The Social Representation of Transgender Women of Colour in the Series Pose

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The Social Representation of Transgender Women of Colour in the Series *Pose*

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Contents

Introduction

1. Introduction

Pose "has made headlines with its inclusive and diverse cast [and] powerful storylines" (Harding, 2019). In a society where trans and queer people are facing higher rates of discrimination, as they

> [are] grappling with an intensely divided political landscape, where [Donald Trump] and his administration are rolling back hard-fought gains for trans people, where [Black] and [Brown] people are fighting for the right to exist, and where industries, from Hollywood to Wall Street, are having a reckoning when it comes to gender disparity, (Mock, 2018)

series like *Pose* "[are] a salve and a possible solution, showing viewers what inclusion looks like" (Ibid). The aim of this dissertation is not only to offer a critical viewpoint on how transgender women of colour are represented in the show but also to challenge the beliefs, prejudices, and stereotypes conveyed by white cisheteronormative society. In addition, this dissertation also has a personal aim as it intends to deconstruct myself as a white cisgender man. To come back to *Pose*, its casting, which will be discussed later, and its characters have been chosen to give more visibility to people, whose experiences are often rendered invisible.

Nowadays, visibility has become "one of the most critical social issues currently being tackled by our society" (Alvarez, 2021). The increasing inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people in the media allows them to be seen by society. Furthermore, making minorities more visible in the media is extremely crucial. Indeed, representation is important for members of minority groups, as seeing themselves represented in the media could help them feel included and could make their experiences appear less isolated. In other words, the representation of minority groups reinforces the idea of collective experiences, thus helping forge a sense of community.

Alongside being beneficial for minority groups' members, their representation is also essential for those who do not belong to these minorities. Indeed,

> what people see and hear in media – from television series to social media posts in advertising – impacts the decisions they make in the boardrooms, academia and institutions of higher education, court rooms, newsrooms, living rooms and at the ballot box. When they see and hear members of the LGBTQ community accurately and authentically included in media, they make decisions that advance equality for everyone. (GLAAD, n.d.)

Lucas Falise

The Social Representation of Transgender Women of Colour in the Series *Pose*

Although there is a growing interest for gender studies, as well as an increasing representation of LGBTQIA+ people in the media, there is still room for improvement. Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that these representations often lack diversity as white LGBTQIA+ people are more represented on screen.

Pose, which was created by Ryan Murphy, Steven Canals, and Brad Falchuk, meets the need of the LGBTQ+ community to be represented as well as the importance of diversity in these representations. Indeed, not only does *Pose* depicts queer folks but also gives a voice to those who are living at intersected levels of marginalisation, such as LGBTQ+ Black and Latinx individuals as well as disabled people (in this case people living with HIV). Therefore, it seems that the show is an interesting medium to study and analyse.

This dissertation will be dedicated to the study of the social representation of transgender women of colour in the first two seasons of the series *Pose*. In other words, it will focus on the way they are represented within the socioeconomic context of the series, that is the 1980s. In order to achieve this aim, this work will be divided in three main chapters.

The first chapter will be dedicated to the presentation of the series, its context, and its reception. Therefore, this part of the dissertation will start by a short summary of the series, which will be followed by a short description of the context of the series' release by focusing on Trump, BLM, and Black Lives Matter. After the context, this dissertation will discuss the reception of the series: its authenticity and its problems of colourism.

The second chapter of this dissertation will focus on economic and health vulnerability. In order to do so, the first part of this chapter will introduce a theoretical framework that deals with Reagan's policies and the emergence of AIDS and its consequences. This prelude will be followed by analyses of selected scenes of *Pose* that are reflective of the theory that will have been developed.

Finally, the third chapter will be focused on the ideas of resistance and kinship. It will, thus, be introduced by a theoretical framework that focuses on ACT UP, queer people's protests, and the Ballroom community and its structure. This framework will be followed by analyses of selected scenes and episodes, which focus on these ideas.

2. Methodology

As written earlier, the main aim of this dissertation is to analyse how transgender women of colour are represented in the series *Pose*. In order to do so, it was important to settle the series and the characters in the socio-economic, political, and historical context of the show. For this specific reason, the analyses will always be preceded by a theoretical framework, whose purpose will be to contextualise and will serve as a comparison tool for the analyses. As the object of this work is a series, it was almost impossible to analyse the whole series in its entirety.

2.1. Selection of the Corpus

Therefore, to provide a portrayal as detailed and accurate as possible of the social representation of transgender women of colour, it has been necessary to select some episodes' scenes. The selection of these scenes was based on two major criteria. On the one hand, it was interesting to select specific and relevant characters. The characters that have been chosen are, for the majority, transgender women of colour. Nevertheless, for comparative purposes, it was also interesting to analyse how other characters were represented. Indeed, the analysis of these other characters has allowed this dissertation to take as many perspectives and point of views as possible into account as well as to deal with the notion of privilege. In addition to these characters used for comparative purposes, others have been chosen for their relevancy in relation with some important themes. On the other hand, the selection of specific scenes has also been influenced by the thematical importance of certain topics. Indeed, as mentioned above, to analyse the social representation of transgender women of colour, it is important to determine a socioeconomic, political, and historical framework. For this reason, this dissertation will be centred on limited and specific themes: *Vulnerability* (rejection, economic vulnerability in opposition with the yuppies, AIDS), *fetishisation* (objectification, prostitution), *resistance* (ACT UP, protests), *kinship* (motherhood, community support).

2.2. Description of the corpus

In addition to briefly contextualising the episodes from which selected scenes have been extracted, it is important to describe their main themes and the characters on which they focus.

First season:

- 1.1 *Pilot*: Rejection, AIDS, economic vulnerability, yuppies, prostitution, community support

  Damon, a young Black dancer is rejected by his biological family and meets Blanca, a transgender housemother. Angel, a transgender sex worker applies for a job at Trump Tower after meeting Stan, a yuppie.

  Focuses on: **Stan Bowes**, **Damon Evangelista, Blanca Evangelista, Angel Evangelista**
- 1.2 *Access*: Protest, rejection, yuppies, fetishisation

  Stan and his wife have an argument about the former's job. His relationship with Angel is evolving. At the same time Blanca is denied access in a gay bar.

  Focuses on: **Stan Bowes**, **Angel Evangelista**, **Blanca Evangelista**
- 1.3 *Giving and Receiving*: AIDS

  Pray visits his boyfriend at the hospital

  Focuses on: **Pray Tell**, **Costas**
- 1.4 *The Fever*: AIDS, fetishisation

  Angel and Stan have an important argument that reveals Stan's real interests. Elektra talks to her lover about her operation. The boys of House of Evangelista get tested for HIV.

  Focuses on: **Angel Evangelista**, **Elektra Abundance**, **Stan Bowes**, **the House of Evangelista's boys**
- 1.5 *Mother's Day*: Motherhood

  Blanca learns that her biological mother died

  Focuses on: **Blanca Evangelista**
- 1.6 *Love is the Message*: AIDS, yuppies, motherhood

  Angel does not know whether she should trust Stan. Costas' health decreases and Blanca has a date.

  Focuses on: **Blanca Evangelista**, **Stan Bowes**, **Angel Evangelista**, **Costas and Pray Tell**
- 1.8 *Mother of the Year*: Motherhood

  Blanca earns the title of Mother of the Year.

  Focuses on: **Blanca Evangelista**

Second season:

- 2.1 *Acting Up*: ACT UP, community support, AIDS

  Blanca and Pray go to Hart Island. The former loses her job at the nail salon and learns that she has AIDS. Pray participates to his first ACT UP meeting. The Ballroom community protests.

  Focuses on: **Blanca Evangelista**, **Pray Tell**
- 2.2 *Worth It*: Economic vulnerability, AIDS

  Blanca creates her own salon and tells her children that she has AIDS.

  Focuses on: **Blanca Evangelista**
- 2.4 *Never Knew Love Like This Before*: Prostitution, community support

  Candy is murdered by one of her clients. At her funerals, her community shows up as a family.

  Focuses on: **Candy Ferocity**
- 2.6 *Love's in Need of Love Today*: AIDS

  Pray's health decreases.

  Focuses on: Pray Tell
- 2.7 *Blow*: ACT UP

  ACT UP strikes again and Blanca has her revenge.

  Focuses on: **ACT UP**, **Blanca Evangelista**
- 2.10 *In My Heels*: Job discrimination

  Angel loses her job and her hopes.

  Focuses on: **Angel Evangelista**

CHAPTER 1: The Object, its Context, and Reception

1. Summary and main characters

Pose tells the story of a group of transgender and gay African-American and Latin-American people living in New York in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. A major part of the show is set in the ballroom, a safe place for Black and Latinx[1] folks considered being "nonconforming"[2] in terms of gender and sexuality. This refuge allows them to express themselves freely during underground competitions opposing *houses*, namely clusters of people living together and led in most cases by a *housemother*. These choreographed contests represent a means of bringing prestige and trophies back to their *house*, thus distinguishing themselves and making their *mother* proud. Each participant has to respect a specific category by sporting appropriate garments and displaying a congruent attitude.

The main characters include Damon Richards (Ryan Jamaal Swain), a young gay Black man. After they discover their son's homosexuality, through the finding of homosexual pornography hidden beneath his bed, Damon's parents feel insulted and ashamed, thus preferring rejecting him. Abandoned by his biological family, the young man is coerced into homelessness. As he endeavours to subsist on the streets, the young man finds peace and consolation in dancing, a passion that will finally lead him to success; Blanca Rodriguez (MJ Rodriguez), an Afro-Puerto Rican trans woman who has lately been diagnosed with AIDS. This time bomb steers the young lady towards making important decisions about her future. As she wants to leave a proof of her existence and help other children in need, she decides to leave the house of Abundance, which raised and uplifted her in order to build her own legendary house ruled by her ideas and values: the house of Evangelista. The first child to join her is Damon;

[1] "Latinx, a gender neutral alternative to Latina and Latino, is a term that has recently gained a presence in popular culture. The term is used to describe the diverse group of people who have roots in Latin America" (Roth, 2021).

[2] According to Merriam-Webster, the term nonconforming means: "not in accordance or agreement with prevailing norms, standards, or customs **:** not conforming" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nonconforming). When the term is applied to gender, it refers to the fact of "exhibiting behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits that do not correspond with the traits typically associated with one's sex **:** having a gender expression that does not conform to gender norms" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender%20nonconforming).

Elektra Abundance (Dominique Jackson), who is a trans Black woman and Blanca's former housemother. Elektra is both feared and looked up to by her whole community. She is perceived as a self-centred, egotistic but successful and famous mother. Behind her tough personality, she hides some insecurities; Angel (Indya Moore), a beautiful trans Afro-Dominican sex worker and one of Blanca's dearest friends. One day, while she is working on the coast, she is accosted by Stan Bowes (Evan Peters), a young yuppie whom she will desperately fall in love with. Unfortunately, this love, although it seems shared in the first place, is impossible because of her being a trans woman. When she joins the house of Evangelista, she is encouraged by Blanca, her friend and new housemother, to pursue her dream to become a model; Esteban Martinez (Angel Bismark Curiel), also known as Lil Papi, is a homeless Latino man who has become accustomed to selling drugs to survive in the streets. He will meet Angel in the ballroom, and they will both start a love story. He eventually becomes Angel's modelling manager; Candy Abundance (Angelica Ross) and Lulu Abundance (Hailie Sahar) are both trans women and Elektra's henchwomen. Despite being inseparable, the two are different from one another. Lulu is more dependent and discreet while Candy is a self-assured and independent woman who does not hesitate to share her opinions and ideas. When the house of Abundance collapses due to economic issues, the two women decide to become co-housemothers and found their own house: the house of Ferocity. After Candy's tragic death, as for she is killed by one of her clients, Lulu becomes closer to Blanca and the rest of her house; Pray Tell (Billy Porter), he is a gay Black man and the most important emcee in the Ball scene. He is Blanca's friend and acts as a fatherly figure for most of the house of Evangelista's children. Unfortunately, after witnessing many of his friends and beloved's deaths due to HIV, he is also diagnosed as HIV-positive. Both Blanca and Pray will be able to count on one another during this terrible hardship.

2. Context

2.1. Trump

Pose's two first seasons were released, respectively, on May 17 2018 and on June 11 2019, when Donald Trump was still the president of the United States of America. The 45th President of the USA has been a highly controversial figure and his administration have had a huge impact on transgender individuals. For instance, in 2017, Donald Trump "abruptly announced a ban on transgender people serving in the military" (Davis & Cooper, 2018-2019, p. 502). According to him, "American forces could not afford the 'tremendous medical costs and disruption' of transgender service members" (Ibid). Indeed, "Mr. Trump elected to announce the ban in order

to resolve a quietly brewing fight on Capitol Hill over whether taxpayer money should pay for gender transition and hormone therapy for transgender service members" (Ibid). This ban was opposed to the gradual transformation that had started occurring under President Barack Obama's terms of office. Obama's administration "announced […] that transgender people could serve openly in the military" (Ibid) while Donald Trump declared that "allowing transgender people to serve openly 'erodes military readiness and unit cohesion […]'" (p. 503). Unfortunately, this policy that aims at reducing transgender people's rights and diminish their quality of life by reversing some of Obama-era's policies is far from being an isolated case.

Another controversial rule proposed by Trump and his administration was to allow "[single 'sex'] homeless shelters to turn away transgender people based on [their] physical appearance" (Mosley & Hagan, 2020). In other words,

> if a trans woman showed up at a women's shelter, for example, the shelter owner could send them to a men's shelter — putting them at risk of sexual assault or harassment, Burns explains. And the rule specifically lists traits such as height, the presence of an Adam's apple and the size of hands or feet that target women. (Ibid)

This rule would, therefore, allow shelter operators to discriminate women based on their appearances and on society's strictly narrowed perception of womanhood as well as men on how 'masculine' they are perceived. Although "no evidence suggests allowing transgender people into shelters that correspond with their gender identity is dangerous" (Ibid), "the rule proposes the threat of 'big, hairy men pretending to be trans' to gain access to women's shelters, which doesn't happen" (Ibid).

In 2019, the Health and Human Services, or HHS, proposed a rule that reversed one from Obama's administration and under which " a transgender person could, for example, be refused care for a check-up at a doctor's office" (Simmons-Duffin, 2020) or 'a transgender man [could be] denied treatment for ovarian cancer, or hysterectomy not being covered by an insurer – or costing more when the procedure is related to someone's gender transition" (Ibid). In other words, Trump allowed doctors "to refuse to provide care that contradicts their religious or moral beliefs" (Ibid), thus allowing those who were against transgender people to discriminate them. Another instance of Trump's administration restricting transgender people's rights is to find in their decision to roll back an "Obama-era guidance [that allowed] transgender students to use bathrooms of their choice" (Mosley & Hagan, 2020). Although this list of anti-trans policies is non-exhaustive, it shows how Trump's era was particularly difficult for transgender folks whose rights were ignored, diminished, and even fully rejected. Trump's politics is important

to highlight in this dissertation as it is, at least to some extent, similar to Reagan's. *Pose* even if it was released in 2018-2019, does not focus on the life of transgender of women of colour living in the 21st century but rather of those who lived in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, even if the timespan is not the same, one can easily notice that the way transgender women of colour are treated in the series resembles the way they have been treated during Trump's presidency. In other words, they are given little rights and are abandoned by mainstream society. Alongside making a parallel between the social, economic, and political situations that shaped Reagan's era and Trump's and that must be faced by transgender women of colour, *Pose* explicitly mentions Donald Trump several times. Trump's name is associated with the Yuppies and their lifestyle, which will be described later.

2.2. Black Lives Matter

Alongside depicting similarities between the treatment of transgender women during Trump and Reagan's presidency, *Pose* allows the spectator to realise that the treatment of people of colour has not completely changed with time either. Indeed, these recent years marked a turning point in the mainstream knowledge of structural and institutional racism with movements such as Black Lives Matter, or BLM. The movement was founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi "in the aftermath of the vigilante killing of an unarmed black teen Trayvon Martin in 2012" (Stryker, 2017, p.210) and became increasingly stronger after the "questionable deaths of black people in encounters with the police" (Ibid). Black Lives Matter is

> an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' humanity, [their] contributions to this society, and [their] resilience in the face of deadly oppression.[3]

Although the movement already existed in 2013, it is only seven years later that it has become "a global rallying cry against racism and police brutality" (Kirby, 2020). May 2020 was marked by the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The Black man was killed by a police officer who kneeled on his neck until he could not breathe anymore (Turan, 2021). Following George Floyd's murder, "thousands of protesters marched against police brutality" (Kirby, 2020) all around the globe. In many Western European countries, such as Belgium and the United Kingdom, solidarity protests rose not only to respond to what happened in the United States but also to denounce their own colonial legacies and the systemic inequities faced by minorities. In 2018, when the first season of *Pose* was released, Black Lives Matter was a

[3] Black Lives Matter. (2019, September 7). *Herstory*. https://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/

growing movement whose influence on American Politics as well as on other social movements and foundations was increasing (Robinson, 2018). Indeed, as Patrice Cullors stated, "[BLM] has [popularised] civil disobedience and the need to put our bodies on the line. With things like the Women's March, and Me Too, and March for our Lives, all of these movements, their foundations are in Black Lives Matter" (Cullors as cited in Robinson, 2018).

