, pp. 4–7). This ‘virtual equality’ that masks ongoing systemic inequalities and vulnerabilities within the broader LGBTQ+ community (Seidman, 2002, p. 15) could then, in my reading, easily lend itself to the violent MAGA attacks on all groups outside of the re-essentialized heteronormativity.

Depoliticized lesbian figures and events within the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse celebrated in pop culture, as we can see, coexist with fierce political attacks on the whole of the LGBTQ+ community deemed disruptive to the conservative gender order, epitomized in the figure of transgender people and drag personas. The intense focus on anti-transgender and anti-drag rhetoric and legislation in 2024 is highly strategic. Judith Butler analyzes the contemporary global ‘anti-gender ideology’ movement as deploying a ‘phantasmatic’ conception of gender to incite fear and moral panic, positioning gender diversity as a threat to children, the family, and social order (Butler, 2024). While trans individuals are the primary targets, argues Butler, the attack aims broadly at dismantling feminist and queer critiques and reinstating traditional hierarchies (Butler, 2024, p. 135)<sup>11</sup>. This political agenda should be highly concerning for the lesbian community as well, since lesbian identities are often expressed through visibilized non-normative gender performances (Smith, 1989; Martin, 1994). These performances have historically been subject to scrutiny and attempts at suppression, making lesbians who embody them particularly vulnerable to contemporary anti-gender rhetoric that attacks gender diversity and performance (Smith, 1989; Martin, 1994).

Manifesting these exclusionary pressures, on January 22, 2025 (what would be shortly after the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ of 2024 can be considered to be “over”), a new Trump administration issued executive orders aimed at strictly defining sex as biological and immutable at birth for federal purposes. These orders seek to roll back legal recognition and protections for transgender and nonbinary individuals in areas such as employment, housing, healthcare, federal documentation, and access to facilities, and also aim to dismantle DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) initiatives in the federal government (Wolf 2025).

This anti-gender movement’s rhetoric aims to violently reinforce and narrow the “discursive limits of ‘sex’” thereby reshaping the “historically revisable criteria of intelligibility” (Butler, 1993, p. 18) for all genders and sexualities. Even if lesbians are not the

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<sup>11</sup> In the first 100 days of the second Trump administration ordered to eliminate “woke” initiatives from the federal government by identifying and discouraging the use of hundreds of words and phrases concerning diversity, equity, inclusion, gender, race, and climate change in official communications and documents (Yourish et al. 2025).

primary explicit target of this current wave of abjection, the underlying “regulatory norms” that define who “matters” (Butler, 1993, p. 16) are being aggressively reasserted to become more exclusionary. Lesbians, particularly those whose gender expressions or identities challenge traditional norms, remain situated within a field circumscribed by this hostile redefinition of the “constitutive outside”—a domain increasingly marked as “unviable” (Butler, 1993, p. 188).

In conclusion, it is unsurprising that right-wing media outlets largely ignore or refrain from actively diminishing the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ concept. This likely stems from both the phenomenon’s focus on potentially less controversial (‘safer’) representations (like, not mentioning the drag identity of Chappell Roan) and the strategic calculation that lesbians are already encompassed within the wider anti-gender offensive. The relative absence of specific, widespread anti-lesbian attacks focused on the 2024 cultural phenomena within MAGA and conservative discourse cannot be seen as acceptance or progress, which is claimed to be close to be achieved in the data sample (Appendix 1). In general, when political forces strategically target one part of the community using arguments that undermine the foundations of gender and sexual freedom for all, visibility within mainstream culture offers little genuine security. It underscores the necessity of cross-community solidarity and a political analysis that moves beyond superficial representation to address the shared threats posed by anti-gender and broader right-wing political movements. It is particularly non-viable in the current iteration of the U.S. culture wars, where anti-transgender politics serves as the primary mobilizing tool for the right. The strategy of embracing homonormative tendencies and the dynamics of commodity culture can only give way to intense attacks on all members of the LGBTQ+ community, palpable lesbian visibility included. The anti-gender movement’s focus on trans people reinforces biologized binaries historically harmful to lesbians, demonstrating that struggle for lesbian seeability is part of a broader political project fighting the MAGA politics of controlling gender and sexuality (Butler, 2024).

### 3.6 Conclusion

This critical discourse analysis exposed the celebratory discourse of ‘Lesbian Renaissance,’ showing its complex and contradictory character deeply embedded in the market logic of consumerism and political maneuvering. I pointed out that the argument that the heralded “visibility win” is illusory. It is predicated on a selective, commodified, and homonormative form of representation. This mediated visibility privileges palatable, commercially viable

figures and narratives that align with mainstream sensibilities, achieved by systematically marginalizing or rendering unseen the broader, less marketable spectrum of lesbian community culture, including potentially disruptive elements like drag identity even within its celebrated icons.

Ultimately, the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse exemplifies the profound limitations of visibility politics when divorced from structural critique and solidarity. It is vital, however, to acknowledge a specific paradox illuminated within the analysis: while the dominant narrative prevailed, some articles did explicitly voice concern about the political struggles facing queer people and pointedly noted the narrowness of the “renaissance,” highlighting the frequent exclusion of marginalized identities such as BIPOC, trans, disabled, and working-class lesbians. Yet, herein lies the critical contradiction: despite identifying this very problem—the failure of mainstream visibility to encompass the community’s diversity or engage with ongoing political battles—these same articles largely failed to substantively counter it within their own pages. By pointing out the depoliticization and exclusion elsewhere while replicating it themselves, they inadvertently reinforced the very system of selective visibility they superficially critiqued. This underscores the insufficiency of mere representational acknowledgment and demands a more radical shift towards challenging the power structures that dictate whose stories are told and confronting the shared political vulnerabilities of *all* queer lives.

Crucially, this curated visibility operates precariously within the current political landscape defined by the strategic anti-gender attacks of MAGA, primarily targeting transgender individuals. The apparent lack of an explicit outrage directed specifically at the mainstream visibility of lesbian cultural figures and products is part of the anti-gender strategic focus—allowing (yet) a seemingly benign, market-friendly lesbian presence to foster an illusion of inclusion when in fact the foundations of gender and sexual freedom for the *entire* LGBTQ+ community are constantly undermined.

## 4. 'LESBIAN RENAISSANCE' ON TIKTOK

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter studies the digital TikTok manifestations of the 'Lesbian Renaissance' discourse. The central question I explore is concerned with understanding how the online lesbian community relates to and interprets this specific cultural moment, how it perceives the impact of the alleged "renaissance" on their lived realities and collective identity.

The 25 videos from 22 distinct creators in the TikTok dataset (Appendix 2) is of significant analytical value. It provides access to users' actual reiteration of the discourse, revealing how individuals articulate their comprehension and lived experiences of the alleged 'Lesbian Renaissance' within a dynamic and relatively spontaneous digital milieu. My study seeks to see if and how there are communities coalescing around the "#lesbianrenaissance" hashtag and what they contributed to this discourse. As the analysis in the previous chapter suggests, despite increased visibility of representation, contemporary society does not necessarily offer a favorable environment for queer individuals, particularly lesbians beyond a depoliticizing commodification (see Chapter 3). However, on TikTok, users engage with the hashtag not merely as passive consumers of content but as active participants in producing a shared meaning of 'Lesbian Renaissance.' While the overwhelming presence of the discourse on TikTok (74.8M posts of #lesbianrenaissance) is significant, it is crucial to analyze whether the production of these videos genuinely constitutes digital political activism. The sheer volume of hashtags may not necessarily indicate an active, agentive disposition, as it could also reflect a reiteration of the commodifying logic of "visibility" within a hegemonic or popular discourse, rather than solely articulations of 'queer futurity' (Muñoz, 2009). I want to explore if the prominence of 'Lesbian Renaissance' on TikTok is organized by a tension between the commercial logic (that is also at work in a commercially driven platform where the users' videos are co-opted for further discussions of "visibility win" formulated in mainstream media (see Chapter 3) and a discourse of disidentification, serving a distinct purpose centered on solidarity, self-expression, and mutual recognition that makes power structures seeable.

### 4.2 The Discourse of TikTok UGC Content Around 'Lesbian Renaissance'

The discourse of 'Lesbian Renaissance' is articulated in my TikTok data in several genres (textual forms): personal testimonies, promotional materials, and cultural critique. Personal

testimony is the prominent genre, with creators sharing their excitement about, and favorable feelings of validation mediated by the current cultural moment (№4 and №12 in Appendix 2). Musicians, both established and emerging, use the platform to connect the “renaissance” to their own art work and experiences, often expressing gratitude for the perceived shift in visibility and its (expected) impact on their own careers (№1, №6, №7). Promotional content is also frequently used, with creators advertising events like “Sapphic Renaissance Fairs” (№2) or tours capitalizing on the “Lesbian renaissance of 2024” (№7). Finally, some videos offer cultural critique, acknowledging the positive aspects of increased representation while also calling for more diversity and inclusivity within the mainstream portrayal of lesbian identities (for example, №3). The distribution of the 25 videos from 22 user accounts in this regard is: 10 personal testimonies, 5 promotional materials, and 10 cultural critiques.

A striking feature of the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse in my TikTok data is the consistent highlighting of particular musical artists as central figures to celebrate and identify with. Chappell Roan is the most frequently cited artist in the data sample; her music, particularly songs like “Femininomenon” and “Good Luck, Babe!” are repeatedly referenced as anthems of this era (№2, №5, №6, №9, №11, №14, №15, №17, №19, №22). Her concerts are depicted as “sapphic wonderland[s]” and spaces of collective queer joy (№6, №14). Billie Eilish is noted for explicitly sapphic songs on her new album *Hit Me Hard and Soft*, 2024 (№8, №12, №15). Reneé Rapp is another prominent musician consistently linked to the lesbian renaissance (№3, №6, №8, №9, №12, №15, №17). The creators discuss her impact, particularly her role in making “Mean Girls” gay and the resonance of her album “Snow Angel” with a sapphic audience (№3, №6, №9, №12, №15, №17). One video even explicitly compares her popularity with that of Chappell Roan’s, arguing that Roan’s larger volume of explicitly lesbian-themed songs contributes to her wider embrace in this specific cultural moment (№9).

The ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ thematicized in the videos is not just about individual artists but also about collective experiences and dedicated spaces. The announcement of a “Sapphic Renaissance Fair” in the Philippines, designed for sapphic women to connect and celebrate, directly employs the renaissance framing (№2). Queer club nights in 2024 are characterized by the collective singing of artists like Chappell Roan (№14). The creators also organize and promote sapphic events themselves, contributing to the sense of a thriving community (№2, №7, №12).

In addition to popular music, other cultural products are frequently cited as evidence of the ‘Lesbian Renaissance.’ Regarding films, popular U.S. movies like *Drive-Away Dolls* (2024), *Bottoms* (2023) and *Love Lies Bleeding* (2024), are mentioned as part of a “cinematic lesbian film renaissance” (№16, №20). One TikTok video from the sample, in addition, actively counters a USA-focused view by recommending and providing synopses for nine diverse contemporary lesbian films from various countries in Asia, Australia, Africa, and Europe, aiming to broaden the audience’s perspective on contemporary sapphic cinema (№20).

In television, reality shows like the BBC’s *I Kissed a Girl* (UK, 2024) and Netflix’s *The Ultimatum: Queer Love* (USA, 2024) are seen as contributing to a welcome increase in lesbian visibility (№3, №12, №17). The Marvel series, *Agatha All Along* (USA, 2024) is celebrated for its “fruity woman”<sup>12</sup> lead character, a significant development for fans who previously had to infer the subtexts in mainstream media (№11, №16). Novels are also mentioned as part of this cultural wave. For example, the contemporary sapphic narrative “Sunburn” by Chloe Michelle Howarth (2023) is highlighted as an example of high-quality storytelling (№16).

Even a few niche cultural expressions are mentioned as examples within the ‘Lesbian Renaissance.’ For instance, a tattoo artist showcases sapphic-themed tattoos as characteristic evidence of the phenomenon (№21), and an illustrator is also mentioned in some self-ironic manner, for linking the desire for queer-themed accessories, like customizable carabiners (№13).

The 25 TikTok videos frame these artists, events, and cultural products as signifiers of the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ in several ways. Their dominant stance is the celebration of increased visibility and mainstream representation. For example, one creator in video №4.2 exclaims:

The lesbian renaissance of 2024 is, like, literally one of the greatest things that's ever fucking happened in pop culture. I'm fucking serious. Like, have you ever seen this many lesbians this visible?

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<sup>12</sup> The slang term “fruity,” when used to mean gay or queer, refers to someone who is perceived as or identifies as being flamboyant, effeminate, or otherwise displaying characteristics stereotypically associated with LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly gay men. It can also be used more broadly to describe something that is gay or queer in nature (Stillman 2025).

The video creators express joy at seeing themselves reflected in music, movies, and TV shows. For instance, in №5 it is formulated like this in the text over video: “what a time to be a lesbian!!!! I can see myself in every genre of music & movie.”

At the same time they note the stark contrast to previous times where lesbian representation was scarce or subtextual in their reading. The evaluation of the difference is formulated in video №11 like this:

I cannot believe that this picture was taken in 2021 when Wandavision had come out, and I used to carry around a picture of Kathryn Hahn as Agatha Harkness in my wallet for witchy lesbian energy. Even though this character was not out or even actually even remotely hinted at being fruity, I was like, no, she’s sapphic... If I could tell this girl that in three years, Marvel would have a witchy show where the main character is a fruity woman, the fruity woman of my dreams, she would lose her mind.

This enhanced visibility is seen as a moment that creates a more welcoming space for lesbians, reducing stigma, and allowing for greater self-acceptance. As one creator notes, “lesbians and queer people need to see that. We all exist in different... forms” (№3).

The ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ is also characterized in the videos by a sense of empowerment and collective joy. The ability to hear explicitly lesbian songs in heteronormative spaces like the gym, for instance, is cited as a powerful marker of change in video №11. Sold-out shows, active online fan engagement (“stan TikTok”), and the creation of inclusive, unapologetically queer art are highlighted as defining features. For example, in video №6 it reads as follows:

Sapphic artists are selling out shows, creating inclusive spaces, unapologetically queer art, defining fashion and running stan TikTok. 2024 is officially a lesbian world and we are just living in it.

However, the celebratory discourse is not without its critiques. One creator poignantly discusses the tendency for mainstream representation to favor white, American,

and feminine-presenting lesbians, advocating for broader inclusion of diverse lesbian identities, including butch lesbians and lesbians of color in video №3:

Of course, a lot of them mainstream is white and American and of course there's, like, nothing wrong with that, but, like white, American, feminine. I think it's just important to be, obviously be grateful for this representation we're getting...But I think it's important that we still, like, fight for representation elsewhere and a variety of representation, because we all look different, we all are different, we all come from different backgrounds. Obviously a lot of people of colour were integral to the formation of the LGBTQ community and for them to not get mainstream recognition, it seems a bit disheartening.

This creator emphasizes that while the current representation is “amazing,” it is crucial to “widen our circle of representation because there are so many different beautiful lesbians who will look different, who will present differently” (№3). This critique on “white, American, feminine” lesbians, also mentioned in №18 and №20 as the face of the renaissance exemplifies Kate McNicholas Smith’s (2020) concept of “the lesbian normal,” and the TikTok creator with this argument directly pushes back against this homogenizing trend. We have seen this critique voiced in media outlets (Appendix 1) as well and simple naming or a call for a diversity in mainstream representation hasn’t been taken as step enough to counter this homonormative tendency (see Chapter 3).

However, what difference can be noticed in the data sample from TikTok is that other figures, like, for example, BIPoC U.S. musicians, are mentioned as part of ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ including Kehlani, who is celebrated not only for her music but for her openness about her lesbian identity (№6, №8, №18). In addition, a roster of other queer women artists such as Fletcher, Arlo Parks, Willow, DoeChii, Cat Burns, girl in red, 070 Shake, Syd, Victoria Monet, Kelela, Tannerelle, Tinashe, Dizzy Fae, Lava La Rue, Janelle Monáe, and Amaarae come to deserve mention (№8, №18). Some UK-based artists like Caroline Kingsbury (№1), Girlie (№7), Cat Burns (№8), and Nxdia (№8) also feature, indicating the users’ perception of the international dimension of the visibility of lesbian popular artists.

The creator of the video №18 also provides a historical context, challenging the exceptionality of the current moment by arguing that, while the current pop music renaissance is notable, a similar wave occurred earlier in the R&B genre, stating:

“And I’m really happy that the lesbian renaissance in music is happening right now. But if you’re an R&B girly, it’s been happening here. Syd, Kehlani, Victoria Monet, Kelela, Tannerelle, Tinashe, Dizzy Fae, Lava La Rue all walked so that this new queer renaissance and pop music could run.”

This speaks to what Valerie Leila Armstrong (1996) termed the “myth of invisibility.” This act of remembering and highlighting the contributions of R&B artists like Syd and Kehlani functions similarly to Armstrong’s contention that lesbians were visible prior to moments like the 1990s “lesbian chic,” suggesting that what changes is often the framing and mainstream acknowledgment rather than an absolute shift from absence to presence. The video thus implicitly critiques the idea of the current renaissance as entirely novel, resisting the tendency for new waves of visibility to erase prior histories of lesbian cultural production and presence.

Another tendency in the video discussions of the heightened visibility of lesbians in popular culture is its potential for the “lesbian aesthetic” to be co-opted by straight women as lesbian culture becomes more mainstream. For example, one creator in video №12 expresses this concern directly:

“I do feel like there is some potential criticism to be made that if we are in the lesbian renaissance then eventually what’s going to happen is we’re going to see straight women co-opting the like lesbian aesthetic, which I don’t love.”

Similarly, the sometimes perplexing mainstream adoption of specific lesbian terminology is noted, as highlighted in video №17 where the creator asks: “Like, why are straight women using the term stud? Like, throwing it around? I’m like, what is happening?”

In my interpretation, these instances of perceived co-option of lesbian aesthetics and terminology by mainstream, potentially heterosexual, actors raise critical concerns regarding the integrity and legibility of lesbian subcultural signifiers. Such mainstream adoption aligns with theoretical understandings of commodification as capitalism can appropriate lesbian styles for market purposes while simultaneously erasing their social and political histories, thereby stripping them of their specific political or communal meanings (Hennessy, 1994, p. 33). Consequently, this process may dilute the distinctiveness of lesbian cultural codes, potentially complicating intra-community recognition and imposing a burden on the community to continuously innovate forms of expression to maintain its unique identity and resist the depoliticizing effects of such assimilation. This dynamic echoes historical patterns where subcultural capital, upon gaining mainstream visibility, risks losing its counter-hegemonic potential by being framed within a discourse that neutralizes its political significance, effectively becoming “a homosexuality of no importance” (Armstrong, 1996, p. 17).

The analysis of discourse from additional data, as presented in Appendix 3, further illuminates and expands the ‘Lesbian Renaissance,’ often paralleled or substituted with the declaration that “2024 is the year of the lesbian” (Appendix 3, №1, №4). Appendix 3 introduces alternative framings and connections to past moments of queer visibility. The term “lesbian apocalypse” emerges on TikTok, describing a phenomenon of mass mutual following and adoption of the lesbian flag, set to music by artists like Chappell Roan, signifying heightened community mobilization and a collective claiming of digital space (Appendix 3, №6). Creators also draw parallels between the current moment and “20gayteen” (2018), citing similarities in the rise of lesbian musicians and the positive cultural visibility experienced during that earlier period, even while acknowledging ongoing broader societal challenges (Appendix 3, №5). The data reinforces the significance of artists such as Kehlani (with her *Crash* album, 2024), Billie Eilish (song “Lunch,” 2024), Chappell Roan, and Reneé Rapp, and also points to other cultural touchstones like *The L Word* TV series (USA 2004-2009) cast appearing at Coachella as key indicators of this impactful year for lesbian visibility (Appendix 3, №1, №4). Animated series with prominent sapphic relationships, like *Arcane* (Netflix series, 2021–2024) with its lesbian main character and explicit sexual relationships between 2 women is also cited as evidence that lesbians “defined the culture this year” (Appendix 3, №2).

The additional data also brings attention to a wider range of lesbian experiences and expressions being celebrated. Beyond the more frequently mentioned artists, there’s an

acknowledgment of “sassy stud anthem[s]” gaining traction, indicating an appreciation for diverse presentations within lesbian culture (Appendix 3, №3). The dance of the Black masculine lesbian creator (a stud) in this video to the song “OKAY” (2024) by a Black musician JT points to the existence of specific cultural products, like music, that are recognized and valued by the stud community. This indicates that, in comparison to mainstream channels where such expressions might be marginalized due to the societal disapproval of female masculinity or the complex patriarchal and racial dynamics Miller (2021) outlines in “The Impact of Patriarchy on Stud Lesbians,” TikTok can function as an important space. On this platform, stud lesbians not only articulate and assert confidence in their identities but also find an audience and communal validation for their distinct cultural contributions.