2.3. Black Trans Lives Matter

Interestingly, as Salzman wrote in her article "From the start, Black Lives Matter has been about LGBTQ lives," (2020) "it's not only straight, cisgender Black men who are dying at the hands of police." Although "many of the largest Black Lives Matter protests have been fuelled by the violence against Black men" (Ibid), queer people of colour have always been central figures in the movement. Indeed, it is worth reminding that BLM was founded by three women, of whom two identify as queer (Ibid). Unfortunately, despite it having been "created by queer folks, [cisgender] privilege has taken precedent over gay and transgender people" (Chase as cited in Salzman, 2020). As a result, some LGBTQ+ advocates denounce the movement's lack of inclusivity as it would "dedicate more energy to Black cis men" (Devin-Norelle, 2020) than to transgender women of colour. Indeed, "when trans women are attacked, it's almost disregarded" (Ibid). While George Floyd's murder became the symbol of the worldwide fight against institutional and systemic racism, the death of at least 27 trans people (Ibid), of whom were a majority of Black trans women, rather remained silenced. It is worth mentioning that trans women of colour are "a prime target [of any form of violence] because of [their] Blackness and [their] intersectionality of being trans" (Salzman, 2020). As J. Brooks writes in his thesis, "Centering Black Trans Lives: Social Network Exploration of #BlackTransLivesMatter Content on Twitter," to racist and transphobic policing, "from employment discrimination issues, to healthcare issues, and prisoners' rights" (Griffin as cited in Brooks, 2021, p. 10), has to be added transgender and gender non-conforming's higher risk "for being subjected to physical and sexual violence" (Brooks, 2021, p. 10). To conclude, it is important to acknowledge that "[one] can no longer talk about Blackness without acknowledging how race interacts with gender, sexuality, ability, socioeconomic status, and other aspects of identity to create multi-layered Black experiences that are often [stigmatised] and ignored" (Morrison as cited in Brooks, 2021, p. 11).

3. Reception

In 2019, according to GLAAD's report "Where we are on TV," only eight percent (38) of the total 488 regular and recurring LGBTQ+ characters are transgender. This indicates an encouraging increase from GLAAD's 2018 report, in which it was stated that there were only 208 recurring LGBTQ+ characters, of whom 8 were transgender (GLAAD, 2018). In 2019, *Pose* and *The L Word: Generation Q* "together account[ed] for more than a quarter of all trans representation across all programming platforms" (GLAAD, 2019). Amongst these transgender characters, 21 are trans women, nine are Black and nine are Latinx. "The series *Pose* itself counted eight trans women as regular and recurring characters in its second season" (Ibid). Moreover, it includes "trans people behind the scenes as writers, directors, producers, choreographers, and crew" (Ibid). Having concerned people working on the project allows them to actively participate in giving a more authentic portrayal as well as avoiding problematic and disrespectful depictions.

3.1. Casting authentically

As written above, *Pose* showcases a lot of LGBTQ+ characters and especially transgender characters. Interestingly, the show does not confine itself to representing these characters but extends its thinking on the casting itself. While many other productions would simply content themselves to add some LGBTQ+ folks to their characters' list and let them be played by straight and cisgender actors, Ryan Murphy has decided to cast authentically, thus giving queer performers the opportunity to tell their own stories on screen (Mock, 2018). This authenticity is one of the main reasons the series has been praised for. Lately, Hollywood and the entertainment industry have been stirring controversy and facing reckoning when it comes to gender and sexual disparity. For instance, in 2019, Scarlett Johansson dropped out of a role in the film *Rub & Tug* because of the backlash about her, a cis woman, playing the role of a trans man. The American actress's first reaction was as controversial as her will to portray Dante 'Tex' Gill:

> You know, as an actor I should be allowed to play any person, or any tree, or any animal because that is my job and the requirements of my job. I feel like it's a trend in my business and it needs to happen for various social reasons, yet there are times it does get uncomfortable when it affects the art because I feel art should be free of restrictions. (Darby, 2019)

By saying so, Scarlett Johansson portrays herself as the victim whilst overlooking, in a way, transgender actors' reality. This discourse is a typical example of cis-centring – that is cisgender people's tendency to centre themselves in trans issues, discussions, and conversations. By decentring the debate and focusing on cisgender people, one devaluates, denies, and makes gender non-conforming folks invisible, hence excluding them from their own experiences and lives. Ciscentrism is closely tied to cisnormativity, which is the assumption that being cisgender is the 'norm' (Worthen, 2016, p. 31), thus considering that every person who does not identify as cisgender is different and divergent. This idea of diverging identities comes from our Western societies' binary assumptions that there are only two genders (Boe et al., 2020, p. 158), eventually leading our political and social system to exclude and reject gender non-conforming people. As Judith Butler argues, this gender binarity "implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it" (Butler, 1999, p. 9). Yet sex is not a binary category either, as exemplified by intersex individuals. In other words, gender is an unfixed (Ibid) social and cultural construct that may fluctuate and change through time. When one realises that gender is independent of and not necessarily related to sex, "[it] becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (Ibid). Nevertheless, in their explanation, Judith Butler remains fairly binary when reducing gender identity to male and female, hence ostracising gender non-binary folks. According to E. Matsuno and S.L. Budge:

> *non-binary* is a term that defines several gender identity groups, including (but not limited to): (a) an individual whose gender identity falls between or outside male and female identities, (b) an individual who can experience being a man or woman at separate times, or (c) an individual who does not experience having a gender identity or rejects having a gender identity. (Matsuno & Budge, 2017, p. 116)

Cisnormativity is also a "hierarchical system of prejudice in which cisgender individuals are privileged above noncisgender individuals" (Worthen, 2016, p. 31). Therefore, cisnormativity abets gender oppression, putting cisgender people in top position owing to Western power dynamics. In our androcentric societies that focus mainly on white heterosexual cisgender men, it appears that cis men are more "inclined to support and maintain hetero-cis-normative biases that support both a glorification of heterosexuality and a reification of 'male/female' dichotomy based on presumed biological sex" (p. 34). In other words, in comparison with cisgender women, cisgender men are more likely to adopt transphobic or anti-nonconforming behaviours. Moreover, interestingly, it seems that cisgender men may be more

antagonistic toward "MtF[4] individuals than they are toward FtM[5] individuals and that trans men and trans women are 'policed' differently based on cultural presumptions about gender" (Ibid). This phenomenon is linked to our patriarchal "male-identified, male controlled, male-cent[red]" (Becker, 1999, p. 24), and misogynistic system, which values "masculinity and masculine traits over femininity and feminine traits" (pp. 24-25), in which "men [are] encouraged to regard women as beings suited to fulfil male needs" (p. 25). To this gender dichotomic relation must be added the racial oppressive relation that exists in our white-centred Western societies and that will partly be discussed in the subchapter entitled "The problem of colourism".

When Scarlett Johansson assumes that "an actor should be allowed to play any person" (Darby, 2019), one may argue that she uses her subjective reality as the general rule. However, one cannot neglect that she is a white cisgender straight woman living in a hetero-cis-normative Western male-centred world. She is undoubtedly the victim of gender-based oppressions but she is still gender conforming, thus privileged in comparison with white trans women and even more privileged than trans women of colour. By assuming that she should be allowed to play whatever character she wants to play, one can argue that she decides, unconsciously or not, to use her privileges as an inappropriate reason to disregard trans actors or gender-nonconforming actors who are suffering from employment discrimination and are not given the same opportunities as their cis counterparts. As Jen Richards highlighted during an interview for *Chicago Tribune*:

> The issue is that trans people often can't even get in the door. They can't even get auditions. We're not even considered for parts that *aren't* trans, so when we can't even get in the door for trans roles it just leaves us in a completely untenable situation. (Metz, 2018)

In other words, these gender-nonconforming actors are often reduced to basing their entire career on playing trans characters. However, many trans actors, who auditioned for trans roles, have been told that they did not look trans enough, therefore the audience would be confused (Giorgis, 2018). According to some casting directors, trans actors would not be able to portray themselves. This idea is problematic because it comes down to a strong desire to represent transness through cisnormativity by sharing a distorted and caricatured portrayal of what being trans is about and assuming that being transgender is a one-size-fits-all experience, thus dehumanising these people and ignoring their individuality. Unfortunately, 'trans face', which

[4] "A trans person who is transitioning from man to woman". *Transgender Terms: What They Mean and How to Use Them Correctly*. (n.d.). LiveAbout. Retrieved August 15, 2021, from https://www.liveabout.com/trasngender-terms-what-do-they-all-mean-3973879

[5] "A trans person who is transitioning from woman to man". (Ibid)

is to be understood by analogy with the term blackface as "when a cisgender actor takes a role from a transgender actor" (Reynolds, 2016), is commonplace in the entertainment industry. In addition to pushing trans actors out of work (Giorgis, 2018) 'trans face', for instance when a cis man plays the role of a trans woman, largely contributes to demeaning transgender folks:

> Using a man to play a transgender actress is the same kind of wink and nod to the audience that this is not "really" a woman. They want the audience to look at the character and not think of her as a woman. By continuing to cast men as MtF they perpetuate the myth that [trans women] are not women. (Williams, 2017)

Alongside this problem of employment discrimination, trans characters are underrepresented. Indeed, as indicated above, only 38 characters among the total 488 recurring LGBTQ+ characters are trans. Besides being few in number, these representations are limitedly diverse. Indeed, most of the time, transgender or gender non-conforming people are portrayed as transvestites, cross-dressers, criminals or sex-workers (McInroy & Craig, 2015, p. 607). One could argue that the scarcity of representation should be alarming enough to prioritise trans actors in the roles of trans characters, yet in many cases cisgender actors are still getting the parts. One can assert that this form of cis-washing[6] deprives trans individuals from being faithfully represented as well as contributes to depicting unreliably their experiences and their bodies, hence leading them to potentially perceive their own life as being less valuable or their body as less attractive. Indeed, "negative depictions frequently portrayed in offline media may have detrimental impacts, such as depression or shame, on transgender people who consume them and incite fear in the [cisgender] population" (Ibid). In their research McInroy and Craig (2015), highlighted that there are too few trans representations, hence a tendency to forget that transgender people exist; limiting transness to stereotypical and insulting representations contributes to the propagation of a transphobic feeling within the unconcerned population; the scope of representation of transgender folks is too limited, thus not reflective of the spectrum of transgender identities. Furthermore, these misrepresentations also prevent the trans or gender-nonconforming audience to self-identify with these unrelatable characters as they are either not representative of their own experiences and lives or insulting and caricatured or even both.

[6] "To ignore, deny, or minimize the gender identity of a trans person or trans people, or the role that a trans person or trans people played in an event". *ciswash - Wiktionary*. (n.d.). Wiktionary. Retrieved August 15, 2021, from https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/ciswash

In hiring trans women, Ryan Murphy and the casting directors addressed these issues allowing the actors to bring their experience to the series, thus facilitating the connection between the characters and the actors but also between the characters and the spectators. Indya Moore, for instance, used their past as a homeless person to guide their role as Angel in the show and acknowledged that their life experience, which cannot be taught during acting classes, helped them to give Angel even more depth. In their words:

> I don't have to feel like there's something wrong with me for not having the privileges that [other performers] have had in their lives, that kept them safe in the ways that I wasn't. I feel really fortunate to have gone through what I've gone through, to use my vessel to encompass the spirit of [this character] in a way that I probably otherwise wouldn't be able to. (Goldberg, 2018)

Angelica Ross, who plays Candy in the series, also said that her characterisation brought back memories and traumas she went through and still faces today. When talking about Candy, the actress declared:

> She's going through some things that definitely bumped up against my own traumas: dealing with body issues, beauty standards, being a dark-skinned black girl trying to find her beauty spotlight in the '80s, when they weren't lighting us right. The struggles that Candy has are things I face to this day. (Ibid)

Furthermore, not only does Ryan Murphy include trans women in his casting but he also centres the whole series on their stories. Therefore, *Pose* challenges cisnormativity as well as the usual cis-centring tendencies and perspectives that typically make their way to our screens. Cisgender characters, thus, form a minority within the cast and are predominantly secondary roles that supplement and accompany the main transgender parts.

3.2. The problem of colourism

Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible for a show to be 'perfect'. *Pose,* despite being highly praised, has been criticised by some critics for its treatment of dark-skinned women:

> Since the show started, there's really only been two dark-skinned characters trans women with prominent roles: Elektra and Candy. And while I have been *living* for them both, it's clear the writers have intentionally portrayed them both as aggressive, violent, vindictive and messy in a way that their lighter-skinned counterparts aren't. (Anderson, 2020)

In the United States colourism originated from the times of slavery when enslavers treated slaves differently on the basis of their skin colour. Indeed, lighter-skinned slaves were often members of these enslavers' family. During these times it was frequent for enslavers to force

enslaved women into sexual intercourse, "the light-skinned children of enslaved people [being] the telltale signs of these sexual assaults" (Nittle, 2021). Although the white oppressors did not want to recognise their mixed-race children, they often gave them privileges their darker-skinned counterparts could not yearn for. Lighter complexions became a 'privilege and an asset' within the community of enslaved people (Ibid).

Thus, colourism is not an emerging phenomenon. In 1982, Alice Walker defined colourism as the "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their skin colour" (Walker as cited in Brown, 2020). In a world mostly driven and dominated by white people, individuals with lighter skin tones are prone to being more privileged. Colourism contributes to white supremacy and "works in tandem with contemporary forms of White racism that valorise Whiteness around the globe" (Minhas, 2020, p.2). Indeed, by hierarchising people on the grounds of how white they look or their 'white-passingness' – when a person of colour is perceived as a white person, for whatever reason –, colourism "is a subsystem of structural racism which operates in various institutions" (Ibid) that devaluates and denigrates darker-skinned people's individualities, lives, and experiences whilst empowering and prioritising lighter-skinned individuals.

Not only does colourism contribute to but also finds its roots in white supremacy, i.e., "a racist ideology that is based upon the belief that white people are superior in many ways to people of other races and that therefore, white people should be dominant over [them]" (Saad, 2020, p.2). In her book *me and white supremacy* Layla F. Saad argues that white supremacy is a system we were all born into whether we acknowledge it or not. In other words, white supremacy is still, though less overtly than before, anchored in our institutions and in our system but also reflected in the way people interact with each other. White people cannot stop being white and stop receiving privileges the same way as people of colour cannot change the colour of their skin and stop receiving racism (Ibid).

Concretely, white supremacy takes the form of white privileges. These privileges white people receive solely on the basis of their skin colour are, according to Renni Eddo-Lodge (2018), "an absence of the negative consequences of racism" (p. 86). That is, white people's race will not negatively impact their lives as is the case for people of colour. The fact that white people are more often in a position of power, mostly due to white supremacy, than their black counterparts, for instance, allows them to enact racism against people of colour (p. 89). Indeed, these discriminations are "backed-up by entitlement, assertion and, most importantly, supported by a structural power" (p. 98), which is embodied by our system, our institutions, our education,

etc, but also supported, voluntarily or not, by people benefiting, knowingly or not, from such a situation. As Layla F. Saad writes in her novel *me and white supremacy*, white privilege is a reward one receives for being born white or for being white-passing in exchange of participating to the white supremacist system (Saad, 2020, p. 38).

Alongside white privileges and the preferential treatment of white people, white normativity, which also contributes to racial disparity and racial oppression, likewise arises from white supremacy. White normativity is the idea that whiteness is the norm, thus "white people are people, and the members of other racial groups are people to the extent they resemble white people" (Morris, 2016, p. 952). Perceiving and considering whiteness as the norm entails other racial categories to be considered as "derivations of the norm" (Ibid) and places being white in a central position within racial categorisation. According to Morris:

> White normativity makes any difference between whites and a minority group, even one to which society attributes generally positive trait, look like evidence that the minority group is abnormal, or not quite human. This effect is based in part on racial stereotypes' ability to minimize the perception of variation among individuals within nonwhite group (Ibid).

Therefore, white normativity seems to be tied to white-centring i.e., the "centring of white people, white values, white norms, and white feelings over everything and everyone else" (Saad, 2020, p. 136). In analogy with what has been discussed about cis-centring, white-centring contributes to the devaluation, the denial, the rejection of people of colour's experiences and individualities.

Therefore, as colourism is a consequence of white supremacy and all its components, it also helps shape systemic perceptions of beauty and attractiveness. As whiteness is often perceived as the 'beauty ideal', physical characteristics typically associated with it, such as a thin nose, straight hair, and light-coloured eyes, are therefore considered superior and more attractive (Minhas, 2020, p. 2). The 'whiter' your features, the prettier you are considered. This white-centred diktat of beauty repudiates and denies the beauteousness of dark-skinned individuals, eventually leading them to, sometimes, distort their appearance in order to please a white-dominated system that will always show its discontent towards whatever it considers not being white enough.

Furthermore, from a Eurocentric perspective, lighter-skinned individuals are also associated with "positive characteristics such as trustworthiness, competence, kindness, integrity, intelligence and likeability" (Ibid), while darker-skinned people are seen as violent, aggressive, selfish and vindicative. This disparity in the representation and the conception of

the "Other" in comparison with "Us" has always been used as a tool to divide the world in two parts, one of them considered superior, and to antagonise and demonise the "Other". These preconceived conceptions and ideas rely on white supremacists' ideologies that shape and nurture racism (Staszak, 2009).

Colourism in Pose

In *Pose*, critics have pointed out the lack of development of Elektra Abundance and Candy, the two main dark-skinned characters. During the first season of the show, Elektra is depicted as a despicable, self-absorbed, and loathsome character whose aim seems to be the belittlement of anyone else. She is the utter opposite of whom Blanca, a lighter-skinned trans woman, wants to be as a mother for her children. At the end of the first season, Elektra is left by a rich white man who was providing her with financial security, thus winding up homeless and in danger. At this time Candy and Lulu, Elektra's two most fervent daughters, abandon and reject their mother to set their own house up: The House of Ferocity. Elektra ends up alone until Blanca, whom she became frenemy with, "shows compassion by taking her into House Evangelista and helping her get a regular job" (Anderson, 2020). At this point, the spectator gets to know another side of Elektra's personality – she becomes more likeable – but it is a short-term transition as in the first two episodes of the second season Elektra "[declares] herself better than all of [House of Evangelista's members], flipping the dinner table over and storming out of the house for no discernible reason" (Ibid). This renewed form of impulsivity and aggressivity corroborates the idea that she did not grow as a character. In other words, Elektra seems incapable of changing, as if her nature was to be uncontrollably obnoxious. On the contrary, characters such as Blanca and Angel, who have lighter skin complexion, never cease growing throughout the series and gradually achieve their goal. Angel eventually makes her way into the world of modelling and Blanca becomes the mother she has always wanted to be.

Candy, in turn, is represented as "violent, two-faced and snarky" (Ibid). She is depicted as the self-delusional 'ugly duckling of the series', who often ends torn apart by Pray Tell during the balls for not being 'good' enough. She seems to be barely taken seriously, even ridiculed, by other members of her community except by Lulu. The audience is not really given the opportunity to get to know Candy's history or background, except slightly when she dies. However, in her criticism, Anderson underlines the idea that Candy's death is not even about Candy but about everybody else:

> Her funeral episode becomes a way for everyone to be absolved of their guilt/grief. Pray Tell gets to explain why he was so horrible to her. Angel and Blanca get to tell Candy how much they needed her, even though it wasn't overly obvious that they needed her throughout the series. Lulu gets to accuse Candy of mistreating her because Lulu is "light-skinned and thick" and then resolve their apparent conflicts with one another. (Ibid)

This conflict between Lulu and Candy is never left accessible to the spectators and leads them to figure out that Candy was jealous of her sister's skin tone. This intervention forces the audience to realise that there is a problem of colour within the series, something they may not be familiar with. This gives the spectator the impression that there is a type of dichotomy and conflict between light-skinned and dark-skinned people. Indeed, one may be aware of racial disparity and the existence of a white preferential system that often excludes black people, but one may not realise that there is also a preferential or, rather, less oppressive treatment of light-complected individuals within the communities of people of colour. In addition, like Elektra, Candy does not seem to evolve or grow and remains a quite nightmarish character. Even when she is dead, Candy's ghost continues to haunt other characters, nay inciting Pray Tell to commit suicide when he is at the hospital struggling against HIV.

CHAPTER 2: Economic and Health Vulnerability

Although the second season of *Pose* focuses on the early 1990s, when George H.W. Bush was president, this theoretical framework will voluntarily focus on Reagan's presidency for different reasons. Firstly, Reagan is directly mentioned in the series as his economic policies, which will be described in the following section, allowed for the birth of a new social class, i.e., the yuppies. Secondly, focusing on Reagan also seems relevant as he was the president during the emergence of AIDS, which is a central topic of the series. For all these reasons, this chapter will not be dedicated to President Bush and his administration's policies but rather to Reagan's.

1. Reagan's presidency

1.1. Reagan

Early Life

Ronald Wilson Reagan was born on 6th February 1911 in Tampico, Illinois, to Edward Jack Reagan and Nelle Wilson. On the one hand, his paternal family descended from a Catholic Irish immigrant who arrived in the United States in 1856 (Coste, 2015, p. 11). On the other hand, Ronald's mother came from a Protestant Scottish family (Ibid). To Nelle, religion was really important and that is the reason why she wanted her second son, Ronald to be raised in a highly religious atmosphere that followed the Disciples of Christ's precepts (p. 12). The latter were characterised by a deep optimism, opposed to the pessimism that is commonly associated with Protestantism (Ibid). The spiritual influence of both the church and his mother impacted Ronald Reagan's perceptions of the world, his future political statements, and ideas (p. 13).

During his childhood, Ronald and his family moved out multiple times through Illinois because of his father's job switching until 1920 when they permanently settled in Dixon, where Ronald Reagan studied and graduated (Ibid). Dixon represents, to Ronald, the symbol of traditional America as it is a place of solidarity and hard labour (Ibid). Interestingly, Françoise Coste underlines the idea that the notion of solidarity, which seems so important to Reagan, is not to be seen in *Reaganism*, which focuses more on a conservative philosophy privileging individualism. The second value, hard work, is directly tied to the American dream. According to this idea, nothing is unachievable for the hard workers who can only improve their quality

of living and chances at building a future for their children through labour (p. 14). Interestingly, F. Coste also writes that Ronald tends to deny what he considers humiliating or too difficult to face (Coste, 2015, p. 15):

> Later in life I learned that, compared with some of the folks who lived in Dixon, our family was "poor." But I didn't know that when I was growing up. And I never thought of our family as disadvantaged. Only later did the government decide that it had to tell people they were poor. (Reagan, 1990, p. 28)

According to Françoise Coste, the intentional use of quotation marks on the word "poor" implies a form of denial of poverty. Therefore, it can be seen as a means of negating its existence (Coste, 2015, p. 16). This negation is problematic as in so far it relies on the idea that if one convinces oneself that one does not see a problem or does not think about it, then it is not important or it does not exist. This mechanism of self-persuasion is a form of self-protection, as one protects oneself from the negative consequences of a situation, which is also perceivable in the Yuppies' denial and misperception of racial disparity during the 1980s that will be discussed later.

Leading his way to politics

In the aftermath of the second World War, Reagan started struggling with his acting career. Hollywood, to some extent, gave up on Ronald, who started being increasingly interested in militantism, so much so that he decided to join the SAG (Screen Actors Guild). From 1947 to 1952, Ronald Reagan was the president of the SAG and started fighting against communism even as he "cooperated in the blacklisting of actors, directors, and writers suspected of leftist sympathies[7]." From 1950, his political opinions changed, he became more and more conservative, leaving behind his early interest in the Democratic party and eventually supporting Republican candidates to presidency. His allegiance switched to the Republican party in 1962.

From 1967 to 1975, Ronald Reagan was the governor of California. Although he was undoubtedly less experienced than his Democrat opponent, Reagan's personality and proximity with the public led him to win the elections by nearly one million votes[8]. In 1980, Reagan became the 40th president of the United States.

[7] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2021, June 1). Ronald Reagan. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ronald-Reagan

[8] Ibid

1.2. Reaganomics: the economic policy of unfairness

When Reagan took office, his purpose was to restore the United States' economic growth that was facing a double-digit inflation (that is a high rate of unemployment combined with a high inflation), while reducing governmental growth. Reaganomics is the name given to the economic policy "based on the principles of supply-side economics and the trickle-down theory" (Kenton, 2021) that was implemented by the Reagan administration. Supply-side economics postulated that "the best way to invigorate the economy was to stimulate production or supply – rather than to stress the consumption of goods and services" (St. Pierre, 1991, p. 327). The trickle-down theory, for its part, relies on the hypothesis that "tax breaks and benefits for corporations and the wealthy will trickle down to everyone else" (Kenton, 2021). In other words, Reaganomics emphasises the idea that one should favour, support, and encourage corporations, entrepreneurs, as well as already well-off people, as cutting their taxes would imply more savings, more investments and eventually create more job opportunities and increase workers' wages, thus increasing their purchasing power and spending. However, this policy did not impact all American citizens the same way. For instance, Reaganomics advocated the reducing of government spending on domestic programs such as Social Security, Medicaid, Food Stamps, education, and job training programs, from which poorer citizens benefited. Instead of funding domestic initiatives and welfare programs, Ronald Reagan wanted to make America strong again by increasing military spending. Reaganomics, to some extent, participated to the emergence of two socio-economic classes.

a. Emergence of a black underclass

By reducing social help, Reagan's economic policy fomented class cleavages as it contributed to the increasing in wealth of already well-off people and the stagnation, even the impoverishment, of less privileged populations' economy (Palley, 1984). Ergo, those who were living just above the threshold of poverty as well as poor people were the first victims of this doctrine. In the United States of America, Black and Latinx people were already facing higher rates of poverty due to predominant forms of racism and grew even poorer because of Reaganomics. Therefore, not only did Reagan widen the gap between richer and poorer individuals but he also worsened the already existing racial disparity. When Reagan decided to

reduce government spending on family support services, Black families were more impacted than White ones for multiple reasons.

Firstly, according to Maurice A. St. Pierre (1991), "the median income for Black families in 1984 was $15,432" or "44.3% less than the median family income of white families – $27,686 – and $11,001 less than the median family income for the nation" (St. Pierre, 1991, p. 331). Secondly, even if the rate of poverty declined, Black individuals remained much poorer than white people (Ibid). St. Pierre also highlights the fact that "in 1984, fully 51.7% of all Black female-headed households lived below the poverty level" (Ibid) and in "[households] where the female head was Black and had two or three related children living in the same household, the poverty rate was 57.5% and 75.6% respectively" (Ibid). Therefore,

> in 1983 fully 48.6% of all Black households were headed by [women], and […since] the median of number of children in these households was 2.36, it meant that nearly 3 out of every 4 Black children in such households were living in poverty in 1984. (Ibid)

In 1976, during Reagan's presidential campaign, the so-called 'Welfare Queen' became a 'problem' he wanted to solve. "The term 'Welfare Queen' was [popularised] by Ronald Reagan […], he used it to describe a poor [Black] woman on welfare who was purposedly 'cheating the system'" (Weiss, 2018, p. 109). This idea was based on the Moynihan Report, which depicted Black single mothers as "sites of 'unrestrained sexual behaviour' – thus responsible for their own poverty" (Ibid). The 'Welfare Queen' image, which relied on alleged links between race, poverty, and sexual pathology, became a means of supporting and justifying his strong desires to cut the government's spending on welfare and social services as the poor Black single mother was portrayed as "greedy, not needy" (Ibid).

Apart from family support services, Reagan also cut spending on Food Stamps. Indeed, Reagan's administration decided to modify these regulations and decided that only families with a gross income of less than $11,000, until then it was less than $14,000 per year would be considered eligible (St. Pierre, 1991, p. 334). This deprivation of food aid impacted millions of low-income American citizens, amongst whom Black individuals were overrepresented (Ibid).

As Maxine Baca Zinn (1989) writes in her article "Family, Race, and Poverty in the Eighties," the economic shifts that happened during the 1980s affected all workers, but especially Black workers due to 'structural racism' (p. 865). According to W.M. Wiecek and J.L. Hamilton's article (2014), structural racism has numerous components, of which will simply be introduced those I consider relevant in my analysis. First it does not focus on the

intent, like individual racism, but rather on "the effect of keeping minority groups in a subordinate position" (Pincus as cited in Wiecek and Hamilton, 2014, p. 1112). In other words, structural racism does not rely on intentional forms of racism but is based on unconscious biases that play a role in the perpetuation of inequality (p. 1114). The biases are stereotypes that "are learned and reinforced at unconscious levels and continue to shape people's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses in automatic and uncontrollable ways" (Ibid). Unfortunately, although they are not intentional, they remain present and significant in people's mental image of what being a person of colour is like. In their articles W.M. Wiecek and J.L. Hamilton explain that there is a conflict between a conscious desire to be racially neutral and unconscious racially-biased stereotypes that can eventually be determining:

> In the employment area, […] an employer may perceive a job candidate to be competent but feel some reservations that he or she cannot pinpoint consciously and therefore decides against hiring that person. Or someone perceived as racially different may be simultaneously respected (consciously) but disliked (because of unconscious stereotypes). (p. 1116)

Secondly, structural racism focuses on individualism i.e., "[it] assume[s] that individuals have effective control of their lives – and ignore[s] structural forces that shape peoples' chances in life, forces that are beyond the control of individuals (p. 1119). In other words, it relies on the assumption that if one is poor, unemployed, uneducated, or whatsoever, "it must be due to some failure to 'achieve' on [one's] part" (Ibid). This idea seems quite interesting knowing that Ronald Reagan was deeply convinced, considering his special interest in hard labour, that it is one's duty to work hard to achieve whatever one wants and people's responsibility to build a future for their family, but also his never-ending fight against the so-called 'Welfare Queen', as mentioned above. Structural racism is also based on white supremacy, which has been described in the subchapter "Colourism" as well as on colour-blindness that will be discussed in the following part, entitled "Emergence of the Yuppies".

To get back to employment issues, in cities, manufacturing industries, which used to give Black and Latinx people access to job security, gave way to service industries which had higher educational requisites for entry and often excluded less privileged populations (Zinn, 1989, p. 866). During these times, people of colour were more subject to be the target of

> long-term unemployment and underemployment, low wage jobs, reduced real income, smaller college participation rates, increased deterioration in the quality of elementary and secondary education, increased impoverishment of the youth, reduction of health and social services, a drop in the accessibility of decent housing, and a general increase of anxiety and insecurity. (Tripp, 1992, p. 46)

This economic shift was accompanied by a demographic shift. On the one hand, inner cities, predominantly populated by Black and Latinx folks, became centres of poverty. On the other hand, the suburbs were more likely to be inhabited by white and more privileged individuals who "commute[d] daily from their suburban residences to the central business districts" (Zinn, 1989, p. 866). The delocalisation of sources of blue-collar jobs and the deindustrialization of inner cities therefore deprived people of colour from getting a job. Indeed, as Maxine Baca Zinn writes:

> Because the industries that provide these jobs have moved to the suburbs and nonmetropolitan peripheries, racial discrimination and inadequate incomes of inner-city minorities now have the additional impact of preventing many from moving out of the inner city in order to maintain their access to traditional sources of employment. The dispersed nature of job growth makes public transportation from inner-city [neighbourhoods] impractical, requiring virtually all city residents who work in peripheral areas to commute by personally owned automobile. (p. 867)

b. Emergence of the Yuppies

While many suffered, others prospered. In the 1980s, the term 'yuppie' emerged and referred to "young urban professionals who ha[d] acquired considerable amounts of money and who boast[ed] a lifestyle based upon consumption and status visibility" (Lowy, 1991, p. 449). According to Richard Lowy's article "Yuppie Racism: Race Relations in the 1980s," the concept 'yuppie' is phonetically similar to the term 'yippie', which was, itself, closely allied with the 1960s term 'hippies' (p. 448). The latter referred to "a person, especially of the late 1960s, who rejected established institutions and values and sought spontaneity, direct personal relations expressing love, and expanded consciousness, often expressed in the wearing of casual, folksy clothing and of beads, headbands, and used garment, etc[9]." "Yippie", in turn, referred to hippies that were part of the "radical political activism" (p. 448) of the Youth International Party formed in 1968 by Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman.

Yuppies were also "anti-war, anti-establishment, pro-free speech, pro-civil rights" (Ibid), just like yippies, but were different in the sense that yuppies were fascinated with "upward mobility, financial prosperity, materialism, and consumerism which draws its inspiration from the economic ideology of Ronald Reagan" (Ibid). Furthermore, this generation of mostly young white men is characterised by ignorance and unawareness when it comes to institutional and

[9] *Definition of hippie | Dictionary.com*. (n.d.). Www.Dictionary.Com. Retrieved August 15, 2021, from https://www.dictionary.com/browse/hippie

structural racism. Most of these people thought that racism was a thing of the past and unconsciously, or not, used this thought as a means of "shield[ing] [themselves] from the realities of ethnic group oppression or the need to examine their own attitudes and their privileged location in the American social structure" (p. 451). Unfortunately, racism does not end when white people do not see or perceive it anymore.

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, colour-blindness is a component of structural and institutional racism that helps shape and nurture stereotypes as well as negative attitudes towards people of colour. It has been described by Layla F. Saad in her book called *me and white supremacy* (2020) as "the idea that you do not see [colours]. That you do not notice differences in race. Or if you do, that you do not treat people differently or oppress people based on these differences" (p. 77). Although the colour-blind approach seems well-intentioned, "[it] winds up denying the lived experiences of other people" (Vincenty, 2020). According to Abby L. Ferber (2012) who cites Bonilla-Silva in her article "The Culture of Privilege: Color-blindness, Postfeminism and Christonormativity," colour-blindness consists of:

1. ***Abstract liberalism***: relies upon the language of political liberalism, referring to abstract concepts of equal opportunity, rationality, free choice, individualism, etc. (i.e., discrimination is no longer a problem, and any individual who works hard can succeed).
2. ***Naturalization***: reframes ongoing inequality as the result of natural processes, rather than social relations (i.e., segregation today is the result of the natural inclination of people to live near others of the same race).
3. ***Cultural racism***: reframes ongoing inequality as the result of inherent cultural differences between racialized groups.
4. ***Minimization of racism***: assumes that we now have a fairly level playing field, everyone has equal opportunities to succeed, and racism is no longer a real problem. (p. 66)

This blindness, whether intentional or not, is one of the main causes of the resurgence of racist feelings among the Anglo-American population. White people's neglect of socio-economic evidence as well as their denial of Black individuals' experiences fomented racial disparity and eventually led to the idea of an existent form of 'reverse discrimination.' This ideology suggests that giving Black people more opportunities would be a means of limiting those of white people or simply rejecting them, thus making the leading majority "an oppressed societal grouping" (Woodard, 1982, p. 167). Some white people, who often questioned the necessity to fight for the racial opportunity equality they thought was already achieved, asserted

"there [was] no need for special emphasis efforts on behalf of Blacks and other minorities" (Lowy, 1991, p. 454).