Overall, the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse on TikTok while largely aligning with the broader definition of the phenomenon through its celebration of increased mainstream lesbian visibility, simultaneously provides significant evidence of recognizing and validating more marginal lesbian cultural productions. This recognition extends beyond creators’ explicit critiques of a White, American, and feminine-centric ‘lesbian normal’; it is also implicitly demonstrated through the very cultural artifacts—such as diverse musical choices or specific subcultural references—that users incorporate into their videos when engaging with or embodying the ‘Lesbian Renaissance.’ Such enacted engagement in the data sample indicates that TikTok might function as a discursive space where lesbian expressions beyond dominant representational tropes can achieve circulation and communal validation.

#### **4.3 Lesbian Community on TikTok: Becoming Seeable in a Place of Negotiation**

The declaration of a ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ in 2024 resonated across both mainstream media outlets (Appendix 1) and user-generated content on platforms like TikTok (Appendix 2). While a shared disposition of the allegedly unprecedented increased lesbian visibility and representation is shared across both domains, a comparative analysis reveals relevant differences regarding the framing of this renaissance, the breadth of artists and cultural products highlighted, and the mechanisms through which diversity is centered (or not). This section explores these distinctions, arguing that while mainstream media often reflects a more narrowly defined, potentially algorithmically influenced articulation of the trend, the TikTok users demonstrate a significant capacity to amplify marginalized voices and showcase a more diverse spectrum of lesbian experiences and artistry.

A primary divergence lies in the scope of artists and cultural products identified as emblematic of the lesbian renaissance. Mainstream media articles (Appendix 1), as detailed in the analysis in Chapter 3, frequently spotlight a group at the intersection of White, American, popular music artists: Chappell Roan, Reneé Rapp, and Billie Eilish (Appendix 1). While these artists are undeniably popular and influential within the TikTok discourse as well (Appendix 2, №6, №8, №9, №12, №15), part of the TikTok videos often presents a broader and more varied cultural landscape. They frequently incorporate or celebrate a wider array of musicians, including BIPOC artists and different genres (see Section 4.2). The “sapphic renaissance carrying the music industry” montage (Appendix 2, №8) includes artists like 070 Shake, Willow, Doechii, Cat Burns, and Arlo Parks, among others, showcasing a more diverse lineup than typically centered in mainstream reports. Furthermore, discussions on TikTok extend to R&B artists like Syd and Kehlani as precursors or ongoing contributors to this cultural moment (Appendix 2, №18; Appendix 3, №1).

Another key difference is self-reflexivity, in the sense of explicit acknowledgment and role of the TikTok platform itself. Mainstream media articles discuss the lesbian renaissance as a pop culture phenomenon, citing social media trends generally but rarely foregrounding TikTok as a specific engine or a primary site of this cultural production, let alone their own role in circulating the discourse. For example, *Dazed* notes that “looking around pop culture right now, it seems we have found ourselves in a sapphic renaissance” (Balanescu, 2024) and *Cosmopolitan* refers to how “social media and the actual media have dubbed” the moment a ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ (Olson, 2024), but they do not address TikTok as a distinct platform shaping the moment. In contrast, part of the TikTok data reflects on the platform as an active space where the renaissance is being defined, celebrated, and negotiated. They point out platform specific features, like the use of sound effects (Ivo, 2021) that allow for vast amounts of lesbian and queer content to be created and discovered under the umbrella of songs by popular artists like Chappell Roan (Appendix 2, №2, №14; Appendix 3, №6).

The ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ of 2024, particularly as it manifested on TikTok, offers a compelling case for understanding the complexities of visibility and glimpses of ‘queer utopia’ within algorithmically governed digital spaces. While content creators frequently emphasized the celebratory aspects of increased mainstream visibility (Appendix 2, №4, №12; Appendix 3, №1, №4), aligning with broader historical desires for recognition (Hennessy, p. 2), it is crucial to nuance this celebration. The joyous expressions of ordinary lesbians on the platform should not be immediately framed through the lens of sophisticated political mobilization or dismissed if they do not align with academic critiques of visibility

politics (as discussed in subchapter 1.2 concerning the limitations of “lesbian chic” and homonormativity). Instead, the affect generated—the feelings of connection, recognition, and shared experience—warrants deeper consideration, especially in a precarious socio-political climate (as discussed in Chapter 2).

TikTok, as a platform, is far from a neutral or inherently safe space for queer individuals; it is embedded within and reflective of broader societal power dynamics and can perpetuate algorithmic bias (Cockayne & Richardson, 2017, p. 14; Hewa, 2021, p. 5). As explored in Section 1.3, its algorithms can shape what becomes visible, potentially prioritizing certain aesthetics or narratives over others. Yet, it is undeniable that TikTok has significantly impacted the music industry (Ivo, 2021) and amplified the artists associated with the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ (Appendix 1, №1, №3). More importantly, it became a key conduit for lesbians to discover and share a wide range of cultural products, from films and television shows to music, often bypassing traditional gatekeepers and random Google searches (Appendix 2, №11, №16, №20) that usually highlight the already popular options. The platform facilitated a form of communal curation, where recommendations for diverse content (Huang, 2022), circulated within user networks, supplementing and sometimes challenging mainstream offerings. This demonstrates a negotiation of the ‘code/space’ (Cockayne & Richardson, 2017), where users leverage the platform’s affordances to build connections and share resources.

The significance of this digital congregation extends beyond the consumption of media. For many lesbians, especially those in oppressive environments, living in the closet, or geographically isolated from offline communities and dating scenes, TikTok provided a crucial avenue for connection and ‘seeability.’ This seeability, distinct from mainstream visibility, is about being affectively recognized and validated by one’s own community—a profound sense of mattering to each other (Hennessy, 1994 p. 20). The use of sounds from artists like Chappell Roan, for example, became a way for countless lesbians to articulate their own experiences, to see and be seen by others who resonate with those narratives<sup>13</sup>. In this sense, the platform facilitated glimpses of a queer utopia, a “then and there” of queer futurity (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 21–22), where connection and shared understanding momentarily transcended the limitations of the present. Crucially, in contrast to mainstream articles (Appendix 1) which often focus on the individual personas of artists like Chappell Roan and the profit-making potential of their visibility (Hennessy, 2000), the more

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<sup>13</sup> For example, if one opens any of Chappell Roan songs (and their edits) on TikTok, the page with all the videos ever made with this sound appear.

meaningful aspect for the TikTok community was not primarily *artists* visibility, but the visibility of *other lesbians* on the platform—in the videos using her sounds, in the comment sections fostering dialogue, and in video stitches creating meaningful conversations. Different lesbian communities, like Black lesbian creators and their audiences, formed their own vibrant “bubbles,” as well (Appendix 3, №3).

The ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ community on TikTok therefore functions as a “counterpublic” (Fraser, *Rethinking the Public Sphere*; Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*), offering alternative narratives and spaces for expression that challenge mainstream, heteronormative, and even homonormative discourses (as discussed in section 1.1). The observation that the TikTok discourse often featured a wider array of musicians, including more BIPoC artists (Appendix 2, №3, №8, №18; Appendix 3, №1, №3, №8), supports this interpretation. However, the very tools that enable these formations, particularly TikTok’s algorithmic architecture, subject these communities to the logics of platform capitalism, creating a tension between connection and the risks of surveillance, data extraction, and commercial co-optation (Section 1.3). Queer communities on TikTok are in a constant state of negotiation, leveraging platform affordances while navigating these inherent risks.

While this mode of connection and affective archiving may not constitute traditional political mobilization, and these TikTok users often remain “detached voices,” there is an undeniable potentiality to them to form a counter-discourse of queer seeability (Muñoz, 2009, p. 25). The platform, despite its own normative tendencies<sup>14</sup>, still provides avenues for more diverse assertions of lesbian existence to be seen and valued. Dominant societal forces often prefer marginalized communities to be consumed by external battles or assimilationist pressures, draining energy from internal healing and connection, making this focus on pragmatic, inclusionary battles can take away energy that might otherwise be directed towards the “utopian performative” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 98) or the “anticipatory illumination of the utopian” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 15). On TikTok we can see a reclamation of focus on lesbian interiority and communal well-being, a quiet insistence on existing and flourishing on one’s own terms (not just in the data sample, but also behind other tags, that are used in the sample like #lesbian, #wlw, etc.).

The dual relationship between algorithmically governed platforms and the profound “affect and potentiality” that José Esteban Muñoz identified as queer futurities manifesting in the present (Muñoz, 2009) is crucial for this research. The ‘Lesbian Renaissance,’ as it

<sup>14</sup> Evidenced by, for example, “lesbian wedding” content that might reflect homonormative values (TikTok Discover page).

unfolded on TikTok in 2024, should not be narrowly understood as a mere “visibility win,” for its importance extends far beyond that depoliticizing logic. It represented a significant surge of shared affect, a palpable “sapphic wave” that resonated deeply within the users.

I would like to argue that artists, such as Chappell Roan did not “invent”, in isolation the articulation of the experiences in their art (like “Good luck, Babe!” whose lyrics explore the hardships of compulsory heterosexuality); rather, their widespread resonance comes from the users’ familiarity with realities like normative heterosexuality. These critical voices occur because their lyrics and performances mediate lived experiences manifested in millions of shared lip syncs under the Chappell Roan’s song on TikTok (TikTok Discover page). It is not an isolated effect of the celebrity, instead, it is built upon lived lesbian experiences. Such cultural figures as Roan ultimately achieve broader visibility, but no matter how we are forced to conceptualise it primarily as a visibility win, it is in fact a win of the community’s mutual feeling, seeing and validating each other. Thus, the lesbian community through the established internal connections in TikTok subsequently recognize a reflection of their collective and individual experiences within these artists. These everyday acts of connection, aesthetic expression, and narrative sharing serve to “art-direct the real,” actively gesturing towards what lesbian life could and should be (Muñoz, 2009).

This phenomenon observed on TikTok aligns with what Claudia Skinner (2023), drawing from José Esteban Muñoz, terms a ‘scrolling utopia.’ This utopia is not a static endpoint but is embodied in the very “striving for a future that is different from the repression that exists in the here and now” (Skinner, 2023, p. 16). Queer creators on TikTok participate in making the queer utopic moments through their videos, which act as minoritarian performances challenging and refusing the “violences of cis-heteropatriarchal U.S. society” (Skinner, 2023, p. 16). These everyday and often theatrical enactments allow audiences to see new queer formations, offering tangible glimpses of alternative queer futures and inviting collective participation in this ongoing utopian project (Skinner, 2023, p. 75). TikTok thus functions as an evolving platform where users actively articulate and strive toward alternative possibilities, aspirations for improvement, and emergent futures.

The evidence for TikTok as such a ‘scrolling utopia’ is abundant in how queer individuals, particularly lesbians, harness the platform for vital “identity work and community building” (Skinner, 2023, p. 51). They actively create this space through resilience, often contending with algorithmic biases (Skinner, 2023, p. 16). According to Bhandari and Bimo (2022), TikTok users have developed what can be described as an ‘algorithmic imaginary’: a conceptual understanding of how the algorithm operates, which they then use to interact with

or manipulate the system to better reflect their preferences (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022, p. 6). This is evident as creators model “pathways out of cis-heteronormativity” and envision possibilities for a more liberatory queer community existence (Skinner, 2023, p. 19). By encouraging the circulation of knowledge and the envisioning of emergent queer possibilities, the platform supports individual self-discovery and helps users access essential resources and networks of care. (Skinner, 2023, p. 99–104). These digital ‘avatars of queer futurity’ (Skinner, 2023, p. 244) on TikTok forge present a “blueprint of a world not quite here” (Skinner, 2023, p. 106) and underscoring the persistent, powerful striving for a queer utopia that can even catalyze connections beyond the screen itself (Skinner, 2023, p. 244).

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The exploration of the “Lesbian Renaissance” on TikTok in 2024, as detailed in this chapter, ultimately reveals a phenomenon far more nuanced than a simple increase in mainstream visibility. While the heightened presence of lesbian artists and cultural products (Appendix 2; Appendix 3) is a significant component, the core outcome of this digital moment, from my analytical standpoint, lies in its profound affective impact and its generation of communal “seeability” within the lesbian community itself. This internal dynamic of mutual recognition, shared experience, and connection—facilitated by, yet also negotiated against, the platform’s algorithmic architecture—constitutes the most salient achievement of this period.

The chapter demonstrates that TikTok became a critical site for lesbians to not only consume but actively co-create and define this “renaissance” on their own terms, often diverging from or critically engaging with mainstream narratives. This, I argue, is more fundamental than the celebration of individual artists; it is the collective that imbues these figures and their work with meaning, recognizing reflections of their own lived realities, and thus amplifying their significance.

Consequently, the “Lesbian Renaissance” on TikTok served as a powerful enactment of what Muñoz terms ‘queer futurity’ in the present (Muñoz, 2009). The myriad “utopian performances” (Appendix 2; Appendix 3)—the everyday expressions of joy, desire, solidarity, anger, and critique—collectively contribute to a living archive of lesbian experience. This is not merely a repository but an active site of meaning-making, where past expressions continually inform present understandings and future possibilities. While the platform’s commercial nature and algorithmic governance present ongoing risks of co-optation and

homogenization, the community's capacity for critical engagement suggests a persistent agency, as it was seen even in the limited data sample.

Therefore, the principal outcome of this digital 'Lesbian Renaissance' is not the quantifiable "visibility win" often touted by external observers, but the qualitative deepening of affective bonds and the fostering of a resilient, multifaceted "seeability" within the lesbian community. This internal affirmation, this collective articulation of presence and potentiality, holds significant cultural and, indeed, implicitly political weight, particularly within a broader socio-political context that often remains challenging. The 'Lesbian Renaissance' discourse on TikTok in 2024 was, at its heart, a testament to the community's ability to find and create meaning, connection, and glimpses of a more affirmed future, even within the complex and often contradictory spaces of contemporary digital platforms informed by the wider socio-political environment.

## CONCLUSION: LESBIAN FUTURITIES

This thesis has critically examined ‘Lesbian Renaissance’—a discourse that gained significant traction in 2024, allegedly claiming a new era of lesbian visibility and representation. The investigation found that popular media outlets predominantly constructed this “renaissance” as a celebratory “visibility win.” However, this narrative, as explored by the research, was often underpinned by selective, commodified, and homonormative ideologies that privileged certain palatable, market-friendly lesbian identities over others. This mainstream discourse circulated within a highly polarized United States, marked by escalating “war on gender,” with the celebrated visibility offering limited challenge to broader exclusionary political movements.

The analysis of popular media outlets (Appendix 1) in Chapter 3 revealed that the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ was predominantly framed as a “visibility win,” celebrating an alleged unprecedented surge in lesbian representation in music, television, and film. Discourse analysis exposed this celebratory narrative as complex and contradictory, deeply embedded in market logic and selective representation. This frequently resulted in the marginalization or rendering unseen of the broader spectrum of lesbian cultural production, including the downplaying of potentially disruptive elements like Chappell Roan’s drag identity and the absence of representation of BIPOC, trans, disabled, and working-class lesbians. Despite some articles acknowledging this lack of diversity, they largely failed to substantively counter it, thereby reinforcing the very system of selective visibility they superficially critiqued. Crucially, this thesis aimed not merely to expose who achieves visibility within such a framework, but also to demonstrate how the very politics of visibility, when divorced from structural critique, may detrimentally affect the capacity for mobilizing towards meaningful social and political change, as the “win” seems to already be present if some marginalised identities get to be visibilized in the mainstream.

This ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse operates within a U.S. context where anti-gender politics, though overtly targeting transgender individuals, also circumscribe the legitimacy of all queer identities, including lesbians (Butler, 1993; Duggan, 2002). Although increased lesbian visibility suggests progress, it cannot be regarded as an unequivocal victory, since prevailing exclusionary ideologies continue to delimit which bodies are intelligible and which remain rendered unintelligible or socially uninhabitable (Butler, 1993, p. 224). For many lesbians—particularly those whose gender expressions deviate from normative femininity—this conditional intelligibility results in heightened precarity, as their identities

become susceptible to the same discursive mechanisms that produce “unlivable” zones for transgender individuals (Butler, 1993, p. 224). Consequently, lesbian identity under these circumstances entails navigating a landscape in which visibility coexists with the imperative to negotiate and contest the restrictive terms of recognition imposed by a heteronormative framework (Duggan, 2002; Butler, 1993).

In light of these dynamics, it was important to examine how lesbians themselves engage with the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse; accordingly, TikTok was chosen as the platform for this investigation. Based on a dataset of 25 videos (Appendix 2) and supplementary material (Appendix 3), the examination of the discourse on this social media platform presented a more nuanced picture.

While TikTok users also celebrated the increased visibility of mainstream artists and cultural products, the platform facilitated a broader and more diverse engagement with the discourse. Creators on TikTok in the data sample often showcased a wider array of musicians, including BIPOC artists and those from different genres, and provided historical context that challenged the narrative of an entirely novel renaissance, for instance, by highlighting earlier contributions from R&B artists. Critiques of the mainstream focus on White, American, and feminine-presenting lesbians were also voiced, alongside concerns about the potential co-option of lesbian aesthetics and terminology by mainstream culture. Lesbian engagement with this cultural moment on TikTok, though subject to the platform’s algorithmic governance, demonstrated significant agency in navigating these dynamics.

Crucially, I argue that TikTok emerged as a space for what Hennessy terms “seeability” (1994, p. 20)—a site for communal curation, connection, and mutual recognition where lesbians not merely actively participated in shaping the meaning of the “renaissance” and discussing mainstream cultural products created by queer women, but engaged with those products in a meaningful for their politicised identity manner. By using popular or only recognised on TikTok songs, they are reshaping their meanings, creating dialogue between each other, enabling a sense of shared experience and glimpses of a “queer futurity” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 21), where the visibility of other lesbians on the platform often holds more significance than the visibility of celebrity figures alone. This internal dynamic of mutual recognition and connection constitutes a salient outcome, moving beyond a simple “visibility win” to foster a resilient, multifaceted “seeability” within the lesbian community itself. It might not be yet a conventionally recognisable mobilising political tool, but it shows *potentiality* to be or become such. These small video performances bring to the repressive reality moments that can be understood as provisional enactments of a queer

horizon—interruptions of straight time that gesture toward alternative possibilities for lesbian life (Muñoz, 2009, pp. 21–22). By staging these enactments, TikTok creators create affirming the “not-yet-conscious” potentials of queer futurity and insisting on a future that is not predicated on assimilation or state-sanctioned recognition (Muñoz, 2009, p. 98). In so doing, lesbian creators’ activity on TikTok might function as anticipatory illuminations of a lesbian futurity rooted in communal resilience and radical imagination, momentarily opening up the possibility of worlds in which lesbian identities thrive beyond the current limits of intelligibility.

It should be noted that this research addressed methodological challenges inherent in studying a rapidly evolving, algorithmically mediated platform like TikTok—where content can appear and disappear in an instant and where visibility is conditioned by recommendation systems. The study developed a systematic approach for capturing and archiving videos, metadata, and user interactions, and then adapted discourse analysis as the main method to account for TikTok’s multimodal texts (video, audio, captions) and algorithmic sorting. By integrating fine-grained examination of individual posts and TikTok discover pages with a broader critique of structural power relations, this thesis not only reveals how hegemonic norms are reproduced but also how counter-hegemonic expressions and alternative knowledges emerge in real time. In doing so, it contributes to existing scholarship by offering a replicable framework for applying critical discourse analysis to dynamic social media environments, demonstrating how everyday digital practices around the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ both reflect and contest prevailing norms of gender and sexuality.

In sum, this thesis demonstrates that the ‘Lesbian Renaissance’ discourse, as framed by mainstream outlets, offers only a partial and commodified form of visibility that elides the structural exclusions faced by many lesbians, particularly those with gender-nonconforming identities. While TikTok data sample captures the same discourse, it was found that the platform functions beyond it—as a site of collective “seeability” where lesbians actively negotiate, contest, and rearticulate the terms of their representation, generating provisional utopian trajectories that point toward radically different futures. Although this emergent digital praxis is not yet a fully formed mobilizing force, it signals the possibility of substantive, community-driven transformation—one that refuses to settle for mere quantifiable presence.