Interestingly, Layla F. Saad (2020) also argues that colour-blindness is, nowadays, used as a tool to "[shift] the burden of addressing the consequences of racism onto [people of colour] by asking them to stop talking about racism and just work harder and be more like white people" (p. 80). In other words, it gives the impression that people of colour are just victimising themselves while assuming that our societies are racially neutral and cleansed from any form of racism, which cannot be less true considering the presence, though concealed, of structural and institutional racism.

To conclude, as Lowy (1991) argues in his article, both the emergence of the yuppies and that of a Black underclass following the 1960s Civil Rights Movement "should not be viewed as a coincidence or social anomaly" but rather as the result of "20 years of White indifference, [and] hostility toward progressive civil rights policies, […] as well as changed conditions in [labour] markets" (p. 449). Moreover, the unawareness or self-conviction in the belief in the eradication of racism tied to colour-blindness is a myth used as a means of reassuring oneself that "we have done all we [could]" (Ferber, 2012, p. 66).

2. AIDS/HIV

2.1. Reagan's silence

Reagan's presidency, apart from having fomented racial disparity and having caused the creation of two emerging economically opposite social classes, was marked by his silence and inaction regarding the spread of HIV in the US. The epidemic originated in 1920 in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, and jumped to New York City around 1970 before occupying the whole territory of the United States in the 1980s. In 1981, US health officials became aware of the first signs of an emerging illness, later known as AIDS, as stated in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: "In the period October 1980-May 1981, 5 young men, all active homosexuals, were treated for biopsy-confirmed Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia at 3 different hospitals in Los Angeles, California. Two of the patients died" (Fitzsimons, 2018). A year before this report, Moral Majority members who were strictly opposed to LGBTQ civil rights

that had advanced after Stonewall riots in 1969[10], delivered a petition to Jimmy Carter in opposition to these gay rights (Ibid). According to this conservative religious political action group, which supported Reagan's election: "God's judgment [was] going to fall on America as on other societies that allowed homosexuality to become a protected way of life" (Ibid). Therefore, when gay men started suffering from AIDS, the Moral Majority regarded the spread of the epidemic as a divine punishment condemning their "immoral" lifestyle (Ibid).

While the number of HIV positive cases kept on rising, Reagan "said almost nothing to the public about AIDS" (Brier, 2018, p. 96). His administration, in contrast, "did a great deal to develop a response to AIDS based in ideological opposition to homosexuality" (Ibid). In October 1982, a journalist, Lester Kinsolving, questioned Reagan's press secretary, Larry Speakes, about the spread of AIDS, which had already caused more than 800 deaths in the US at the time. The latter's answers became highly controversial as he ridiculed and joked about the consequences and the seriousness of HIV:

> **Lester Kinsolving:** Does the president have any reaction to the announcement by the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta that AIDS is now an epidemic in over 600 cases?
>
> **Larry Speakes:** AIDS? I haven't got anything on it.
>
> **Lester Kinsolving:** Over a third of them have died. It's known as "gay plague." [Press pool laughter.] No, it is. It's a pretty serious thing. One in every three people that get this have died. And I wonder if the president was aware of this.
>
> **Larry Speakes:** I don't have it. [Press pool laughter.] Do you?
>
> **Lester Kinsolving:** You don't have it? Well, I'm relieved to hear that, Larry! [Press pool laughter.]
>
> **Larry Speakes:** Do you?
>
> **Lester Kinsolving:** No, I don't.
>
> **Larry Speakes:** You didn't answer my question. How do you know? [Press pool laughter.]
>
> **Lester Kinsolving:** Does the president — in other words, the White House — look on this as a great joke?
>
> **Larry Speakes:** No, I don't know anything about it, Lester. (Lopez, 2016)

The same year, people learned of "several other disparate groups who were among the earliest cases, including people who used intravenous drugs, female (they were reported as "women" but we know now that it included both cisgender and transgender women) sex workers, [haemophiliacs], and Haitians living in the United States and on the island of Haiti"

[10] See pp. 60-62

(Brier, 2018, p. 96). These people were often referred to as the "5-Hs": homosexuals, hookers, haemophiliacs, Haitians, and heroin users (Ibid).

In 1983, medical experts became aware of the gravity of the situation as well as its urgency. As the epidemic kept on spreading, the CDC, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, asked for a better research funding because its inadequacy "[had] seriously restricted [health experts'] work and [had] presumably deepened the invasion of this disease into the American population" (Bennington-Castro, 2020) as more than 2000 people had already died (Ibid). Unfortunately, "Ronald Reagan did not publicly talk about AIDS until 1985 […] when he was in a news conference where he discusses the budget dedicated to fighting [the epidemic], and he claims fighting the disease was a 'top priority' for his administration" (Massih, 2017, p. 143). This sudden public speaking and the government's upwelling of consciousness on the matter had certainly been influenced by the HIV positivity of notable people such as Rock Hudson. Hudson was a closeted gay movie star of the 1950s and a dear friend of Reagan's. His death moved people into action as it was perceived as the proof that AIDS was not a disease reserved for gay men, as he was thought to be straight, but rather a non-discriminating epidemic that could impact the population as a whole.

It was not until the end of 1987 that the government finally began taking steps to raise AIDS awareness. For instance, "[the] Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) […] sponsored AIDS Awareness Month, and launched the America Responds to AIDS' advertising campaign" (Padamsee, 2020, p. 1006). This year was also marked by the entrance of AZT, a really expensive treatment for AIDS that only "seemed to slow the progression of the disease, and did not cure it [nor] prevent death" (Bennington-Castro, 2020).

2.2. LGBs

Initially, AIDS was known as Gay Related Immuno-Deficiency, or GRID, and was especially, at least publicly, associated with white gay men. This denomination contributed to a raising hatred and a raising fear towards gay individuals. Indeed, as mentioned above, religious and political conservatives used the epidemic as a tool for demonising gayness as homosexuals "[had] declared war upon nature, and now nature is exacting an awful retribution[11]." Furthermore, as HIV was known to be deadly and contagious, gay men were pictured as

[11] *Emergence of the AIDS crisis (article)*. (n.d.). Khan Academy. Retrieved June 22, 2021, from https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/modern-us/1980s-america/a/emergence-of-the-aids-crisis

diseased and dangerous as if "[they] were the virus and that, rather than it, caused the pandemic" (Power, 2011, p. 32). These ideas were tied to several theories that were made to establish an alleged causal link between homosexuality and AIDS such as the 'overload theory'. According to this theory, "the gay lifestyle, including a combination of drug use, poor health and history of sexually transmitted infections, led to a collapsed immune system" (p. 31). Even when it was proven that AIDS was not making any difference between people, no matter their sexual orientation, gender, race and income level, "the perception that there was an intrinsic link between homosexuality and AIDS tended to persevere in Western countries" (Ibid).

The lack of governmental response to the spread of this epidemic forces oneself to ask questions about whether Reagan's administration was homophobic. As written above, his administration took a lot of time to consider the disease as a real threat and stop ridiculing and joking about the consequences HIV had on gay individuals. Apart from responding tardively and inappropriately, it seems that the government only decided to react when it was clear that the disease was not subject to impact solely gay individuals but rather the entire American population. In other words, when gay men were the only victims, no effort was made to control, prevent, and cure AIDS but when straight individuals, or at least closeted gay people, started suffering Reagan and his administration decided that it was time to consider AIDS as "a top priority" (Massih, 2017, p. 143).

Interestingly, as Susan Stryker writes in her book *Transgender History* (2017), it quickly became clear that

> the prevalence of HIV infection was not uniformly distributed but rather was structured at the population level by racism and poverty: poor people of [colour], particularly African American people, were far more likely to become infected and far less likely to access the best life-prolonging health care. (p. 166)

Although "communities of [colour], particularly African American gay and bisexual men, were particularly hard struck" (Brier, 2018, p. 96), "their suffering largely remained invisible because gayness was always assumed to be white" (Ibid). As Jennifer Brier writes in her article "AIDS and Action (1980-1990s)," "the white [racialisation] of AIDS allowed most black gay men to construct AIDS as a disease that only affected white gay men and therefore not something that rose to the level of attention or action" (p. 97). It clearly appears that the racial disparity that already existed and was prevalent in the US did not confine itself economically-wise but also impacted the gay community from within. In a white-centred and heteronormative society, Black gay and bisexual individuals were forced to face a double burden i.e., racial

oppression and stigmatisation based on their sexual orientation. However, the gay community itself was highly segregated, thus little inclusive and united, as William G. Hawkeswood writes in his book called *One of the Children: Gay Black Men in Harlem* (1996):

> Most gay black men have experienced rejection by other gays because they are black. […] This means that for a gay black man, often his [colour], not his sexual preference, defines his position in society. […] Because gay black men are constantly defined by their skin [colour] when they [socialise] in mainstream gay life, they choose to live in black society, among black friends and lovers, to be free from the stigma of racist attitudes in their daily lives, and their choice of black men as lovers is often an expression of love of blackness. (pp. 99-100)

As Brier suggests, limited interactions, especially sexual, between Black and white gay individuals can be the reason why the formers' increasing reported cases were at first little documented until around 1983, "when the extent of the epidemic's reach in African American communities became apparent" (Brier, 2018, p. 97).

2.3. What about the 'T'?

In the 1980s, there was little documentation about transgender people and how impacted they were by the epidemic of AIDS. It is important to acknowledge that trans women of colour and gay or bisexual men of colour are not living the same reality or the same situation. As mentioned above, it is clear that Black LGB folks were much more impacted than their white counterparts due to systemic and institutional racism and homophobia. The intention of this dissertation is not to belittle the oppressions faced by gay individuals of colour in the 1980s, but rather to reflect on how worse the experiences lived by transgender women of colour could be.

The social isolation and economic vulnerability of queer people and especially of transgender people resulted in them having to rely on sex work for survival. Indeed, stigmatisation around trans people is often accompanied by a limited amount of employment opportunities. Since "conventional routes" exclude trans people, sex work appears to be the most feasible job and the only escape to poverty (Jaspal, 2020, p. 133). By doing so, they expose themselves to more violence, higher rates of criminalisation, as sex work is illegal in most states in the USA, and higher risks of being hit by sexually transmitted diseases. As Susan Stryker writes,

> Black transgender women living at the intersection of transphobia, misogyny, homophobia, racism, and higher rates of incarceration – particularly if they were involved in commercial sex work – were especially vulnerable. (Stryker, 2017, p. 166)

The notion of intersectionality is important in the understanding of how different human beings can endure different levels of discriminations, thus having a more or less privileged status in comparison with other individuals. This notion that has been coined in the 1980s by Kimberlé Crenshaw, referred to "the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise[12]." In other words,

> intersectional theory asserts that people are often disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression: their race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers. Intersectionality recognizes that identity markers (e.g. "woman" and "black") do not exist independently of each other, and that each informs the others, often creating a complex convergence of oppression[13].

Therefore, in the 1980s, transgender women of colour were forced to live in an antagonistic environment as they were experiencing Reagan's economically and racially unfair politics, the raise of AIDS that induced an increasing level of hatred and fear towards the LGBT+ community as well as living in an androcentric society that privileges men over women. In this sense one can conclude that transgender women of colour

> had come to be seen as 'vulnerable' populations – ones more prone to infection because of the confluence of poverty, social stigma, job discrimination, survival prostitution, fewer educational resources, lack of access to medical information or health care, and other contributing factors. (Stryker, 2017, p. 164)

3. LGBTQI+ people of colour's vulnerability and rejection in *Pose*

This theoretical framework has allowed for the contextualisation of the 1980s focusing on two major socio-economic factors that played a role in making people of colour more vulnerable. To sum up, Reaganomics, accompanied by structural and institutional racism, led people of colour to live in a more precarious state and widened the gap between poorer populations and wealthier ones, between people of colour and their white counterparts. AIDS, in count, sank the whole LGBTQ+ community into fear and despair as thousands of queer folks, among others, died in front of an impassive government. The following part will analyse how the series *Pose*

[12] *intersectionality, n. : Oxford English Dictionary*. (n.d.). Oxford English Dictionary. Retrieved August 15, 2021, from https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/429843

[13] *What is intersectionality, and what does it have to do with me?* (2017, March 29). YW Boston. https://www.ywboston.org/2017/03/what-is-intersectionality-and-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-me/

depicts LGBT people of colour, and especially transgender women, as a vulnerable community. In order to do so, the analyses will be focused on some selected scenes due to their reflectiveness of the series' depiction of the problematics that have been discussed. Firstly, the analysis will discuss to what extent society, family and the Church's rejection can impact queer people of colour. Secondly, it will focus on how *Pose* shows the spectator that transgender women of colour rely on sex work for survival. Thirdly, this section will analyse the series' depiction of the yuppies in comparison with the Black underclass that has been described earlier in this dissertation. Finally, it will discuss the importance of AIDS, its stigmatisation, and its effects on the characters' lives.

Family rejection: "You're dead to me" (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 14:20)

The pilot episode (1.1) of *Pose* starts with Damon Richardson (Ryan Jamaal Swain), a young gay black man who comes back home after his dancing class. While on the bus, Damon reads a magazine's article about a new dance school that makes him smile and dream. As soon as he gets home, he hurries up and goes up to his room where he puts Donna Summer's "On the *Radio"* on and starts dancing. His father, Lawrence, arrives in turn and rushes into his son's room. The angry father cuts the track and starts lecturing Damon about how loud the music is. But this is just the beginning and the "blasting music" appears to be rather a guise that conceals the real reason of the father's anger. Here is a transcript of their interaction:

> **Lawrence:** We talked about you blasting music. Where'd you come from?
>
> **Damon:** I-I was at school, sir.
>
> **Lawrence:** Well, guess where I was. I went into town. Met up with the fellas for a drink at O'Malleys. When I arrived, they were having a laugh. You remember Todd, worked down at the factory with me. He saw you skipping out of that dance studio in ballet shoes. And I'm thinking: "not my son, 'cause we discussed it, and I said, no dance class."
>
> **Damon:** I can explain, I was…
>
> **Lawrence:** Yeah? And how you do explain this (showing an erotic gay magazine)? Found it under your bed. I told your mother. "If you are too gentle with him, he's gonna grow up a sissy." I tried toughening you up, but she kept saying: "Creatives need space to explore." So, I let her raise you, and this is how you repay my kindness?
>
> *Silence*
>
> **Lawrence:** What? Speak up. You're 17. You're a man now, right? So say it.
>
> **Damon:** I'm a dancer. And… I'm gay. (Ibid, 12:30)

After this revelation, Damon's father slaps him across the face, then takes off his own belt and starts beating his son until the mother comes and Damon can barely breathe.

This scene shows the spectator how homophobia is anchored in Damon's father's mind and how ashamed he is of his son. According to J.D.P. Bird et al.'s study (2017), the process of coming out to one's family "[is] often difficult and [accompanied by] strong disapproval or rejection" (p. 327), which can either be expressed verbally or through physical abuse or even both (p. 329). Damon's father's reaction is a compilation of both verbal and physical abuse and also makes visible an interesting feature of homophobia that is "internalised misogyny". Indeed, the father uses the word "sissy" (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 12:35) when referring to gayness. This term "is most often used as a particularly hurtful synonym for an effeminate male, and its application in this particular context is meant to produce shame and derision" (Nazza, 2010). Therefore, using the word "sissy" as an insult implies considering femininity as something negative or at least inferior to masculinity. Moreover, multiple times during the dialogue between the two characters, Lawrence refers to manhood as in "You're a man now, right?" (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 13:15) or "You don't know what it is like to be a man, to struggle" (Ibid, 13:40). These two references can be interpreted as allusions to the path to adulthood: a child becomes an adult; a young boy becomes a man, but it can also be seen as a means of questioning Damon's masculinity. In Western cultures, hegemonic masculinity, which is "considered as the true nature of men and involves mainly heterosexism (i.e., an ideological system that focuses on the primacy of heterosexuality and the processes maintaining heterosexuals' social power and privilege) and opposition to femininity" (Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009, p. 1233), prevails and shapes attitudes towards people who are said to threaten men's gender identity. Therefore, "[men] would be more rejecting of homosexuals in order to [fulfil] their need to affirm their masculinity by distancing themselves from those with whom they do not want to be confused" (p. 1234). Interestingly again, the implicit link made by Lawrence between creativity and homosexuality in "[your mother told me that] Creatives need space […] and [being gay] is how you repay my kindness" (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 13:00) finds its roots in the same theory. Creativity is often related to emotional expressiveness and men are expected to be strong and tough, not sensitive, therefore, they cannot show their emotions; being emotional is stereotypically attached to women. These ideas are linked to the notions of patriarchy and androcentrism that have been discussed and defined earlier on in this dissertation (see p. 11).

However, the scene does not end after this conversation. Indeed, after being interrupted by his wife, Lawrence shouts: "I want him [Damon] out of my house!" (Falchuk et al., 2018a,

14:05), then grabs his son and pushes him out. As they step through the door, Lawrence throws Damon to the ground before giving him a look of disgust and retorting: "You are dead to me" (Ibid, 14:20). Once more this scene includes a form of violence that combines both emotional and physical abuses. The consequences of such family breakdown have been studied by J.D.P. Bird et al. in their article "I had to Go to the Streets to Get Love: Pathways from Parental Rejection to HIV Risk Among Young Gay and Bisexual Men" (2017). Their findings led to the idea that parental rejection could result in a lack of emotional and/or instrumental support that would encourage risky behaviours and the likelihood of ending up on the streets (pp. 330-331):

> the decreased instrumental and emotional support that accompanied parental rejection was related to housing instability, homelessness, poverty, lack of guidance and support, and emotional isolation, and these factors seemed to be potentially linked to their engaging in survival sex. (p. 333)

In other words, by rejecting his son, Lawrence forces him to live by himself on the streets where he will be most vulnerable and will certainly have to do whatever it takes to survive.