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## APPENDIX 1

## “Lesbian Renaissance” in Media Outlets

Nº	Name and Short Description	About	Link
1	<p><i>DAZED</i>  <b>We’re in the midst of a lesbian renaissance</b></p> <p>From Chappell Roan and Billie Eilish to BBC’s I Kissed A Girl, sapphic representation in pop culture is at an all-time high.</p>	<p><b>Dazed Digital</b> is an alternative style and pop culture magazine. It has a global audience, sitting primarily in the US, UK and Europe.</p> <p><b>Section:</b> Life &amp; Culture</p> <p><b>Article Author:</b> Miriam Balanescu, a culture writer and editor based between London and Cambridge, specialising in film and books criticism.</p>	<a href="https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/62761/1/welcome-to-the-lesbian-renaissance-billie-eilish-chappell-roan">https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/62761/1/welcome-to-the-lesbian-renaissance-billie-eilish-chappell-roan</a>
2	<p><i>DAZED</i>  <b>The lesbian renaissance hits London Fashion Week</b></p> <p>From Erdem to S.S. Daley, Sinéad O’Dwyer to Chopova Lowena, 2024’s lesbian renaissance continued into London Fashion Week’s SS25 collections</p>	<p><b>Dazed Digital</b> is an alternative style and pop culture magazine. It has a global audience, sitting primarily in the US, UK and Europe.</p> <p><b>Section:</b> Fashion</p> <p><b>Article Author:</b> Isobel Van Dyke is a social media editor and features writer covering music, nightlife, fashion and LGBTQ+ culture.</p>	<a href="https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/64671/1/london-fashion-week-ss25-lesbian-renaissance-fashion">https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/64671/1/london-fashion-week-ss25-lesbian-renaissance-fashion</a>
3	<p><i>COSMOPOLITAN</i>  <b>Please—I Beg You—Stop Calling It a “Lesbian Renaissance”</b></p> <p>In this summer of Chappell Roan, here’s your healthy reminder that pop culture wouldn’t even exist without queer women.</p>	<p><b>Cosmopolitan</b> is an American online and print magazine focused on women's fashion, entertainment, relationships, and lifestyle.</p> <p><b>Section:</b> Celebrities &amp; Entertainment</p>	<a href="https://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/celebs/a61865144/lesbian-renaissance-queer-contributions-mainstream/">https://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/celebs/a61865144/lesbian-renaissance-queer-contributions-mainstream/</a>

		<p><b>Article Author:</b> Samantha Olson is an assistant news editor at Cosmo, covering all things pop culture, entertainment, and celebrity news.</p>	
4	<p><i>XTRA</i> <b>2024's hottest onscreen trend? Toxic lesbians</b></p>	<p><b>Xtra</b> is an online LGBTQ magazine and community platform covering politics, culture, health, sex and relationships. Xtra is based in Toronto, Canada with the majority of the reading audience from the USA (36%) and Canada (20%).</p> <p><b>Section:</b> Rainbow Rewind 2024</p> <p><b>Article Author:</b> Anna Govert is an editor and critic based in Northwest Indiana, USA, whose work has appeared in Paste Magazine, The AV Club, Jezebel and more.</p>	<p><a href="https://xtramagazine.com/culture/2024s-hottest-onscreen-trend-toxic-lesbians-269720">https://xtramagazine.com/culture/2024s-hottest-onscreen-trend-toxic-lesbians-269720</a></p>
5	<p><i>HER CAMPUS</i> <b>Is This Really a Lesbian Renaissance?</b></p>	<p><b>Her Campus</b> is an online magazine based in Boston, USA, targets and connects college women on topics like pop culture, wellness, style, politics, health, and more.</p> <p><b>Section:</b> Culture</p> <p><b>Article Author:</b> Healey Kohn was a sophomore at Kenyon College originally from New Jersey at the time of the publication.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.hercampus.com/school/kenyon/is-this-really-a-lesbian-renaissance/">https://www.hercampus.com/school/kenyon/is-this-really-a-lesbian-renaissance/</a></p>

6	<p><i>HER CAMPUS</i></p> <p><b>The Lesbian Renaissance: Three Rising Lesbian Artists Changing the Game</b></p>	<p><b>Her Campus</b> is an online magazine based in Boston, USA, targets and connects college women on topics like pop culture, wellness, style, politics, health, and more.</p> <p><b>Section:</b> Culture (subsection “Entertainment”)</p> <p><b>Article Author:</b> Joanne Joseph was a MSc Marketing student at the University of Bristol at the time of the publication.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.hercampus.com/school/bristol/the-lesbian-renaissance-three-rising-lesbian-artists-changing-the-game/">https://www.hercampus.com/school/bristol/the-lesbian-renaissance-three-rising-lesbian-artists-changing-the-game/</a></p>
7	<p><i>PINK NEWS</i></p> <p><b>What is the ‘lesbian renaissance’? Here’s everything you need to know</b></p>	<p><b>PinkNews</b> is a UK-based online newspaper focused on LGBTQ+ news and culture, with over 60% of its audience coming from American readers and viewers. The magazine claims to be “the world’s largest and most influential LGBTQ+ led media brand.”</p> <p><b>Section:</b> Identity (subsection “Lesbian”)</p> <p><b>Article Author:</b> Emily Maskell is a UK-based freelance film critic, entertainment and culture writer.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/08/07/what-is-the-lesbian-renaissance-heres-everything-you-need-to-know/">https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/08/07/what-is-the-lesbian-renaissance-heres-everything-you-need-to-know/</a></p>
8	<p><i>ELLE</i></p> <p><b>We Need More Than A Lesbian Renaissance; I Want A Revolution</b></p> <p>Pop culture is seemingly currently undergoing a celebration of sapphic culture, but this moment in the spotlight</p>	<p><b>Elle UK</b> is a British fashion, beauty, and lifestyle magazine, known for its focus on style, culture, and the latest trends.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/a61452046/lesbian-renaissance-revolution/">https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/a61452046/lesbian-renaissance-revolution/</a></p>

	isn't enough, writes Sophie Wilkinson.	<p><b>Section:</b> Life + Culture (subsection “Pride and Joy”)</p> <p><b>Article Author:</b> Sophie Wilkinson is a freelance journalist across news, features and investigations based in the UK. Wilkinson openly dates women.</p>	
9	<p><i>THE STANDARD</i></p> <p><b>Inside London’s lesbian renaissance, from La Camionera to Strapped</b></p> <p>Spaces for the capital’s queer women have long been overlooked, but as El Hunt reports, a wave of inclusive, dyke-friendly nights are on the way</p>	<p><b>The London Standard</b> provides all the latest news in London, around the UK and the world.</p> <p><b>Section:</b> Going Out (subsection “Pubs, Bars and Nightlife”)</p> <p><b>Article Author:</b> El Hunt is a freelance journalist covering music and culture with bylines in The Guardian, NME, BBC, Time Out London, Evening Standard and more.</p>	<a href="https://www.standard.co.uk/going-out/bars/london-lesbian-renaissance-bars-clubs-popups-b1150557.html">https://www.standard.co.uk/going-out/bars/london-lesbian-renaissance-bars-clubs-popups-b1150557.html</a>
10	<p><i>DAILY MAIL</i></p> <p><b>The 'lesbian renaissance' has arrived: LGBT+ icons hail a 'sapphic tsunami' as steamy female sex scenes dominate TV and film and pop lyrics depict girl-on-girl love stories</b></p>	<p><b>The Daily Mail</b> is a British tabloid newspaper and online news platform focused on sensational news, entertainment, celebrity gossip, and popular culture.</p> <p><b>Section:</b> Femail</p> <p><b>Article Author:</b> Alice is a Junior Reporter for Femail, covering all things lifestyle from food and fashion to wellness and trends.</p>	<a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-13684139/The-lesbian-renaissance-arrived-LGBT-icons-hail-sapphic-tsunami-steamy-female-sex-scenes-dominate-TV-film-pop-lyrics-depict-girl-girl-love-stories.html">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-13684139/The-lesbian-renaissance-arrived-LGBT-icons-hail-sapphic-tsunami-steamy-female-sex-scenes-dominate-TV-film-pop-lyrics-depict-girl-girl-love-stories.html</a>
11	<p><i>VOGUE</i></p> <p><b>Do we need to talk about the “lesbian</b></p>	<p><b>Vogue Australia</b> provides runway</p>	<a href="https://www.vogue.com.au/culture/features/d">https://www.vogue.com.au/culture/features/d</a>

	<p><b>renaissance”?</b></p> <p>Queer and lesbian pop stars are finally getting their flowers in the media, but there is progression still to come, and a full past of pain and struggle that we must acknowledge to get the full picture.</p>	<p>coverage of all the major fashion shows, reports on seasonal trends, the latest social, celebrity and fashion news, and pop culture.</p> <p>Section: Culture</p> <p>Article Author: Ella O’Keeffe is a Head of Brand in Vogue Australia and an open lesbian.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.queernews.com.au/news-story/c01afb9e917a058addd5de0b519a1e577">o-we-need-to-talk-about-the-lesbian-renaissance/news-story/c01afb9e917a058addd5de0b519a1e577</a></p>
12	<p><b><i>LITTLE UMBRELLA</i></b></p> <p><b>Are We Entering a ‘Lesbian Renaissance’?</b></p>	<p><b>Little Umbrella Collective</b> is a New Zealand-based creative organization encompassing music, visual arts, literature, film, and other artistic disciplines.</p> <p>Section: Articles &amp; Essays</p> <p>Article Author: not found.</p>	<p><a href="https://littleumbrellacollective.co.nz/are-we-entering-a-lesbian-renaissance/">https://littleumbrellacollective.co.nz/are-we-entering-a-lesbian-renaissance/</a></p>

## APPENDIX 2

### “Lesbian Renaissance” Related Content on TikTok

No	Video	Link
1	<b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@carolinekingsburyxx">https://www.tiktok.com/@carolinekingsburyxx</a> US-based lesbian musician	
1.1	<i>Video 1</i>  <b>Caption:</b> the lesbian renaissance visited me and this song and i am so grateful damn 🥹👩🏻❤️🙏🏻🎀 i knew this was a hit the moment i wrote it at my desk before going to my grocery store job i had back then and i remember sneaking away to listen to the demo i made bc i was so excited. anyway ily thank u bbs 🎀🥹👄❤️ #carolinekingsbury #indiepop #queer #80saesthetic #synthpop #synthwave #synthtok #pop #newartist #lesbianrenaissance #chappellroan #gaytiktok 🌈 #lesbiansoftiktok  <b>Description:</b> the creator, who is a US-based musician, sings to her own song with the following text over video: “would like to thank the lesbian renaissance of summer 2024 for helping get this sleeper hit i wrote alone in my bedroom released 3 yrs ago over a million streams this summer likewowwww”	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYc5jkG/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYc5jkG/</a>
1.2	<i>Video 2</i>  <b>Caption:</b> hi i'm caroline kingsbury and 2024 the year of the lesbian pop renaissance changed my life forever and next year the world will know my name  <b>Description:</b> the creator with the text over video says about how life-changing was lesbian renaissance: “hi i'm caroline kingsbury and 2024 the year of the lesbian pop renaissance changed my life forever and next year the world will know my name”	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYcf6RA/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYcf6RA/</a>
1.3	<i>Video 3</i>  <b>Caption:</b> dont wry guys im OMWWWW 🌈💖🥹🎧👄💖🌟🌟💖🌈🎧🙄🦋🙄📺 #lesbiansoftiktok #wlw #iconic #80saesthetic #80smusic #80sfashion #queer #newartist #maximalist #fashiontiktok #newwave  <b>Description:</b> the creator on the video walks with the text over video: “me omw to the lesbian pop renaissance of summer”	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYcSAfs/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYcSAfs/</a>
2	<b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@xo.amame">https://www.tiktok.com/@xo.amame</a> Account for Amame space which is designed for sapphic women to connect, dance, and celebrate (in the Philippines).  <b>Caption:</b> Sapphic Renaissance fair is happening next week and you wouldn't	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYcDaJt/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYcDaJt/</a>