God's wrath: "The Bible condemns homosexuality" (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 14:35)

After the altercation with his father (1.1), it is Damon's mother's turn to reject her son. She joins Damon outside the house and slaps him across the face.

> **Mother:** How could you betray me this way? I went against your father's word, supported your creativity, and you bring filth into my home? And you know the Bible condemns homosexuality, and God will punish you by giving you that disease.
>
> **Damon:** But I'm not a sinner.
>
> **Mother:** You are! If you love me, you will go before Him, ask for forgiveness and never engage in vile behaviour. Understood?
>
> *Silence*
>
> **Mother:** That's how it's gonna be? (She throws Damon's backpack and jacket at him) (Ibid, 14:30)

The mother's rejection of Damon's homosexuality is related to her religious beliefs rather than to society's expectations of masculinity as it was the case for Lawrence's reaction. Interestingly, the first thing Damon's mother say to him is "how could you betray me?" (Ibid) This notion of betrayal has been noted in K.E. Maslowe & M.A. Yarhouse's study "Christian Parental Reactions When A LGB Child Comes Out" (2015), whose purpose was to analyse and understand "how parents who identify as Christian responded to and coped with their child's

disclosure of same-sex sexuality and/or having a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity" (Maslowe & Yarhouse, 2015, p. 352). According to them, parents' responses could be emotional, cognitive, and/or behavioural (p. 355). Emotional responses included anger that "stemmed from a sense that the child had betrayed and/or abandoned their parent, particularly in defiance of the way in which they were 'raised' and the values and morals they learned as a child that were in a direct conflict with a gay lifestyle" (p. 356). In other words, when Damon's mother feels betrayed by her son her reaction implies that she and her husband feel as if they had failed, to some extent, as parents. To go further, one can also interpret this feeling as a roundabout way of postulating that being homosexual is a choice that Damon made, betrayal meaning "an act of deliberate disloyalty[14]," but also a means of antagonising once more homosexuality as the same word implies "supporting a rival group[15]." In a second step, she also supports what has been said earlier with creativity that seems to be associated with homosexuality.

Most importantly, this scene emphasises what has been written earlier in this dissertation about religion's rejection and demonisation of homosexuality. Firstly, Damon's mother tells him: "And you know the Bible condemns homosexuality, and God will punish you by giving you that disease" (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 14:35). By saying so, she "[defines] AIDS as God's punishment for moral failing and [blames] PWAs[16] for contracting the illness" (Kowalewski, 1990, p. 93). Therefore, PWAs are considered sinners and "AIDS is a lethal judgment of God on the sin of homosexuality and it is also the judgement of God on America for endorsing this vulgar, perverted and reprobate lifestyle" (Falwell cited in Kowalewski, p.93). As mentioned above, relating homosexuality to AIDS has been a strategy used by the Moral Majority in the United States that resulted in an increasing hatred and fear against LGBTQ+ people who were eventually left aside by their families, friends, and society in general. Furthermore, by implying that God will give Damon a disease the mother "[communicates] a fatalistic message that HIV infection [is] an inevitable outcome" (Bird et al., 2017, p. 329). Secondly, when Damon's mother tells him: "you will go before Him, ask for forgiveness" (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 15:00), her words could be interpreted as a means of showing that she cares for her son. This interpretation is tied to the idea that we must "[love] the 'sinner' while hating the 'sin'" (Kowalewski, 1990, p. 95). Therefore, her caring would be the reason why she wants her son

[14] *betrayal - Dictionary Definition*. (n.d.-b). Vocabulary.Com. Retrieved August 2, 2021, from https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/betrayal

[15] *What does betrayal mean?* (n.d.). Definitions.Net. Retrieved August 2, 2021, from https://www.definitions.net/definition/betrayal

[16] People with AIDS

to ask for forgiveness, she wants him to be accepted by the Lord and not to be sick. The second part of the speech, which focuses on "never engage in vile behaviour" (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 15:00), is again used to establish a causal link between homosexuality, sin, and AIDS. It gives the impression that homosexuality is an abomination:

> AIDS represents the physical results of homosexuality, [just like] those who smoke or drink also suffer the consequences of abusing their bodies (e.g., cancer or liver disease). From this perspective, homosexual sex is defined as unhealthy – an abuse of the natural purpose of sexuality and the human body. (Kowalewski, 1990, p. 95)

Apart from demonising homosexuality using the Bible and her religious beliefs, Damon's mother's speech also relies on emotional blackmail. Indeed, she uses the "if you love me" (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 15:00) formula to try to change her son's behaviour and sexual orientation. In their study entitled "Parental Psychological Control and Emotional and Behavioral Disorders among Spanish Adolescents," (2019) B. León-del-Barco et al. have studied, among other things, the impact of parents' psychological control's strategies such as emotional blackmail, guilt induction, and love withdrawal on their children. These forms of manipulation tend to hinder children's autonomy and can affect them "emotionally, stifling their ability to establish emotional links with others, the development of their personal identity" (Barber as cited in León-del-Barco et al., p. 2) as well as "may constitute intrusive [behaviours] verging on psychological abuse" (León-del-Barco et al., p. 9). In other words, this type of relation between a parent and a child that is based on manipulative strategies aiming at controlling the latter can lead to mental health issues, such as a decreased self-esteem. Low self-esteem, in turn, can lead them to seek for love and approbation, which can sometimes be the reason why young people are going to engage in risky behaviours. Indeed, as one of J.D.P. Bird et al.'s study's (2017) respondents stated: "I was going through a thing of low self-esteem, and I thought having unprotected sex with people made them care about me more" (p. 331).

To conclude, both the intervention of the father and the mother are reflective of the mindset of the time. They reject their son for being homosexual. On the one hand, Lawrence focuses more on society's expectation of masculinity while his wife uses her religious beliefs and manipulative strategies to try to change her son. Therefore, these two scenes depict how society, represented in this case by family and religion, turned its back on the LGBTQ+ community and how it not only rejected but also demonised and stigmatised gayness. As it has been highlighted, this rejecting tendency led concerned people to be left aside, emotionally isolated, and to try to find comfort wherever they could. That is a probable reason why LGBTQ+ people often

engaged in risky behaviours such as prostitution, or at least unprotected sex. They also had to face a higher probability to end up homeless, as they were often kicked, at a young age with no job security, from their houses with nothing more than a backpack and a jacket.

Job Employment discrimination: "I'm too much of a woman for you?" (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 46:00

Alongside being rejected from their family and the Church, thus being left fragilized and more prone to homelessness, transgender women of colour are also discriminated within the labour market. This section of the analysis will be devoted to *Pose*'s representation of job discrimination and its possible consequences.

In *Pilot* (1.1), Angel travels to Trump Tower for a job application. Despite "the want ad [that] said [they] were" (Ibid) hiring, the saleswoman, to whom Angel speaks, is adamant: "[they] are not hiring right now" (Ibid). Faced with this refusal, Angel feels confused and gets defensive:

Angel: So, what's the problem? What, I'm too much woman for you?

Saleswoman: I'm gonna have to ask you to leave.

Angel: Thank you for your time. (Ibid)

During this interaction between the two women, the spectator swiftly understands why Angel was not given to opportunity to apply for the job. Indeed, when Angel asks whether "[she is] too much of a woman for the [saleswoman]," she knows that she is being rejected and discriminated for her transness. Unfortunately, Angel's case is far from being an isolated instance of transphobic job discrimination. As it has been noticed, "Refusal to hire, privacy violations, harassment, and even physical and sexual violence on the job are common occurrences, and are experienced at even higher rates by transgender people of [colour].[17]" These forms of prejudices "[contribute] to a crisis of homelessness, poverty" (Branstetter as cited in Moreau, 2019) among the transgender community and lead some concerned people "to become involved in underground economies – such as sex and drug work – in order to survive[18]." Later in the series, Angel decides to follow her dream and to try to make her way

[17] *Employment*. (n.d.). National Center for Transgender Equality. Retrieved July 30, 2021, from https://transequality.org/issues/employment

[18] Ibid.

in the world of modelling. Unfortunately, the 1990s fashion industry was really prejudiced. *Pose* raises the spectator's awareness of many forms of discrimination models like Angel were obliged to face. While she is encouraged by Blanca to pursue her dreams, Angel is aware of the fashion industry's tendency to favour white models (Arias, 2019):

> Before Angel tries out for the Ford Models Fresh Face of 1990 competition, she tells her house mother Blanca Evangelista (MJ Rodriguez) that she doesn't look like all the other girls in the magazines. Most of the covers and ads she points at feature White women. When she arrives to the audition venue, she almost backs out after seeing mostly light-skinned models. (Ibid)

As J. Arias notices in her article, "The problematic '90s fashion industry according to 'Pose' S2," "in the real world, some models don't get booked because of their skin [colour]" (Ibid). However, thanks to her beauty, personality, and voguing abilities, she becomes a standout and moves on to the semi-finals. Alongside the fashion industry's racism, Angel has to face its trans discrimination. Although Angel's career seems to be taking off in a rather positive way throughout the second season of the show, in *In My Heels* (2.10), she "receives bad news that someone exposed her secret that she's [a transgender woman]" (Ibid), which immediately stops her career:

> **Ms Ford**: The creative director accused me of pulling a publicity stunt on her dime. I didn't know what she was talking about. She said, "I asked for a girl, not a drag queen." I swore to her these were lies meant to tarnish the Ford Agency and diminish your stardom. But word has spread. Everyone has pulled your contracts. They're claiming misrepresentation, fraud.
>
> **Angel**: I'm not a fraud. You think I'm a fraud?
>
> **Ms Ford**: No. Look at me. Angel. You came to me as you are. But the world isn't ready yet. (Murphy et al., 2019b, 14:00)

Angel is not the only character who is victim of job employment discrimination in *Pose*. Blanca, who has been working in a salon from the beginning of the first season, is also discriminated against. In *Acting Up* (2.1), she asks her boss for a day-off to participate to an ACT UP protest to support her community. However, she faces the categorical refusal of the salon manager, Ms Rose:

> **Ms. Rose**: I just booked you an 11:10 and a 12:15.
>
> **Blanca**: I'm sorry, Ms. Rose. You gonna have to give this to someone else.
>
> **Ms. Rose**: I'm the owner, I need you to work.
>
> **Blanca**: You know I never turn down work, but my friends are counting on me.
>
> **Ms. Rose**: You're ungrateful. I let you work here because I am a good Christian and…

Blanca: Please. I have to leave.

Ms. Rose: So quit.

Blanca: You know what? You're right. I quit. I'm not wasting whatever time I have left on this Earth to give any part of me to you.

Ms. Rose: You should kiss my feet for hiring you. No one else will. You will see. Ladies like getting their nails done by ladies. (Murphy et al. 2019a, 29:40)

Even if this specific scene does not depict a form of discrimination in the employment process itself, it is worth analysing. The fact that the salon owner used the term "ungrateful" is a means of putting pressure on Blanca's shoulders by manipulating her emotions. Indeed, Ms. Rose thinks that giving Blanca a job is a sufficient reason for the latter to be eternally grateful. One could interpret Ms. Rose's words as a means of asserting her power over Blanca. In their study, "Native speaker saviorism: a racialized teaching ideology" (2020), C.J. Jenks and J. W. Lee wrote about that

> [saviourism] stems from a number of psychologies, chiefly sentimentality, self-righteousness and chauvinism. These [saviourist] discourses are rooted in an epistemology that situates […] egocentric ambitions within larger narratives of kindness, generosity and the like (e.g. victimization). (Jenks & Lee, 2020, p.190)

However, in this particular case, one could transfer their explanation about White saviourism to saviourism in general. In the relationship between Ms. Rose and Blanca, both women are racialised. Therefore, it seems that it would be more relevant to talk about an existing form of cisgender saviourism, which highlights a form of gender hierarchy rather than a racial one, that should be understood by analogy with White saviourism. In other words, the owner's generosity could be analysed as her desire to be considered a "good Christian" as well as a means of assuming that transgender women perpetually need cisgender people's help, thus contributing to perpetuating power dynamics.

After quitting her job, in *Worth It* (2.2), Blanca wants to create her own salon, an objective she will ultimately achieve. In order to make her dream come true, she rents a place owned by Frederica Norman (Patti LuPone), a wealthy white Jewish lady. Their first meeting paves the way for the spectator to understand who this new character truly is:

Blanca: Hi, Ms. Norman? I'm Blanca Rodriguez. I'm… I'm the prospective tenant.

Frederica: Are you a PR? Puerto Rican?

Blanca: No, I'm American.

Frederica: I'm sure, but where is your family from? Your lineage?

Blanca: I'm Dominican.

Frederica: Good. Let's go in. I don't normally rent to anyone darker than my Aunt Lilly after a week's vacation in Palm Beach, but I've had good luck with Dominicans. Hard workers for the most part. (Mock & Horder-Payton, 2019, 8:00)

This conversation is a clear depiction of an overt form of individual racism based on stereotypical prejudices. Frederica Norman, who is a rich white woman, does not conceal the fact that she does not normally want to deal with dark-skinned people, as she implies, they are lazy. Interestingly, one could interpret Ms. Norman's allusion to Dominicans as hard workers as a means of establishing a racial hierarchy. To be clearer, "the people who are most oppressed are also the most likely to be branded 'lazy'" (Price, 2021). The rhetoric of laziness has been used casually in the past and has been tied, among other, to people of colour. For instance, "after the abolition of slavery in the United States, political cartoons and racist propaganda of the period continued to portray Black Americans as lazy, unreliable, and taking advantage of any benefits offered to them" (Ibid). As mentioned above, Ronald Reagan was deeply convinced that one's socio-economic situation fell on one's own responsibility, that is called individualism. He also valued hard work and used the image of "the Welfare Queen" to widen the gap between rich white people and their poor Black counterparts (see pp. 19-26). Despite Frederica's racist intervention, the two characters make a deal and sign the contract with a handshake.

Blanca becomes an entrepreneur and plans to open her salon shortly after getting the keys. Unfortunately, during a conversation with her son, Frederica learns that Blanca is a transgender woman: "You know that storefront you rented out yesterday? I went to check with the electrician, and I ran into the new tenant. You know it's a guy, right?" (Mock & Horder-Payton, 2019, 30:15) This news upsets the landlord who asks her son to evict Blanca from the building. The next day, Blanca goes back to her future salon and is joined by Frederica:

Frederica: You are trespassing.

Blanca: I paid you first and last. This is my place for at least two months.

Frederica: You deceived me. I can work with thieves and murderers, but I cannot do business with… a liar. Norman properties reserves the right to evict tenants at any time. (Ibid, 33:00)

Once more, in addition to being stigmatised because of the colour of her skin, Blanca is rejected for being a transgender woman. Interestingly, Frederica says that she would rather work with thieves and murderers rather than with people like Blanca, thus the former establishes

a kind of moral hierarchy that places Blanca at the very bottom. The latter is, therefore, considered as morally worse than criminals.

To sum up, *Pose* depicts how transgender women of colour are discriminated against in the workplace. On the one hand, they have to face institutional and individual racism that picture people of colour as inferior. On the other hand, Blanca and Angel face transphobic attitudes that consider them as fake women or frauds. These forms of rejection, as mentioned above, can lead to homelessness or situations of financial need that can result in the participation of ostracised communities in 'underground economies' to survive.

Yuppies: "I am a brand, a middle-class white guy" (Falcuk et al., 2018b, 45:00)

As mentioned through the theoretical framework of this chapter, while Black and Latin-American individuals were facing higher rates of poverty due to structural and institutional forms of racism, middle-class white people could easily enrich themselves. The emergence of this consumerist and materialist social class is also worth analysing in *Pose*. In addition to be dedicated to the study of Stan Bowes, as a representation of the Yuppies and their mindset, this part of the analysis will also focus on some aspects of the relationship between Stan and Angel, i.e., the notion possessiveness and ownership.

The first time the spectator gets to know Stan Bowes (Evan Peters) is in the pilot episode (1.1). In the scene introducing the character, he is applying for a job in Trump Tower. His interlocutor, Matt Bromley (James Van Der Beek), is a white rich and successful man who does not hold back to parade his pride and his wealth. During the interview, Matt attempts to know what Stan's ambitions are:

> **Matt**: What do you want? Not money-wise, what do you want?
>
> **Stan**: I wanna be you. I want what you have. I want a view of the river or the park or both. I want to be able to walk by a shop on Fifth, see something in the window for my wife, and just go buy it. (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 33:20)

Interestingly, on the first part of his answer, Stan makes a parallel between being and having, which is quite representative of the mindset of the yuppies. As written above, yuppie culture is characterised by a deep desire to possess. What you own is who you are: the more you have, the more successful you are. In other words, even when he is asked about his ambitions and dreams, not money-wise, Stan's answer keeps on being related to money. He wants enough money to buy whatever he wants whenever he wants it, as if, according to him,

money could buy happiness. After Stan's revelation, Matt is thrilled, he smiles, hits the table and starts a monologue about his belongings:

> **Matt**: The new American Dream. For the first time in American history, it's considered a good thing to flaunt your success, right? Let people know how rich you are. This watch? Patek Phillippe, rose gold, nine grand. I got four of them. I've watched a Met game from the owner's bow and partied with Gooden and Strawberry afterwards. Just the other day, I was backstage at a Cyndi Lauper concert. I drive a Mercedes 350, and this suit is bespoke. God bless Ronald Reagan. (Ibid, 33:30)

Matt's intervention is a clear reference to the Yuppies' consumption-based lifestyle. For instance, the fact that he owns four identical watches, is questionable in terms of necessity. However, at the sight of Matt's monologue, the spectator can get an idea of what drives the yuppies to accumulate objects that are sometimes unnecessary to them. Their possessions are a means of flaunting their success, which, therefore, depends on individuals' wealth. In other words, his monologue corroborates the idea that what you own shapes and makes who you are. In *Access* (1.2), this idea of a possession-depending success appears once more during a conversation between Stan and his wife:

> **Patty**: We never used to have so many.
>
> **Stan**: Yeah, well, this is what success looks like.
>
> **Patty**: You think we're successful enough to get a dishwasher?
>
> **Stan**: You serious? Do you see how underwater we are now? Look at all this.
>
> **Patty**: We have a Cadillac in the garage. There is a ball gown in mine that costs $900 that I've worn once. If we don't have any money, then how are you paying for all these things?
>
> **Stan**: We need all that stuff.
>
> **Patty**: We need a dishwasher. We have a baby and I'm up doing dishes by hand until *The Tonight Show* starts.
>
> **Stan**: You don't understand how it works out there in Manhattan, okay? You have to look the part or they won't let you into the big club. You wore that gown to the big event at 21 the other night, and now they all thing you're one of them. (Falchuk et al., 2018b, 30:00)

This scene begins with a reiteration of what has been discussed earlier, that is the relation established between being successful and accumulating assets. Interestingly, the conflict that breaks out between the two spouses allows the spectator to realise that the characters do not share the same opinions and point of views regarding what is necessary. On the one hand, Patty focuses on what she considers primordial for the household as she mentions the importance and the necessity to buy a dishwasher. On the other hand, Stan is more focusing on the fact that it

is necessary to play and look the part to be accepted by society. Therefore, he prioritises the purchase of goods that will make him appear rich and socially more acceptable, rather than what he truly wants and needs. Later in the same episode, Stan and Angel are eating in a restaurant during the latter's break. This scene is interesting to analyse on various levels. Firstly, it is the moment when the spectator has access to Stan's mind and sees how he considers himself:

> **Stan**: I am no one.I want what I'm supposed to want, I wear what I'm supposed to wear, and work where I'm supposed to work. I stand for nothing. […] I can buy things I can't afford, which means they're never really mine. I don't live, I don't believe. I accumulate. I'm a brand, a middle-class white guy. […] I'm the one playing dress-up (Ibid, 45:00)

To sum up, he defines himself as an individual who follows society's expectations without knowing why. He just wants to fit in society, and, in order to achieve his goal, he performs a role, he dresses-up as a middle-class white guy. Stan is the total opposite of Angel whom he considers as a "real" and authentic woman (Ibid).

Secondly, it is also the moment when Stan and Angel's relationship takes a new turn:

> **Stan**: I don't like other men touching you. How much a week do you make?
>
> **Angel**: You trying to put me on a retainer, sweetheart?
>
> **Stan**: I'm sorry I didn't mean it like that. What if I got you a place of your own?
>
> **Angel**: A kept woman? I must warn you; I cannot cook. Unless you count opening a can of SpaghettiOs. I want a year lease. I don't want you running way and leaving me holding the bag once you get me out of your system. You want to possess me. Why? What are you? (Ibid, 44:00)

Although it may seem innocuous, one could interpret Stan's desire that Angel not be touched by other men as a form of possession. This possessiveness in their relationship could be seen as a form of marking Stan's ownership over Angel as she says the "[he] wants to possess [her]" (Ibid). In other words, she would not be considered as a woman or a human but rather as Stan's property, or his object. The image of a kept woman, to which she refers, can also be used to reinforce this reading of Angel as a kind of a doll. The fact that he wants to buy her a place of her own can either be interpreted as his desire to protect her or the place itself could be seen as a doll's house. This interpretation is reinforced by a conversation Blanca has with Patty, Stan's wife, in *Love is The Message* (1.6), during which the former says: "It felt like he wanted to keep me, like a doll. […] I wasn't nothing until *he* decided to come home and play with me" (Murphy & Mock, 2018, 1:45, emphasis in original). In a nutshell, throughout the first season of the show, *Pose* depicts Stan Bowes as the embodiment of Yuppies' mindset. Not only does he want to accumulate material assets, but he also wants to possess Angel. In other words,

Yuppies' materialism and consumerism can be read beyond the literal meaning of the terms, which are objects-related, and applied to human beings.

Reliance on sex work for survival and its consequences

Because of their rejection by society, the Church, their family and the fact that they are discriminated against in the workplace, many queer people of colour rely on sex work as a means to survive. Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous analyses, rejection can lead these marginalised and stigmatised individuals to search for recognition and love in whomever they can, leading them to engage in risky behaviours. On numerous occasions, *Pose* reflects these realities that impact many of the main characters. From the pilot episode (1.1), the spectator gets to the heart of the matter through Angel's (Indya Moore) presence on the Piers. The Piers "were a nexus of the city's queer underground, a place where gay men, trans people and sex workers all gathered to participate in social, sexual, and political life" (Dunham, 2017, p. 91). This symbolic place "provided a refuge away from NYPD surveillance, which specifically targeted low-income queer and trans people and trans people of [colour]," (Ibid) whose reliance on the sex trades for money continued to be criminalised by the state (Ibid). Throughout the first season, Angel is the main, if not the only, representation of sex work. She alternates between working on the Piers and at Show World. During a conversation she has with Stan Bowes (Evan Peters), who has been introduced in the previous part, she says that she is dancing at Show World because "it is safe behind the glass, money is good, and [she likes] being admired" (Falchuk et al., 2018b, 42:20). In other words, Angel is the reflection of both the characteristics mentioned above, that are the financial and attention need.

This economic precariousness will also lead other important characters to take the path of sex work. This is notably the case of Elektra Abundance. She is introduced as a rich Black transgender woman that can afford her lifestyle thanks to Dick Ford (Christopher Meloni), a rich white man who grants her an allowance in his absence. Although she has become accustomed to being able to buy everything she wants, she soon realises that her economic security is hanging by a thread. While she makes one of the most important decisions of her life, she is abandoned by the man who said he loved her. Without any source of income, she cannot afford to maintain her house or her current lifestyle. Consequently, she will first be outcast by Candy and Lulu before being forced to sleep on a bench in the street. In order to earn money, she will start working at Show World, just like Angel, before being helped and saved

by Blanca. Reliance on sex work to survive is not the only similarity shared by Angel and Elektra. Interestingly, the two characters are also the only transgender women of colour, in the series, whose evolution has been shaped by their relationship with white rich men. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, Angel meets Stan, a yuppie, with whom she falls in love while she is working on the Piers. The evolution of their love story is shown throughout the first season of the show. Yet, after some suspicious behaviour, "Angel expresses her confusion and distress towards Stan in an attempt to understand why [he] chose her specifically" (Peebles, 2020). In response, Stan reveals his true face to Angel and the spectator:

> **Angel**: I just wanna know the truth. Who are you?
>
> **Stan**: I don't know. When I was in college, I went… I went to a porno bookstore. It was one of those big ones in Times Square that has everything. I owned one old Playboy since I was 14; I wanted to get something more hard-core. There was one section of magazines off to the side, and they were wrapped up in brown paper, but I could still see the title (She-Males). I got all hot in the face and nervous, but it also made me a little hard. And it made no sense to me. I never thought about anything like that before.
>
> **Angel**: I'm a pornographic magazine come to life. (Mock & Horder-Payton, 2018, 45:40)

This conversation allows one to realise that Angel is the embodiment of Stan's fetish. Stan views Angel as an "exotic object" (Peebles, 2020) that he wants to possess. In this case, "the object of desire is a male to the female transsexual body—prior to surgery, penis intact" (Zeavin as cited in Peebles, 2020).

On the other hand, the same situation occurs in the relationship between Elektra and Dick, who appears for the first time on screen in *The Fever* (1.4). The scene starts with Elektra joining him in his luxurious apartment, where they apparently commonly meet. Unlike Stan's intentions, Dick's are straight forward. Firstly, he overtly objectifies Elektra to whom he says that she is "[his] greatest possession" (Mock & Horder-Payton, 2018, 16:30). Secondly, after a love scene, Elektra mentions her will to undergo her gender affirmation surgery, which she refers to as her "transsexualism operation" (Ibid, 17:00) with which Dick disagrees:

> **Dick**: You know how I feel about that. I want you as you are. You get cut up by some doctor, that's someone else. The woman I have has always had…something extra.
>
> **Elektra**: That something extra has not been on your to-do list in years.
>
> **Dick**: Don't you paint me as some lazy lay. You're the one who has always had a hang-up about it. What, you think I didn't see you gritting your teeth, pretending to like it when I'd go down on you? I stopped out of respect for you.
>
> **Elektra**: If you respect me so much, then why does it matter that it's there?

> **Dick**: It just does. I…know what I like, but I can't explain why my dick gets hard knowing that yours is there. All I know is that I want in the room. Now, maybe it's because I like the feeling of knowing that I'm getting away with something that no one else knows about. I just want it there. […] I gave you a life. A real life… and now you repay me this way? […] if [your] future involves this procedure, it obviously doesn't include me. (Ibid, 17:20)

In other words, Dick objectifies and dehumanises Elektra. Indeed, he seems to be only attracted to her genitalia as he clearly threatens her to end the relationship if she gets operated. As it has been noted, "this [dehumanisation] of transgender women as sexual objects for white men" would allow them "to still feel masculine and hold power in society, as they are just expanding what it means to be attracted by women" (Pebbles, 2020). The rhetoric of "getting away with something that no one else knows about" (Mock & Horder-Payton, 2018, 17:20) is a "hegemonic masculine practice of dissociating oneself from anything that may be thought as 'gay'" (Gercio as cited in Pebbles, 2020). To sum up, transgender women of colour are depicted as fetishised and objectified in *Pose*. Therefore, in relationships with white cisgender men, they seem to be often reduced to their bodies. They are fungible exotic objects that one wants to possess and that are not considered to deserve any form of commitment. Despite Dick's threatening words, Elektra eventually decided to undergo the operation, which will lead her to her economic decline as she is left by her suitor.

Following Elektra's decline, Candy and Lulu decide to form their own house, the House of Ferocity. To support her house, Candy will also have to resort to sex work. Indeed, because "being a mother's expensive […], [in order] to make ends meet, Candy [has] been taking tricks down at the motel on Grant" (Mock & Murphy, 2019, 16:10). Unfortunately, in *Never Knew Love Like This Before* (2.4), she will be murdered by one of her clients in this motel. Her death is a means of reminding the audience that trans women are facing an epidemic of violence (Haylock, 2019). As Angel highlights, "eleven girls have been killed this year" (Mock & Murphy, 2019, 22:30). These women who have to rely on sex work for survival often end up facing waves of violence perpetrated by men who "are afraid to deal with their desires" (Ibid, 30:30). Therefore, Candy's death allows the spectator to realise that the fetishisation of trans women of colour's bodies can also lead to abominable consequences.

To conclude, even if Blanca is never concretely associated with sex work, she admits that she used her body to receive affection from men she did not know. During a family dinner she talks about the importance of condoms and reveals her secret:

> I'm-a tell y'all the hard truth. You boys are young, Black, gay, and poor. This world despises you. You get this disease, you die, they feel relieved that you're getting what you deserve. And living

> in a world like that can make you feel desperate for love. Now, if you want to be healthy and do it the healthy way, you can do it like how our community does by forming houses. But it is much faster if you do it in an unhealthy way. And that's what I did back then when I started in this world in '83 or so, when none of us understood this plague. I thought the only way to find love was with my body. So I would go out to a club, get a little drunk, find me a man that would love me for a while. And even in these moments when his arms were around me, I believe he loved me. We didn't know each other's names. I just would convince myself that it would feel like that forever. But it didn't. So I would find another and then another. […] I would completely debase myself for these men. I just wanted love. […] I had let those guys inside of me. Inside my heart, inside my body. I wanted to please them […] so I didn't use any condoms. […] And now I got AIDS. (Mock & Horder-Payton, 2019, 35:45)

This monologue reflects what has been mentioned above, that is that some queer people of colour try to find love in whatever way they can. Unfortunately, in some cases this quest for love forces them to take dangerous paths, like unprotected sex leading to getting AIDS. Therefore, one can notice that Blanca's case is different from the three other characters' that have been discussed. While Candy, Angel and Elektra use their body to earn a living, Blanca used her to try to find love.

To sum up, this part of the analysis shows that, because of their lack job opportunities, the fact that they are ostracised and abandoned by society in general, transgender women of colour seem to use their bodies to fulfil two important needs, i.e., financial need and desire to be loved and admired. This analysis also allowed one to consider *Pose*'s depiction of transgender women of colour as object of desire and fetish. Indeed, one can realise that, in addition to rely on their own body, it is the same body to which they are reduced in the eyes of rich white cisgender men. In other words, they are not seen as people to love but rather as sexual objects, bodies to experiment, an exotic experience. Indeed, "[sexualisation] occurs when someone is reduced to their body parts or sexual functioning (Flores et al.; Fredrickson & Roberts, as cited in Anzani et al., 2021, p. 898). Lastly, this section also focused on two of the possible consequences of fetishisation and reliance on sex work, that are being murdered and contracting AIDS.

"It must be hard to tell people they are going to die day after day" (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 17:25)

This part of the analysis will be focused on the representation of AIDS in *Pose*. Since it is a central theme in the show, the following pages will be dedicated to the analysis of selected scenes, as well as to the depiction of AIDS as a constant threat that will undoubtedly have irreversible and destructive consequences on the character's lives.

The first episode of the second season (2.1) starts with Pray Tell and Blanca Rodriguez. They are going to Hart Island, where Pray's ex-boyfriend named Keenan was said to be buried. After they broke up, Keenan got sick and Pray tried to reach out. Unfortunately, the young man did not have any family, as Pray says Keenan was "orphaned just like the rest of us" (Murphy et al., 2019a, 2:30). He died alone in a tiny studio apartment. His body was found three weeks after his death. His body "was lying in the heat for so long, [Pray Tell] heard that [Keenan's] body just melted into the mattress" (Ibid, 3:00)

When they arrive on the island, the two characters enter an office where a Black lady is sitting and working with a pile of papers on her desk. She stares at Blanca and Pray, before pointing to a paper they need to sign.

Pray: His name is… was Keenan. Keenan Howard. I'm here to see…his burial site.

Lady: He's a relation of yours?

Pray: Not exactly. We dated; we broke up. Listen. He died of pneumonia, and I was told he was buried here

Lady: Here is the thing. Names don't matter here. Just a bunch of pine boxes in a ditch.

Blanca: So, no headstones?

Lady: Welcome to Hart Island. Just a mass grave of people whose families couldn't afford a burial or unclaimed bodies from the morgue. Infants are out back in Potter's Field. We quarantine the ones that died of AIDS, don't want them infecting anyone else, you know.

Blanca: But they're already dead.

Lady: Sweetie, we don't know how this thing is spread. (Ibid, 1:20)

Pray Tell tells the lady that Keenan died of pneumonia. Interestingly, one could think that Pray Tell just does not want to say that his loved one died of AIDS, which caused pneumonia. It is important to remind that AIDS was highly taboo since those who were infected often had to deal with "job loss, homelessness, denial of access to public services (including hospitals), and rejection from family and society" (Batza, 2018, p. 295). Therefore, his avoidance of saying that Keenan died of AIDS may be a means of protecting himself from any kind of embarrassment, exclusion, or judgement. This fear is akin to his fright of being stigmatised because AIDS was thought to only impact gay individuals, leading them to be socially avoided. These two consequences of AIDS are tied to Goffman's definition of stigmas associated with social collectivities and characters, which will be developed further. Later in the same episode, this notion of embarrassment appears once more. Pray tells Blanca that when he tried to reach out Keenan after their break-up, and when he became aware of Keenan's sickness, the latter did

not answer and Pray "[thinks] that he was embarrassed about getting sick" (Murphy et al., 2019a, 3:00). Interestingly, this self-isolation seems to be a common pattern that many characters follow in the series. Indeed, at the beginning of the show, in the first episode, *Pilot* (Falchuk, Canals & Murphy, 2018), Blanca is also diagnosed with HIV but does not tell anyone apart from Pray Tell, who she considers a friend and a someway fatherly figure. Another example occurs in the fourth episode, *The Fever* (Mock & Horder Payton, 2018), Pray Tell is also diagnosed as HIV-positive but conceals his results to the other protagonists. To recontextualise the scene, Lil Papi, Damon, Ricky and Pray go to the hospital to be tested for HIV after Damon's feverish condition, which made many characters feel very anxious. The three first characters are HIV-negative, while Pray has to face a reality "[he] dreaded most" (Ibid, 49:20) and that he had dodged for years. Both Blanca and Pray's desire not to disclose their seropositivity, and by extension their tendency to self-isolate themselves, find their roots in the stigmatisation of people living with the disease. In their article L. Gilbert and L. Walker (2010), used the definition of stigma provided by Goffman and applied it to the case of HIV. According to Goffman, a stigma is "an attribute that is deeply discrediting within a particular social interaction," (Goffman as cited in Gilbert & Walker, 2010, p. 140) which can be divided in three distinct types:

1. Stigmas of the body (such as blemishes or deformities);
2. Stigmas of character (e.g. the people with mental health problems or the criminal); and
3. Stigmas associated with social collectivities ('racial' or tribal), all of which he stresses are socially, culturally and historically variable (Gabe et al. as cited in Gilbert & Walker, 2010, p. 140)

These three types of stigmas are not mutually exclusive, and, when the three apply at the same time, it "[increases] the severity and complexity of stigma related attitudes and behaviour in comparison to other stigmatised conditions where only one of the attributes applies" (Gilbert & Walker, 2010, p.140). To go further, Goffman and other scholars also established a list of attributes shared by diseases associated with the highest degree of stigma, to which HIV unquestionably belongs:

1. The disease is progressive and incurable;
2. The disease is not well understood among the public; and
3. The symptoms cannot be concealed. (Ibid)

Alongside the society's stigma that already represent a weight on the concerned population's shoulders, is to be added the "internalised stigma"[19] that results from it. Indeed, people living with HIV "often internali[se] the stigma they experience and begin to develop a negative self-image[20]." Furthermore, "HIV internali[sed] stigma can lead to feelings of shame, fear of disclosure, isolation, and despair. These feelings can keep people from getting tested and treated for HIV[21]," thus, sometimes, leading them to die alone.