	<p>wanna miss out #wlw #wlwtok #queertok #lesbiansoftiktok #lesbianevents #sapphicparties #lesbianspace #sapphicevents @We are Amame</p> <p><b>Description:</b> the video contains the announcement of the (July 23-26, 2024) to Sapphic Renaissance Fair in Amame (lesbian space) made to Chappell Roan's song "Femininomenon."</p>	
3	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@granorla">https://www.tiktok.com/@granorla</a> Lesbian creator based in London, UK.</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> Lesbian renaissance and representation #lesbianrenaissance #lesbianmusician #wlw</p> <p><b>Description:</b> the creator discusses the current "lesbian renaissance" and increased visibility, appreciating the progress while critiquing the mainstream representation for often being white and feminine, advocating for broader inclusion of diverse lesbian identities like butch and POC individuals.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b> Recently, the word lesbian renaissance has been thrown around on TikTok and that we are in one right now. I think it's definitely a valid thing to, like, comment on. And we've got Chappell Roan, Renee Rapp, we've got a load of bands and we have like, I Kissed the girl in the UK, the dating show. But I've seen it elsewhere by other TikTok creators, that this isn't the only time lesbians have become mainstream. It's happened before and it's amazing to get this representation. But I think it's really important to not just stop there because I think a lot of the lesbians that are kind of in the mainstream right now. Great, great to see great representation. A lot of them are feminine presenting. There's nothing wrong with that. And lesbians and queer people need to see that. We all exist in different. Different in different forms. But there's definitely, like a lack of butch it going on. Nothing is femininity, which feels very gay still. It is still able to maybe be tolerated by a heteronormative society, whereas if you were maybe like a butch stinger, it wouldn't be as so much tolerated. And I'd even say the mask presenting queer people who are slightly more into the mainstream now, they still have a sort of amount of tolerance by society maybe. Of course, a lot of them mainstream is white and American and of course there's, like, nothing wrong with that, but, like white, American, feminine. I think it's just important to be, obviously be grateful for this representation we're getting. It is amazing. And all these people are doing such amazing work and loving and loving getting lesbian music. But I think it's important that we still, like, fight for representation elsewhere and a variety of representation, because we all look different, we all are different, we all come from different backgrounds. Obviously a lot of people of colour were integral to the formation of the LGBTQ community and for them to not get mainstream recognition, it seems a bit disheartening. It must be hard if you're growing up and you don't see yourself represented. There is probably. There is many queer POC characters and artists and</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYcQFtj/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYcQFtj/</a></p>


	<p>musicians. Like, there's probably many butch ones as well.</p> <p>I think we are yet to have that sort of mainstream butchness again.</p> <p>Not that I'm aware of. I don't know for this sort of generation, but it's really interesting to see and I don't seem like I am complaining because I am so happy to get to have lesbians come out on top, no pun intended. I think we just got to keep doing what we're doing and got to widen our circle of representation because there are so many different beautiful lesbians who will look different, who will present differently. And they deserve the people who've grown up and have never seen that, they deserve to see that, or people deserve to feel, understand themselves. Also, I'm fully aware that I am white and I probably have pretty privilege or whatever. I young. Yeah.</p>	
4	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@rani.adi">https://www.tiktok.com/@rani.adi</a></p> <p>Lesbian musician based in New York City, USA</p>	
4.1	<p><i>Video 1</i></p> <p><b>Caption:</b> Live laugh lesbian 2024 #wllw #lgbt</p> <p><b>Description:</b> The creator identifies 2024 as a period termed the "lesbian renaissance," positively evaluating this time and noting the significance of experiencing it in New York City.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b></p> <p>I just want to say I am so lucky to be alive in the lesbian renaissance of 2024. It's a crazy time to be alive, being in New York City for the lesbian renaissance. Holy shit, bro. The greatest experience of my entire fucking life. And if you're a lesbian in 2024, let's fucking go bad.</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYc48cB/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYc48cB/</a></p>
4.2	<p><i>Video 2</i></p> <p><b>Caption:</b> Lets go lesbians!!! #feminism #storytime #wllw #lgbt</p> <p><b>Description:</b> The creator describes the "lesbian renaissance of 2024" as a highly significant pop culture development, contrasting the current increased visibility of lesbians and prominent lesbian artists with their personal experiences of lower visibility approximately a decade earlier.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b></p> <p>The lesbian renaissance of 2024 is, like, literally one of the greatest things that's ever fucking happened in pop culture. I'm fucking serious. Like, have you ever seen this many lesbians this visible? Like, I've been queer since I was literally 14 and like, a decade ago when I came out, when I was, like, a freshman in high school. Like, being a lesbian, like, being queer, dating women was such a thing. Like, it was such a thing. Like, I was one of the queer kids in high school, and there weren't fucking very many of us. Let me tell you. I was literally, like, one of maybe 10 people that was out. Like, me and my girlfriend were like, the queer couple thing. Fucking God. For lesbians rising up in 2024. Like, I love that, baby. Gays will have such a space and are seen so much in the industry. Like, there are so many fucking lesbian artists that are massive right</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3UuKT/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3UuKT/</a></p>

	now and that are giving a platform and giving a voice to everybody that, like, needs it.	
5	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@brookeheartslife">https://www.tiktok.com/@brookeheartslife</a> Lesbian disabled content creator</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> lesbian historians will study our 2024 Renaissance #thegiver #wlw #lesbian #disabled #chappellroan</p> <p><b>Description:</b> a disabled lesbian creator lip synching to Chappell Roan's song with the following text over video: "what a time to be a lesbian!!!! I can see myself in every genre of music &amp; movie"</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYcVUHt/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShYcVUHt/</a>
6	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@i.am.waffl3z">https://www.tiktok.com/@i.am.waffl3z</a> Lesbian musician based in the USA</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> The sapphic renaissance is HERE! 🌈✨ it's time to break down why lesbian artists aren't just participating in pop culture anymore - they're DEFINING it. #LesbianTikTok #WLW #PopCulture #ChappellRoan #ReneeRapp #Kehlani #SapphicTikTok #QueerMusic #2024Trends #PopMusic #lesbianmusic #lesbians #lesbian #sapphic #lesbiansoftiktok #sapphic</p> <p><b>Description:</b> The creator asserts that lesbians exert a major influence on contemporary music and pop culture, citing specific artists like Chappell Roan (mentioning her drag persona), Reneé Rapp, and Kehlani, along with general trends like sold-out shows and online fan engagement, to characterize 2024 as a period defined by significant lesbian cultural impact.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b> Okay, can we talk about how lesbians are literally carrying music and pop culture right now? Exhibit A: Chapel Roan. Chapel gave us "The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess," which turned every concert into a drag show - sapphic wonderland. Then Reneé Rapp said "I'm gonna make "Mean girls" gay" and dropped "Snow angel," which became every lesbian's winter anthem. Kehlani coming out as lesbian and blessing us with "Up at Night" and that iconic melt video. Absolute legend status! Sapphic artists are selling out shows, creating inclusive spaces, unapologetically queer art, defining fashion and running stan TikTok. 2024 is officially a lesbian world and we are just living in it.</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3JjsQ/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3JjsQ/</a>
7	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@girlimusic">https://www.tiktok.com/@girlimusic</a> Bisexual musician based in the UK</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> bringing the british sapphic renaissance to the States baby! 🌈🇺🇸💗 #ontour #usatour #sapphic #wlw</p> <p><b>Description:</b> This video functions as a promotional announcement where the creator, UK queer artist Girlie, references the "lesbian renaissance of 2024" and their history of releasing relevant music since 2016 to advertise their upcoming US tour, prompting viewers in specific cities to comment for ticket links.</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3dPfc/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3dPfc/</a>

	<p><b>Full speech transcription:</b>          If you are loving the lesbian renaissance of 2024 and you might be interested to know that I have been releasing songs about liking girls since 2016. My name is Girlie, I am a UK singer, songwriter, queer artist and I am coming to the USA to do my fourth American tour.          I'm coming to all of the beautiful cities that are popping up on your screen right now. If you live in or near any of these places and you want to witness the Sapphic Renaissance live on stage, then comment below and I will send you the link to tickets.</p>	
8	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@catburnsupdates">https://www.tiktok.com/@catburnsupdates</a>          Lesbian musician based in the UK</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> here for the queer representation 🥰🥰🥰          video inspired by this girls remix          and @Amy O 🍷 ✨ ✨ ✨          #catburns #billieeilish #reneerapp #nxdia #sashakeable #kehlani #arloparks #willow #chappellroan #070shake #girlinred #fletcher #wlw #queermusic #lgbtqtiktok #sapphics #lesbianrenaissance #queerartist</p> <p><b>Description:</b> A US-based Black lesbian musician made a video edit featuring herself alongside with other queer women musicians with the text over the video: “the sapphic renaissance carrying the music industry &gt;&gt;&gt;&gt;,” where “&gt;&gt;&gt;&gt;” means “more than anything.” The video features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 070 Shake - Queer (has generally avoided specific labels), USA, New Jersey</li> <li>• Fletcher - Queer, USA, New Jersey</li> <li>• Arlo Parks - Bisexual, UK, London</li> <li>• Willow - Lesbian, USA, California</li> <li>• DoeChii - Queer, USA, Florida</li> <li>• René Rapp - Lesbian, USA, North Carolina</li> <li>• Chappell Roan - Lesbian, USA, Missouri</li> <li>• Cat Burns - Lesbian, UK, London</li> <li>• Billie Eilish - Queer, USA, California</li> <li>• Miley Cyrus - Pansexual, USA, Tennessee</li> <li>• girl in red - Lesbian, Norway</li> <li>• Nxdia - Lesbian, UK</li> </ul>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3JwAx/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3JwAx/</a></p>
9	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@thescarylibrary">https://www.tiktok.com/@thescarylibrary</a>          Account of a non-binary lesbian mostly dedicated to books</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> Posting my drafts!!! #chappellroan #reneerapp #lesbianmusic</p> <p><b>Description:</b> In this video, the creator analyzes the perceived differential popularity between musicians Chappell Roan and René Rapp within the context of the 2024 "lesbian renaissance," hypothesizing that Roan's greater success stems from a larger volume of explicitly lesbian-themed songs compared to Rapp's catalogue.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b>          I think I know why Chappell Roan e blew up more than René Rapp during this</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3ChCb/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3ChCb/</a></p>



	<p>lesbian renaissance of 2024. So hear me out. Chappell Roan has a lot of songs about women, about liking women, like Good Luck Babe, like feminine nonon etc etc etc. Whereas Reneé Rapp only kind of has pretty girls. A lot of her songs have he/him pronouns and she wrote during the time that she was still identifying as bisexual, which is valid and fine and now she's a lesbian. But she doesn't really have songs that are lesbian songs except for "Pretty girls." And I think in order for her to blow up more, she needs to drop another album in the future. Her sophomore album that's full of lesbian songs. She/her pronouns, about lesbian love, lesbian heartbreak, whatever she wants, lesbian joy, lesbian pain, whatever. As long as it's lesbian, it's going to be good. Because as much as I love Reneé Rapp, I don't care about hearing a song about a guy. So yeah, I think that's the plan that she needs to follow in order to become bigger.</p>	
10	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@nareisraelyan">https://www.tiktok.com/@nareisraelyan</a> Account of lesbian content creator based in the USA</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> Of all people.. we really are in a Sapphic Renaissance, arent we? 😊 #harriswalz #wlw #🌈 #pinkponyclub</p> <p><b>Description:</b> the creator lip synced to the song made from Trum's words about "immigrants eating the dogs, eating the cats" with the following text over video: "Trump dropping the latest Lesbian Banger of 2024 was not in my bingo card 😊," employing the phrase "eating cats" as a double entendre that equates Trump's words with slang referencing cunnilingus, thereby humorously connecting the politician's statement to lesbian sexuality and culture.</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3ALJK/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3ALJK/</a></p>
11	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@poppylaur">https://www.tiktok.com/@poppylaur</a> Account of a lesbian content creator based in Los Angeles, USA</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> please tell me your favorite sapphic piece of media/your favorite sapphic icon in the comments so i can do more research on this era #wlw #sapphic #girlslikegirls #agathario #agathaallalong #chappellroan</p> <p><b>Description:</b> In a video displaying the text "the lesbian renaissance," the creator validates this cultural concept through personal anecdotes contrasting current mainstream queer visibility, citing examples in popular music and Marvel media, with the previous necessity for interpreting subtext, and concludes by briefly promoting their related creative work—a lesbian vampire web series.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b> I saw someone on here recently say that we are in a lesbian renaissance, and I could not agree more. Like, every time that I'm at the gym and I'm, like, using a machine and I hear Chappell Roan's "Good luck, babe!" playing overhead, I'm like, I cannot believe that in one of the most heteronormative spaces, they are blasting a song about comphet from a lesbian pop star. I cannot believe that this picture was taken in 2021 when Wandavision had come out, and I used to carry around a picture of Kathryn Hahn as Agatha Harkness in my wallet for witchy lesbian energy.</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3y4m7/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3y4m7/</a></p>

	<p>Even though this character was not out or even actually even remotely hinted at being fruity, I was like, no, she's sapphic.</p> <p>She's sapphic.</p> <p>If I could tell this girl that in three years, Marvel would have a witchy show where the main character is a fruity woman, the fruity woman of my dreams, she would lose her mind.</p> <p>And the fact that my girlfriend and I have written a lesbian vampire web series like this is the era of the smooching girls.</p> <p>Also, if you want to help make this come to a reality, you should check out my little bio on my profile, because if you want to hear more about this project, it's gonna... It's gonna slay. It's gonna slay.</p>	
12	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@maddieoffline">https://www.tiktok.com/@maddieoffline</a></p> <p>Account of a lesbian and activist, who is organising sapphic events for the community explicitly in this account, based in Birmingham, the UK</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> I can't be the only one?? I'm so happy that I just feel like so much lesbian art is being made right now 🥰</p> <p>p.s. count how many times I say "lesbian renaissance" in this video 😭</p> <p>#lesbiansoftiktok #lesbian #wlw #lgbt #lgbtq #lesbianpride #sapphic</p> <p><b>Description:</b> This video features a creator evaluating the current cultural moment as a potential "lesbian renaissance," citing supporting evidence from popular culture (music, film, TV) and personal experience, while acknowledging potential downsides like aesthetic co-option but ultimately focusing on the positive impact of reduced stigma surrounding lesbian identity.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b></p> <p>So does anyone else feel like we are living through the lesbian renaissance at the moment or am I just in like a crazy echo chamber? Because I feel like we're in the lesbian renaissance and I've 1am living for it. Like we have Billie Eilish out here with explicitly sapphic songs on her new album which Chef's Kiss, by the way. We have Reneè Rapp. No comment. We have Chappell Roan's rising popularity. We have Kristen Stewart in an explicitly lesbian blockbuster. Last year we had the Queer Ultimatum. This year we have I Kissed a Girl on the BBC. Like I feel like we're in the lesbian renaissance and I'm just. I'm just obsessed. I do feel like there is some potential criticism to be made that if we are in the lesbian renaissance then eventually what's going to happen is we're going to see straight women co-opting the like lesbian aesthetic, which I don't love. But that's not what this video is about. I for one am just really happy that I feel like less women are seeing lesbian as a day word which is just beautiful. Like it makes me so happy. As somebody who didn't think that I could claim the word lesbian and who came out only just over a year ago, I'm just so happy to be living in this era and I'm excited to see where else is to come.</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMetjgt/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMetjgt/</a></p>
13	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@emilyafosterillustration">https://www.tiktok.com/@emilyafosterillustration</a></p> <p>Queer and autistic illustrator based in the UK</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> In the midst of the lesbian renaissance it is impossible to be financially responsible when build your own carabiner exists! 🔗 to get yours in my bio</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMeqf9n/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMeqf9n/</a></p>

	 <p>#queerillustrator #lesbianart #lesbianartist #queer #wlw #lesbian #queeraccessories #carabiner</p> <p><b>Description:</b> in this promotional video, a queer illustrator displays customizable carabiner accessories they create, employing text overlays “Trying to be financially responsible during the lesbian renaissance...,” following “Build your own carabiner existing...” that humorously link the difficulty of financial restraint during the "lesbian renaissance" directly to the appeal and availability of their product aimed at a queer/lesbian market.</p>	
14	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@micksfeelings">https://www.tiktok.com/@micksfeelings</a> Account of a lesbian music enthusiast</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> its the lesbian renaissance babyyy #chappellroan #lesbiansoftiktok #queertiktok #paradisoamsterdam #fyp</p> <p>People singing to Chappell Roan music with the description</p> <p><b>Description:</b> This video portrays collective singing along to Chappell Roan's music as emblematic of the typical atmosphere and soundtrack of a queer club night point of view “POV you’re at the queer club night in 2024.”</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShM8YjC5/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShM8YjC5/</a>
15	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@rchute">https://www.tiktok.com/@rchute</a> Account of a queer artist based in Edinburg, Scotland</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> what a time to be alive, the lesbian renaissance is in full swing #wlw</p> <p><b>Description:</b> This video features a creator lip-syncing while displaying the exact text overlay "renée, chappell &amp; billie?! the lesbian renaissance is in full swing," suggesting that the concurrent cultural prominence of these three specific queer artists (Reneé Rapp, Chappell Roan, Billie Eilish) serves as validation that the phenomenon termed the "lesbian renaissance" is currently at a significant peak.</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMepN6w/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMepN6w/</a>
16	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@verve_books">https://www.tiktok.com/@verve_books</a> A blog from an indie book publisher in the UK</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> What a time to be alive! Happy #internationallesbianday #lesbianrenaissance #bottomsmovie #agathallalong #sunburnchloemichellehowarth #sapphics #lesbiansoftiktok #lesbianfilms #lesbianbooks</p> <p><b>Description:</b> the creator holds the book “Sunburn” with the text overlay "I lied, put your clothes back on. We're going to discuss how we're experiencing a Lesbian Renaissance and experiencing some of the best sapphic stories ever told - Sunburn, Bottoms, Agatha All Along etc" to introduce a commentary that positions specific contemporary sapphic narratives as exemplary components of a current, high-caliber "Lesbian Renaissance," arguing that the current era is uniquely defined by the emergence of exceptionally high-quality sapphic narratives across various cultural forms.</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMeuLkK/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMeuLkK/</a>

17	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@milkchocolatekinderegg">https://www.tiktok.com/@milkchocolatekinderegg</a> Lesbian poet based in Toronto, Canada</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> what happens when subculture becomes mainstream culture? #wlw #lesbiansoftiktok #lesbiantiktok</p> <p><b>Description:</b> with a text overlay “The Lesbian Renaissance” across the whole video, the creator asserts a belief in a current "lesbian renaissance," and contrasts their own recent discovery of lesbian culture upon coming out two years ago with its rapidly increasing mainstream representation, evidenced by specific public figures and media, and notes the concurrent assimilation and sometimes perplexing usage of specific lesbian terminology (stud, stem) within broader society.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b> I believe that we're in the midst of a lesbian renaissance. And let me explain. I came out as lesbian two years ago, and prior to that, I was chronically straight. Like, culturally. I did not know that lesbian culture was even a thing before I came out as a lesbian, which I like that personally. And since then, in the past two years, lesbian culture has started to reach the mainstream in this really weird way. Not in a bad way, necessarily, but, like, we had the “Ultimatum, Queer Edition.” We have Chappell Roan, we have Reneè Rapp. We have all of these lesbians who are entering the zeitgeist and entering straight culture in a way that I was not even aware prior to coming out that there were exclusively sapphic spaces. I didn't know that this was a thing. I didn't know what a mask was. Like, I think I could have put it together, but, like, I didn't know that there were. I didn't know what a stud was. I don't know what a stem was. I didn't know these things. Like, why are straight women using the term stud? Like, throwing it around? I'm like, what is happening?</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMe354q/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMe354q/</a></p>
18	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@janen0vacane">https://www.tiktok.com/@janen0vacane</a> Lesbian content creator based in Los Angeles, USA</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> wow i cant beleive i forgot to mention janelle monae &amp; amarae 🥹 #greenscreen #wlw #lesbianrenaissance</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Acknowledging the contemporary "lesbian renaissance in music," this video provides historical context by arguing for its earlier manifestation within the R&amp;B genre, positioning artists like Syd and Kehlani as precursors whose work facilitated the current wave of mainstream queer pop success.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b> And I'm really happy that the lesbian renaissance in music is happening right now. But if you're an R&amp;B girly, it's been happening here. Syd, Kehlani, Victoria Monet, Kelela, Tannerelle, Tinashe, Dizzy Fae, Lava La Rue all walked so that this new queer renaissance and pop music could run. Like my girl Kehlani literally released one of the best and gayest albums I've heard in a minute. Lesbians and queer women are just having our moment. I love y'all. I put them in a playlist, but let me know who you think I should add.</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMeW1Kj/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMeW1Kj/</a></p>