The revelations that follow Pray's statement are also worth describing. The Black lady, who is working, says that in Hart Island, "Names don't matter […]. Just a bunch of pine boxes in a ditch" (Murphy et al., 2019a, 1:40) This piece of information provides the spectator with an idea of how people living with AIDS's bodies were treated after their death. They are nothing more than just "a bunch of pine boxes in a ditch" (Ibid) as if their life did not have any kind of value. The fact that their names do not matter in such a place is representative of the dehumanising treatment that these people were given by society. In other words, without a name, these individuals are made invisible and considered unworthy, which gives the impression that they never really existed. In her article called "Unclaimed and Unknown: Examining Hart Island," (2020) A. Rees described the island as a "only one mile long and about half a mile wide" (Rees, 2020, p. 1) place populated by "1 million [dead] individuals" (Ibid). In other words, Hart Island is an immense cemetery, in which "The average individual buried […] was most likely experiencing homelessness at the time of their death, had no next of kin or none could be found" (Ibid). Moreover, if the person died of AIDS "during the height of [the] crisis," (Ibid) they were denied a private burial, thus buried in a pauper's grave on the island. As A. Rees argues in her article, these people, to some extent, are facing a double death. Apart from not being alive anymore, they have to face a form of social death, which is:

> the effect of a (social) practice in which a person or group of people is excluded, dominated, or humiliated to the point of becoming dead to the rest of society. Although such people are physically alive, their lives no longer bear a social meaning; they no longer count as lives that matter. (Guenther as cited in Rees, 2020, p. 4)

Indeed, the lady tells Blanca and Pray that they are "unclaimed bodies from the morgue" (Murphy et al., 2019a, 1:50), and as Rees writes: "To be unclaimed in death is to extend one's own social death beyond life and into literal death" (Rees, 2020, p. 4). In other words, these

[19] 'Internali[sed] stigma' or 'self-stigma' happens when one takes in the negative ideas and stereotypes about people living with HIV and starts to apply them to oneself. *Facts about HIV Stigma | HIV Basics | HIV/AIDS | CDC*. (n.d.). Cdc.Gov. Retrieved July 22, 2021, from https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/hiv-stigma/index.html
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

people were already socially dead in life as they were so ignored and excluded that no one seems to know that they are literally dead. Therefore, these individuals, buried in Hart Island, represent "an example of a doubly dead population" (p. 5). To go further, the fact that these dead individuals are not given a headstone is a means of showing that they are buried without being identifiable, thus deprived and "removed from any past heritage and legacy of the future" (p. 6). Since they are left there without anyone knowing it, their burial cannot be visited easily so they become, to some extent, 'ungrievable' lives. As J. Butler writes: "An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all" (Butler as cited in Rees, 2020, p. 6).

The dialogue ends when the working lady says, "We quarantine the ones that died of AIDS, don't want them infecting anyone else, you know" (Murphy et al., 2019a, 2:00) as well as "we don't know how this is spread" (Ibid). Her words are reflective of the lack of information about the disease. Another instance of such a lack of understanding and knowledge is to be found in the scene when Damon, Ricky, Lil Papi and Pray are in the restaurant and plan to be tested. Indeed, their conversation around the virus highlights the fact that HIV's means of propagating is little understood by the protagonists. Damon and Ricky are convinced that Lil Papi, who is not gay, has nothing to worry about (Mock & Horder-Payton, 2018, 33:00). However, as it has already been mentioned AIDS is a non-discriminating epidemic. In other words, gay men were not the only populations impacted by the disease. The lack of information and understanding is linked to Reagan's silence. As it has been discussed earlier in this dissertation, the 1980s, when AIDS emerged, were marked by the US government's indifference and nonaction regarding the spread of the virus because it was thought to only impact the society's margins, thus not considered an important matter and not taken seriously. As in life, people with AIDS are excluded in death, they are buried far from anyone else, quarantined, left aside, and treated as though they had the plague. This ignorance that resulted in demonising and othering those individuals, who were living with AIDS or died of the disease, is part of the list of attributes developed by Goffman and other scholars, who studied the level of stigmatisation associated with certain diseases. Indeed, they concluded that HIV was highly stigmatised partly because it was not understood among the public.

To go further, as it has been discussed, AIDS is a central topic in the series and does not confine itself to appearing in one or two scenes. To a certain degree, one can consider AIDS as an inanimate and mostly invisible antagonist, if not one of the main, of the series. Although AIDS is intangible, it is sometimes left visible. Indeed, this part will focus on another

Goffman's attribute, which is that the symptoms of HIV cannot be easily concealed, hence participate to the stigmatisation of people living with AIDS, as well as the disease itself. Throughout the first season of *Pose*, the spectator is confronted to both the psychological and physical ravages of AIDS on the characters. As part of the disease's psychological effects (fear, despair, self-isolation, etc.) on those who contracted it has already been mentioned and discussed, this part will be dedicated to its physical aspects. According to the University of California San Francisco, "Symptoms of AIDS are caused by the deterioration of the immune system and the decline of CD4+ T cells, which are the immune system's key infection fighters[22]." Among the most common symptoms are: memory loss, pneumonia, profound and unexplained fatigue, rapid weight loss, recurring fever, red, brown, pink or purplish blotches on the skin (Ibid). Apart from these common symptoms, "Because people with AIDS have weakened immune systems, they're more prone to infections, called opportunistic infections," (Ibid) such as difficult swallowing, vision loss, coughing and shortness of breath, etc (Ibid).

The first time *Pose* depicts people severely affected by the virus is during the episode called *Giving and Receiving* (1.3) (Mock et al., 2018). During this episode, Pray Tell and Helena St. Rogers, Damon's dance teacher, are going to the hospital to visit their loved ones. On the one hand, Pray visits his boyfriend, Costas. When he arrives at the latter's room, Pray cannot prevent himself from seeing that Costas' lunch is still on the doorstep because the nurse did not dare to enter and feed him. Once more, her fear of approaching the HIV patient supports the idea that little is known about the virus, hence reinforces the stigma around AIDS. Although Costas does not have any blotches on his face, he appears completely weakened and lifeless. On the other hand, Helena visits Tony, a former student of hers who contracted HIV and then AIDS. When she arrives in his room, the young man is standing up and dancing and eventually invites his teacher to dance with him by calling her by another name. When she asks him to lay on his bed and have a rest, the young man becomes violent and yells at her, forcing Helena to ask for help. Moments after, Tony seems more peaceful and has forgotten what just happened. Tony's memory loss and seeming mental absence are, as mentioned above, symptoms of AIDS. In addition to these internal symptoms, the young man clearly suffers physically from the disease. Indeed, he appears thinner, as his bone structure is left visible, his face is covered with blotches, and his eyes are lighter as if his vision had decreased.

[22] University of California San Francisco. (n.d.). *AIDS Symptoms*. Ucsfhealth.Org. Retrieved August 15, 2021, from https://www.ucsfhealth.org/conditions/aids/symptoms

In *Love Is the Message* (1.6) (Murphy & Mock, 2018), Pray visits Costas once more and the spectator can easily notice that his condition has worsened (Figure 1). Indeed, while he could still eat by himself the first time he appeared on screen, he, now, seems to depend on the help of his boyfriend. Furthermore, although he did not have any kind of blotches on the face, they are now unconcealable. Moreover, he looks much thinner than he was on the previous scene, his facial bone structure is apparent, and he is even more tired than he used to be. Later, Pray goes back to the hospital where he talks with Judy, a lesbian white nurse, and tells her that his boyfriend has not been fed. Judy says they tried to feed him but his throat was so infected that it was too painful to swallow. As mentioned above, AIDS was often accompanied by a series of opportunistic infections due to the patients' immune system decline. Costas' incapacity to eat emphasises the fact that his condition is increasingly worsening. These physical symptoms, witnessed by Pray Tell, nurture the latter's psychosis as if Costas' declining appearance and status were a mirroring of Pray's fate. As Costas says to Pray: "I know you have this virus. You have that fear in your eyes. Like, every time you're looking at me, you're looking at your own fate" (Ibid, 40:15). Pray is not the only character of the series who projects the reality of a sick individual on his own. To cope with the grim and depressing atmosphere of a hospital ward, where patients never get better, Pray decides to produce an AIDS cabaret night for the sick. He asks Blanca to come and perform for the, and, while performing, the young woman looks at a young lady in a very severely advanced state of the disease. This frightening vision of a reality that could become her own cuts her off and her eyes become filled with concern and sadness. Blanca and Pray's reactions to these visions, which they believe are inevitably premonitory, show that the physical symptoms of the disease are used to feed and strengthen the stigma around AIDS.

Another interesting scene is to be found in *Love's in Need of Love Today* (2.6). In this episode, Pray's health declines and he is taken to the hospital where he meets Lewis Carter (Lance Roberts), a sickly AIDS Black patient. The two roommates discuss about the reasons that led them in this situation. The spectator learns that Lewis "[is] a college-educated man […] not a queen" (Falchuk et al., 2019, 9:00). One could interpret this revelation as the first instance of a non-queer character who suffers from the disease. Pray, who is accustomed with the disease impacting queer folks, assumes that the man, who he shares his hospital room with, must be gay too. However, *Pose* does not really answer this question. Lewis could either be a straight man who got the disease or a queer individual who prefers not to come out as gay. Minutes later, Lewis starts coughing painfully in reaction to the drugs he has been provided with. Pray

calls the nurse for help but it is too late, the man is dead. This scene shows the spectator that, once more, death is a possible outcome even when the protagonists are medically treated. The following scene pictures Pray who is dreaming about his own death and is haunted by the ghosts of some of the people who played an important part in his life. The first two ghosts to join him are Candy and his stepfather. The former encourages Pray to give up on his life by underlining how sad life is and that giving up and accepting to die would allow him to go to his self-made Heaven where he would have "the time of [his] life" (Ibid, 11:45). Then, the discussion with his stepfather allows the spectator to get access to a part of Pray's past that was not accessible yet. One learns that the emcee was sexually abused by a man he, someway, trusted and loved. After these two antagonistic visions, Pray is joined by Costas who certifies to him that his time has not come yet. He leads Pray to the AIDS Cabaret where he will perform for "hundreds of men [that] have died in [the] hospital, and are waiting" (Ibid, 17:10). Pray finds himself surrounded by many physically affected people who died from the disease (Figure 2). After a while, the scene changes and the spectator realises that the young man is really standing alone in the middle of a room thanking invisible people before being interrupted by Judy. In other words, this scene allows the spectator to understand that Pray's situation is getting worse as he has started losing his mind.

To conclude, as it has been mentioned above, AIDS is a ubiquitous antagonist that threatens *Pose*'s characters throughout the two seasons of the series. On the one hand, it has psychological effects on most characters as it forces them to live in a constant fear. For instance, when they witness their loved ones' death, they cannot prevent themselves from wondering when their turn will come. In addition to fear, Blanca and Pray, to some extent, self-isolate themselves from the reality of the disease as they do not want their friends to know they are sick. By doing so, they deprive themselves from any kind of family support. On the other hand, to these psychological effects have to be added the physical stigma around AIDS. Indeed, people severely affected by the disease cannot easily conceal the physical symptoms, thus they are more often easily othered, excluded and rejected. In addition to this, many characters die, which supports the idea that this is a situation that needs to be addressed urgently.

Figure 1

Figure 2

CHAPTER 3: LGBT People of Colour: Resistance and Solidarity

1. ACT UP: United in anger

The American government's inaction, silence, and apathy led LGBTQ+ political and activist movements, willing to advocate for the creation of a proper control and preventive strategy destined to counter the exponential growth of AIDS and its devasting consequences, to emerge. To respond in an adequate manner to the epidemic's propagation, "a new kind of alliance politics" (Stryker, 2017, p. 166) as well as the fact that "gay liberation politics and feminist public health activism [take] transgender issues far more seriously" were required (Ibid):

> The name for this new kind of unabashedly pro-gay, nonseparatist, antiassimilationist alliance politics […], which did not [organise] itself around identity categories but instead took aim at overarching social structures that [marginalised] those infected by HIV, [was called] *queer* (Ibid).

Queer, in its political sense, appeared as a non-discriminating politics, which allowed "specific communities [to come] together across the dividing lines of race, gender, class and nationality, citizenship and sexual orientation," (Ibid) and drew its forces from protest groups such as ACT UP, also known as AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. ACT UP was founded in 1987 in New York and was a gathering of protestors who used a "new politics of emotion" based on anger and rage to affect political change (Brier, 2018, p. 101). ACT UP's activism was not violent but unapologetically confrontational (Figure 3 and 4). The purpose of the protestors was to show their suffering and force the government and to take immediate actions, especially to "get drugs into bodies" and develop equitable as well as efficient treatment, AZT being too expensive and ineffective (Ibid).

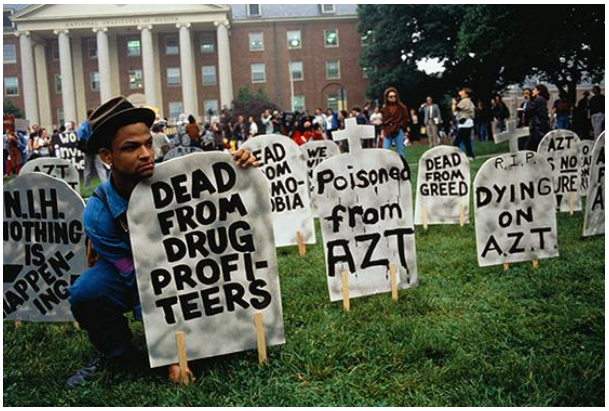

Figure 3

Figure 4

A racist organisation?

However, ACT UP has been considered a racist organisation by some. Those who agree with this theory suppose that the group's inner racism is a combination of different factors:

> 1. ACT UP was made up of privileged white gay men who cared primarily about people with AIDS like themselves and neglected the needs of other populations with AIDS;
>
> 2. ACT UP was a majority-white organi[s]ation and, as such, an alienating place for many people of [colour], but even more, white participants at times disregarded and in other ways oppressed participants of [colour];
>
> 3. ACT UP tackled some of the racist dimensions of the AIDS epidemic but in ways that usurped the role of AIDS activists of [colour] (Gould, 2012, p. 55).

According to Deborah B. Gould (2012), racism was particularly pronounced in the protest group's internal conflicts as there were a lot of disagreements. In the early 1990s the epidemic was still propagating swiftly and led the impacted communities to be increasingly afraid and desperate, as they had the impression that their "activism might not be able to interrupt the dying" (p. 56). This fear and despair played a role in shaping racist, sexist and classist dynamics within the organisation as some participants "[generalised] from their particular experiences of AIDS and argued that ACT UP should fight the epidemic from that perspective alone, effectively privileging the concerns of white, middle class, gay men over those of others with HIV/AIDS" (pp. 56-57). Critics have also pointed out that the priority given to "getting drugs into bodies" was a means of neglecting "important issues like unequal access to health care […] and would result in disadvantaged AIDS-affected populations falling through the cracks" (p. 57). When minorities, who were impacted by intersected forms of discriminations i.e., sexism, classism or racism, interjected their experiences in the discussions to fight the epidemic, "other participants began to ask, 'what does this have to do with AIDS?' and angrily accused people working on those issues of 'getting off track'" (p. 57):

> Most of them were white, middle-class. Most of them were men who had this sense of privilege, and all of a sudden they came up against a system that was saying, ''We don't care if you die ....'' In addition to the rage about the disease itself, their rage about that [societal abandonment] was really overwhelming, and you [could] see them go through, ''How dare they not take care of me.'' So when other people [in ACT UP] started broadening the agenda, I think they felt like ''Well, what does this have to do with AIDS, you know, what does this have to do with me?'' (Barr as cited in Gould, p. 58)

Although it seems important to acknowledge that ACT UP's racism is a true issue that should not be left aside, its positive contributions to the fight against AIDS as well as the anti-racist work of many within the organisation cannot be neglected. As Cylar writes:

> I mean [ACT UP] is as racist as any other organization or institution. Any time you get a group of people together who happen to be white men, who happen to be gay, there is a certain amount of racism present. But I don't have a problem working with them or fighting with them. To simply label a group or person as racist doesn't work in 1990 anymore. You have to go one step further and say, ''This is exactly what you did, this is why it's racist, and this is what you should do to correct it.'' We've done that in ACT UP and they're getting better. All of our flyers, for instance, are translated into Spanish now. And ACT UP was one of the first activist groups who said universal health care is a right. They were also the first to point out that people of [colour] were not getting into clinical AIDS drug trials. (Cylar as cited by Gould, p. 60)

In 1990-1992, Queer Nation, an activist organisation founded by HIV/AIDS activists from ACT UP, changed the public perceptions of AIDS and homosexuality and contributed to shifting LGB community, from the inside, which "allowed transgender issues to come back into the community's dialogue" (Stryker, 2017, p. 167).