19	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@1inn344">https://www.tiktok.com/@1inn344</a> Lesbian content creator</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> ugh i dont think im ever gonna shut up #chappellroan #london #concert #lesbianrenaissance #femininominon #wlw #fyp</p> <p><b>Description:</b> footage of Chappell Roan performing her song "Femininomenon," explicitly framed by the title "we are living the lesbian renaissance rn," to exemplify and validate the assertion of a contemporary lesbian cultural moment.</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMeT73S/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMeT73S/</a>
20	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@moviegoodormoviebad">https://www.tiktok.com/@moviegoodormoviebad</a> Content creator based in Baltimore, USA</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> We are in a renaissance of queer film and I want to take the time to highlight international lesbian films made recently people should be watching! #lgbtmovies #movierecommendation #thehandmaiden #lesbian #sapphic #lgbtfilm #lgbt #myfirstsummer #rafiki</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Grounding the assertion of a "cinematic lesbian film renaissance" with initial visuals of popular US movies (Love Lies Bleeding, Drive-Away Dolls, Bottoms), the video then deliberately pivots to recommend and provide synopses for nine diverse international lesbian films, aiming to broaden the discussion beyond a US-centric perspective.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b> We are in a cinematic lesbian film renaissance right now. As many people point out, OP didn't mention any films made outside the United States. I want to take the time to highlight nine international lesbian films that came out recently. You should be checking out I mentioning "The Handmaiden" so no one gets mad at me for not mentioning it. No one mentions the Korean film "Moonlit Winter". This follows a high school girl that finds out that her mother was sending love letters to another woman in her youth. This film is so heartwarming. There are sad parts, but this film leaves me with butterflies every single time. Have to name the Australian film "My First Summer". This is one of the best first love stories Ive ever seen. I think if you need to tackle any kind of internalized homophobia, you gotta check this one out. Definitely want to name the German film "Cocoon". This is very similar to "My First Summer". Again, a First love story. I do think this one is a bit of a mixed bag, but the highs in this film are so astronomically high. You gotta check it out. The Kenyan film "Rafiki" should be mentioned so much more because this film was actually banned due to the queer content in the film. If you don't know, in Kenya, if you're caught sleeping with a person of the same gender or same sex, you will actually go to jail for 14 years. This film was a very big deal when it came out. It was very much embraced. I feel like people should be embracing it here. "Blue Jean". One of the most essential British queer films ever made. This follows a PE teacher who's suddenly outed when she runs into one of our students as a gay bar. If you don't what it's like to be a British person in the 80s who's queer, please check out and read what Section 28 is. We don't get much representation of older</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMeXMsw/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMeXMsw/</a>

	<p>queer folks, so I want to point out the French film "Two of Us". This follows two neighbors who live across the hall from each other, who've been in love, who've been together for years when suddenly one of them has a stroke and they've been hid their queerness from their families and all of a sudden one of them is being caret taken by one of their families. I want to do a bit of a genre twist by naming "Thelma". It's a Norwegian supernatural thriller that's also queer.</p> <p>It follows a deeply religious woman who all of a sudden realizes she falls in love with a girl while in college and she develops supernatural powers.</p> <p>And last but not least, I need to name the French film "The Five Devils" this is a movie exclusive. Now, I don't think this film sits in one genre, but it is a supernatural thriller. It is also science fiction. It's also a fantasy film. Know nothing about this. But this is a queer film, even though it doesn't feel like one at first.</p>	
21	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@chloelane">https://www.tiktok.com/@chloelane</a> Lesbian tattoo artist based in Hertford, UK</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> Lets go lesbians !!!!   #wlw #sapphic #lesbiansoftiktok #tattooartist #tattooideas #queertattooartist</p> <p><b>Description:</b> This video has the textual overlay "POV you are living through a ✨lesbian renaissance✨" that aims to contextualize a visual display of sapphic-themed tattoos, thereby positioning this form of body art created by the artist as characteristic evidence of the named cultural phenomenon.</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMeHfGY/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMeHfGY/</a></p>
22	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@loudlaralondon">https://www.tiktok.com/@loudlaralondon</a> Lesbin content creator based in Amsterdam, Netherland, originally from the USA</p> <p><b>Caption:</b> maybe country music aint so bad after all @chappell roan #chappellroan #southernlesbian</p> <p><b>Description:</b> The creator lip-syncs to an unreleased Chappell Roan country-style song, while the accompanying caption frames this performance as embodying the profound personal healing experienced by queer women from the American South, stating “y'all could never understand how healing the lesbian country music renaissance is as a gay girl who grew up in the south.”</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMemWo4/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShMemWo4/</a></p>

### APPENDIX 3

#### Relevant to “Lesbian Renaissance” Discourse content on TikTok

№	Content Description	Reference
1	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@itsjust_lex">https://www.tiktok.com/@itsjust_lex</a></p> <p><b>Caption:</b> TELL ME IT IS NOT!???! What’s been your favorite lesbian moment this year?! I am here for the “Crash” album from @Kehlani and @Teyana and @Victoria Monét moment cuz 🤔 REPOST THISSS TO LETT EVERYBODY AND THEY MAMA KNOW!! #femsoftiktok 🌈 #wlw #blacklesbiantiktok 🌈 #lesbiansoftiktokover30</p> <p><b>Description:</b> the creator with the text over video “2024 is the year of the lesbian🌈” cites increases in cultural visibility through music, online content, and public presence as justification, and concluding with a celebratory affirmation directed towards the lesbian community.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b> Y'all. 2024 is the year of the lesbian. You literally couldn't tell me any different. All the music, the content, all the lesbiansians just coming outside, letting everybody know who she is. Yo, tap in. This is our year, ladies.</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY357Xv/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY357Xv/</a>
2	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@macreax">https://www.tiktok.com/@macreax</a></p> <p><b>Caption:</b> that korrasami reaction compilation has me REFLECTING 😊 #wlw #sapphic #lesbiansoftiktok #chappellroan #wicked #arcane #caitvi #macreax</p> <p><b>Description:</b> the creator brushes their teeth on the video to CHappell Roan’s song “The Giver” with the following text over video: “brushing my teeth thinking about how 2024 truly will be looked back on as the year of the lesbian. SEAS of people at those concerts, screaming sapphic songs by sapphic artists about messy situationships, stone tops, and comphet. wicked is a blockbuster, led by a queer woman, and the sequel is named after the duet between the two women leads (gay?) all culminating with Netflix greenlighting a full sesbian lex scene animated by french artists and scored by king princess (AND they both live?!) We defined the culture this year.”</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3yyn4/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3yyn4/</a>
3	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@its_dakidbre">https://www.tiktok.com/@its_dakidbre</a></p> <p><b>Caption:</b> Dc me 😭</p> <p><b>Description:</b> the creator lip-syncs to the song “OKAY” by JT with a</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3wM2y/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3wM2y/</a>

	text over video "Sassy stud anthem all summer long 2024🌈," thereby highlighting a dimension of contemporary queer experience distinct from more mainstream or feminine representations discussed within the "lesbian renaissance."	
4	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@gigipena">https://www.tiktok.com/@gigipena</a></p> <p><b>Caption:</b> Its a great day to be gay 🌈 #greenscreen #wlw #wltiktok #lesbiansoftiktok #billieeilishlunch</p> <p><b>Description:</b> using an initial text overlay and visuals of corresponding personal notes proclaiming "2024 is year of lesbian," the creator presents a spoken commentary elaborating on these points, citing specific examples from music (Billie Eilish's "Lunch"), film ("Love Lies Bleeding"), television ("The L Word" cast at Coachella), and artist visibility (Reneé Rapp, Chappell Roan) to argue for significant lesbian mainstream cultural impact during that year.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b>          Alright, guys, 2024 is the year the lesbian, and I'm gonna tell you why. So I woke up the other night and I had this in my notes app and I have a habit of just like writing random shit down when I have insomnia. Like no explanation. But I saw this and I'm like, this has legs.          Lesbians have been dominating mainstream pop culture this year and I just feel fed. Just a constant buffet of new tidbits. Here's our recap so far.          First, obviously, we have "Lunch".          I have been manifesting Billie Eilish to come out for years now. Not only did she do that this year, not only did she have that Rolling Stone interview, we got this song. I forget who I am when this song is playing. I almost rear ended a car yesterday hearing a new lyric. We got the OG "The L Word" cast coming out at Coachella, which actually caused one of my straight friends to actually watch the show. Which ultimately leads me to Reneé Rapp and Chappell Roan.          "Love Lies Bleeding". Kristen Stewart was also when I wanted to come out for years. And now she's having that, you know, the bathroom scene. This is the first time I've seen these adorable prom videos. I forget the name of the show, but holy shit.          I don't love the last one. But she has representation.</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY37bVx/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY37bVx/</a>
5	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@mustbemaia">https://www.tiktok.com/@mustbemaia</a></p> <p><b>Caption:</b> N/A</p> <p><b>Description:</b> The creator analyzes 2024 as a revival of the positive queer cultural visibility reminiscent of "20gayteen" (2018), citing parallels in the ascent of lesbian musicians like Reneé Rapp and</p>	<a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3kwyX/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3kwyX/</a>

	<p>expressing personal resonance linked to their own coming-out experiences during the earlier period, while contextualizing this hopeful trend within persistent broader societal challenges.</p> <p><b>Full speech transcription:</b>          I'm calling it right now.          2024 is the return of 20gayteen.          And if you're old enough to have lived through 20gayteen, then you'll know exactly what I mean.          Watching Renee's star rise has been so special to witness, and it reminds me of when all of these lesbian musicians had their debuts or started getting more notoriety in 2018, and how amazing it was seeing them collab together, seeing them talk about each other. And we're experiencing that again right now. And I just couldn't be happier. Like, I swear I haven't been happy since 20gayteen happened.          I'm just kidding. But, like, there was just so much about that year that was, like, really the first year after I realized I was a lesbian and just felt comfortable accepting it.          It was my first pride. I went to my first lesbian concert.          It was just so incredible. And I know things are still so horrible right now in so many aspects, and I hope that this can bring some amount of joy, even if it's a little bit, especially to people who need it right now.</p>	
6	<p><b>Account:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@vaughnbeth">https://www.tiktok.com/@vaughnbeth</a></p> <p><b>Caption:</b> N/A</p> <p><b>Description:</b> the video features a lesbian flag display overlaid with the text "Happy lesbian apocalypse! 🍷💜💖 Let's go lesbians!" and synchronized with a soundtrack blending Chappell Roan's song "Good Luck, Babe!" with an audio trend derived from a TV show uttering "Here we go lesbians!", where "<a href="#">lesbian apocalypse</a>" refers to a phenomenon on TikTok characterized by lesbian users collectively engaging in mass mutual following and uniformly adopting the lesbian flag as their profile picture, signifying a moment of heightened community mobilization and visibility on the platform.</p>	<p><a href="https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3uCcs/">https://vt.tiktok.com/ZShY3uCcs/</a></p>