2. 1960s-1970s: more than a decade of resistance

Although there is little documentation on transgender people during the AIDS epidemic as well as a tendency to make them invisible in LGBTQ+ discussions in the 1980s, the transgender community has always been a community that resists and fights back. More than 20 years before the emergence of AIDS, the LGBTQ+ community, and more especially LGBT people of colour, already had to face different stigmas and forms of oppression. This part of my dissertation aims at showing how resistant the transgender community and the LGBTQ+ community of colour were, as well as how present they were in early protests and riots despite them being little documented.

The Cooper Do-Nuts riot

In May 1959, an incident opposing LGBTQ+ people and the police occurred in a 24-hour Cooper Do-nuts café, which was located between two popular gay bars, in Los Angeles (Stryker, 2017, p. 82). At the time, Cooper's was popular among the LGBTQ+ community of colour "along with the people who enjoyed their company or bought their sexual services" (Ibid). Therefore, the business became a gathering place for "drag queens and male hustlers, many of them Latino or African American" (Ibid). Soon, the police started patrolling the shop's vicinity, questioning people for no apparent reason, and demanding identification that, "for trans people […], often led to arrest on suspicion of prostitution, vagrancy, loitering, or many other so-called nuisance crimes" (Ibid). On the night of the riot, the police came to Cooper's

and attempted to arrest several LGBTQ+ patrons. In response to these attempts, customers and onlookers started throwing doughnuts at the cops and this eventually led to fighting in the street "as squad cars and police wagons converged to the site and [made] arrests" (Ibid).

The Dewey's sit-ins

In 1965, in Philadelphia, a similar incident, though nonviolent, occurred in a Dewey's lunch that refused to serve some customers who wore what was considered as "nonconforming clothing" and therefore were driving away other patrons (Ibid). The Dewey's was attracting the same clientele as Cooper Do-Nut's, so, when management denied service to their undesired customers, three of them refused to leave the establishment and staged a sit-in. This event was "the first act of civil disobedience over anti-transgender discrimination" (p. 93). As a result, three customers were arrested and a response ensued:

> Dewey's patrons and members of the Philadelphia's homophile community set up a picket line at the restaurant, where they passed out thousands of pieces of literature protesting the lunch counter's treatment of gender-variant people. (Ibid)

Later the same year, another sit-in occurred in the same Dewey's and the police came without arresting anyone, leading the restaurant's management to back down and promise "an immediate cessation of all indiscriminate denials of service" (Ibid).

The Compton's Cafeteria riot

In 1966, The Compton's Cafeteria riot was "primarily initiated by queer and trans people of [colour], many of whom were homeless and enjoyed little institutional or [organisational] support" (Dunham, 2017, p. 93). In San Francisco, in the Tenderloin neighbourhood, Compton's became the theatre of a conflict between the police and "drag queens" that resulted in street fighting. Tenderloin neighbourhood was known to be a poor place where "prostitution, gambling, selling and consuming [criminalised drugs, and sexually explicit entertainment […] were effectively permitted" (Stryker, 2017, p. 87) and where the police was highly corrupted. The night of the riot, the "restaurant's management became annoyed by a noisy young crowd of queens at one table who seemed to be spending a lot of time without spending a lot of money" and decided to call the police (p. 85). When they arrived, one of the police officers "grabbed the arm of one of the queens and tried to drag her away" (Ibid), which resulted in a trans woman, fed up with the harassment and abuse, throwing a cup of coffee in the officer's face (Levin, 2019). The fight became increasingly intense as "customers turned over the tables and smashed the plate-glass windows before pouring out […] into the streets […] [where] drag queens beat

the police with their heavy purses and the sharp stiletto heels of their shoes" (Stryker, 2017, p. 86). A "general havoc was raised that night in the Tenderloin" (Broshears cited in Stryker, p. 86) and it was the first time a direct action by trans women "[had] resulted in long-lasting institutional change" (Stryker, 2017, p. 85).

In terms of institutional changes that were perpetrated after Compton's riot, there was the opening of the "Central City Anti-Poverty Program Office […] in the Tenderloin, which created a new police-community relations officer job" (Oatman-Stanford, 2020). The first person to fill this job was Elliott Blackstone, who "worked to dissuade his colleagues in the police department from arresting transgender people simply for using the 'wrong' toilets or cross-dressing in public" (Stryker, 2017, p. 99). In addition, the Central City Anti-Poverty Program Office also gave the opportunity to transgender people to leave prostitution, "teaching them clerical skills through the Neighbourhood Youth Corps training programs" (Ibid).

Another example of institutional change that occurred after Compton's riot was the creation of the Conversion Our Goal, or COG:

> [COG] provided an initial point of contact for transgender people seeking medical services, who were then steered toward the Center for Special Problems, which offered additional group support sessions, psychological counselling, hormone prescriptions, and, eventually, when a 'sex change' clinic was established at […] Stanford University Medical School, surgery referrals. (Ibid)

The Center for Special Problems, in turn, was significant as it "provided ID cards for transgender clients that matched their social genders" (Ibid). The ID card was utterly important to the transgender community because it allowed them to have access to services that required an identification such as opening a bank account but also facilitated their access to finding legal employments (Ibid).

Stonewall

At the same time, New York City became the place where another important organisation was being set up. In 1968, Mario Martino, a transgender man, founded Labyrinth, "the first [organisation] in the United States devoted specifically to the needs of transgender men" (p. 105). Martino's organisation was not a political one, but rather a platform that was made to help transgender men to "make the often-difficult transition from one social gender to another" (Ibid). Beside the foundation and the quiet work of Martino's Labyrinth Foundation, the 1969 Stonewall Inn bar's events became internationally famous and even "[mythologised] as the origin of the gay liberation movement" (p. 106). However, as described above, "gay,

transgender, and gender-nonconforming people had been engaging in militant protest and collective actions against social oppression for at least a decade by that time" (Ibid). Stonewall Inn was located in New York's Greenwich Village, which was not "as economically down-and-out as San Francisco's Tenderloin" (Ibid), but which gathered similar people than those "who resisted at Cooper Do-Nut['s], Dewey's, and Compton's Cafeteria: drag queens, hustlers, gender nonconformists of many varieties, gay men, lesbians, and countercultural types who simply 'dug the scene'" (Ibid). As it was frequented by this type of clientele, it was often checked by the police too. On 28th June 1969, what could be considered a routine police check turned into one of the most notorious riots in the history of the LGBTQ+ community. While workers and patrons were arrested and escorted out the bar and into the waiting police wagons, some eyewitness accounts noted:

> African American and Puerto Rican members of the crowd – many of them street queens, feminine gay me, transgender women, or gender non-conforming youth – grew increasingly angry as they watched their 'sisters' being arrested and escalated the level of opposition to the police (p. 108).

The conflict between the police and the crowd started intensifying when the latter decided to throw heavy objects at the former, who, in response, began beating people from the crowd. In view of this increasingly violent situation, "Weekend partiers and residents in the heavily gay [neighbourhood] quickly swelled the ranks of the crowd to more than two thousand people, and the outnumbered police barricaded themselves inside the [bar] and called for reinforcement" (p. 109). Some rioters wanted the police out the bar and started trying to break down the Stonewall Inn's door, others threw a Molotov cocktail inside to drive the police back into the streets (Ibid).

Stonewall riot has largely impacted the LGBTQ+ community as it inspired gay activists to form the Gay Liberation Front, or GLF. Unfortunately, the GLF, quickly after its creation, became a white dominated movement that marginalised women, working class people, people of colour, and trans individuals. In other words, the GLF which had been inspired by years and years of riots, excluded, to some extent, those same people who largely contributed to fighting for the LGBTQ+'s emancipation (p.110). In 1973, the 'depathologisation' of homosexuality marked a turning point in the relation between gay men and transgender people. Because gays were

> 'liberated' from the burden of psychopathology, [they] and trans communities no longer had a common interest in working to address how they were each treated by the mental health

> establishment. Gay liberationists who had little familiarity with transgender issues came to see transgender people as 'not liberated'. (p. 123)

In addition to being rejected by gay white men, trans people were also excluded from radical, mostly white, feminist movements toward which many lesbians redirected their energy (Ibid). The same year as homosexuality was 'depathologised' marked the appearance of "an emerging discourse in feminism that held all male-to-female [transgender people] to be, by definition, violators of women, because they represented an 'unwanted penetration' into women's space" (p. 129). Robin Morgan, an American poet, attacked Beth Elliott, a transgender singer, at the West Coast Lesbian Conference. Morgan asked the audience why Beth Elliott was present at such an event because her presence, according to Morgan, was a means of "[permitting] into [their] organisations […] men who deliberately [reemphasise] gender roles, and who parody female oppression and suffering" (Morgan as cited in Stryker, p. 131). However, the American poetess went further by assuming her utterly transphobic approach to feminism:

> I will not call a male 'she'; thirty-two years of suffering in this androcentric society and of surviving, have earned me the title 'woman'; one walk down the street by a male transvestite, five minutes of his being hassled (which he may enjoy), and then he dares, he dares to think he understands our pain? No, in our mother's names and in our own, we must not call him sister. […] I charge him as an opportunist, an infiltrator, and a destroyer – with the mentality of a rapist. (Ibid)

3. A Supportive community

In the 1970s, as a consequence of their exclusion from both gay and lesbian movements, transgender people needed to create their own organisations. In 1969, the Queens Liberation Front, or QLF, was founded in New York and, a year after, Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, who were both present in Stonewall riots, established STAR, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries. On the one hand, the former organisation was formed "by drag queen named Lee Brewster and heterosexual transvestite Bunny Eisenhower […] to resist the erasure of drag and trans visibility in the first Christopher Street Liberation Day march, which commemorated the Stonewall Riots" (Stryker, 2017, p. 111). Interestingly, as S. Stryker noted in her book *Transgender History*, the Queen's Liberation Front's founder, Lee Brewster, was also running a business called Lee's Mardi Gras Boutique that was used at the time as a "gathering place for segments of the city's transgender community well into the 1990s" (Ibid). On the other hand, when Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P Johnson decided to found STAR, "their

primary goal was to help street kids stay out of jail, or get out of jail, and to find food, clothing, and a place to live" (p. 110). Sylvia Rivera was a "poor, radical, street [queen] of [colour]" (Evans, 2015, p. 29), who played an important part in helping to found the Gay Liberation Front. She was one of the most famous figures of Stonewall riots. Marsha "Pay It No Mind" Johnson was an African-American transgender woman who took part in trans-activism. At a time when the term transgender had not entered the lexicon yet, Johnson self-defined as a transvestite or a drag queen[23]." She was often homeless and had to support herself through sex work, which led her to be arrested multiple times. In 1969, she became an icon of the Stonewall riots, just like her friend Sylvia Rivera, and was also one of the founders of the GLF. When Sylvia Rivera figured out that the mainstream portion of the movement, she dedicated herself to set up, violently excluded people like her from the commemoration of Christopher Street Liberation Day, she got on stage and declared:

> I've been trying to get up here all day. I have been to jail. I have been raped and beaten many times, by men, heterosexual men. I will no longer put up with this shit. I have had my nose broken. I have lost my job. I have lost my apartment. For gay liberation. And you all treat me this way? What the fuck's wrong with you? I believe in gay power. I believe in us getting our rights, or else I would not be out there fighting for our rights. That's all I wanted to say to you people. Come and see the people at Star House. The people there are trying to do something for all of us, not [just]men and women that belong to a white, middle-class club. And that's what you all belong to. Revolution! Gay Power! (Rivera as cited in Stryker, 2017, p. 129)

Therefore, one can conclude that GLF became increasingly homonormative as well as more and more hostile to marginalised identities (Evans, 2015, p. 30). Homonormativity has been defined by Lisa Duggan as: "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan as cited in Rapcewicz, 2016). It is a "privileging set of hierarchies, social norms, and expectations that cause the oppressed to oppress one another" (Flores, 2017). To be clearer, homonormativity "encourages heterosexual mimicking" (Ibid) and implies that the mainstream gay culture, which is mainly constituted by white cisgender gay men, focuses on their desire to have access to the same privileges as their heterosexual counterparts' (i.e., marriage, adoption, etc) while ignoring other LGBTQ+ people's reality, who are forced to face intersected forms of marginalisation on a daily basis (Ibid). For instance,

[23] *Sylvia Rivera*. (n.d.). National Women's History Museum. Retrieved August 16, 2021, from https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/sylvia-rivera

"homonormativity made same-sex marriage priority number one, when trans people still can't use bathrooms safely, can still be fired for being who they are, and can still be viciously abused by the prison system" (Ibid).

This homonormative mindset is one of the main reasons why Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson decided to develop STAR. The Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries appeared as an organisation that recognised "the struggles of transgender people who lived on the streets, especially youth" (Evans, 2015, pp. 30-31). In an urge to finally include trans women of colour, as well as the LGBTQ+ people who were not invited in mainstream associations' discussions, Rivera stated:

> "I am tired of seeing my children—I call everybody including you in this room, you are all my children—I am tired of seeing homeless transgender children; young, gay, youth children. I am tired of seeing the lack of interest that this rich community has. This is a very affluent community. We can afford to re-renovate a building for millions and millions of dollars and buy another building across the street and still not worry about your homeless children from your community . . .". (Rivera as cited in Evans, 2015, p.31)

In other words, Rivera considered that trans people were her children and that she had a duty to protect them and fight for them as their motherly figure. As has been explained, most transgender people were excluded from society but also, as will be discussed later, disowned by their families. In consequence, as a substitute for their biological families, trans people would live with their chosen families. That is the reason why, in addition to STAR, Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson decided to create STAR House, "an overtly politici[sed] version of the 'house' culture that already characteri[sed] Black and Latino queer kinship networks" (Stryker, 2017, p. 110), in which they both acted as 'house' mothers.

> Their goal was to educate and protect the younger people who were coming into the kind of life they themselves led – they even dreamed of establishing a school for kids who'd never learned to read and write because their formal education was interrupted by discrimination and bullying (Ibid).

It is important to highlight that little academic attention has been paid to the study of Ballroom culture, also known as house/ball culture, which has just been mentioned above. Although it becomes more and more prominent and mainstream, ball culture is not an emerging social and cultural phenomenon since its origins can be traced back to the nineteenth century and the first Harlem's Annual Odd Fellows Ball (Lindores, 2018), started by The Hamilton Lodge organisation. During these events, later known as "Faggots Ball" or the "Fairies Ball" (Brathwaite, 2018), women, performing in male drag, were competing against men, performing

in female drag, to win prizes. The balls became increasingly famous as it attracted 8,000 attendees in 1936 (Brathwaite, 2018). According to L.F. Brathwaite's article "Striking a 'Pose': A Brief History of Ball Culture", even if the Hamilton Lodge was a "coloured organisation" it soon became the theatre of an increasing racial tension as "Black queens were expected to whiten their faces if they expected to win prizes" (Ibid). As a result, queens of colour decided to search for their own spaces and, in 1962, "Marcel Christian (LaBeija) is credited with staging the first black drag ball […]. This splintering of the community led to the formation of 'houses'" (Ibid).

In 1981, the balls allowed these constructed families to compete in different categories such as: butch realness, models effect, face, executive, town and country and so on… (Ibid). "Realness" was what the judges were expecting and striving for i.e., "the best approximation of an archetype, which was a reflection of society and a world to which they couldn't gain entry" (Ibid):

> In real life you can't get a job as an executive unless you have the educational background and the opportunity. Now, the fact that you are not an executive is merely because of the social standing of life. Black people have a hard time getting anywhere and those that do are usually straight. In a ballroom you can be anything you want. You're not really an executive but you're looking like an executive. You're showing the straight world that I can be an executive if I had the opportunity because can look like one, and that is like a fulfilment. (D. Corey as cited in Brathwaite, 2018)

The ballroom scene initiated the concept of houses, of which, the House of LaBeija has been documented as the probable very first one that was founded in the early 1970s. "The house became a surrogate family for young queer [Black and Latinx] kids, who were often estranged from their biological families, living on the street, turning tricks, or otherwise struggling to get by" (Ibid). The house of Labeija was led by Crystal Labeija, who, therefore, became the "Mother". Soon, other houses were founded throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Apart from having initiated the house-culture, the ballroom scene was also the place where voguing emerged. Although the term is often associated with Madonna's song and video "Vogue" in 1990, the origins of voguing is to be found in the ballroom culture and was "a nonviolent way of fighting during the balls" (Ibid). In his article, Brathwaite highlights three phases: the 1960s' Old Way, the 1980s' New Way and the mid-90s' Vogue Fem. The three forms of voguing resemble one another as they basically are forms of mimicking poses and movements from the fashion magazine *Vogue*. The New Way "was more dynamic, acrobatic, and athletic, often involving contortions and martial arts influences" and the Vogue Fem

involved "hyper-effeminate posturing along with intricate hand and arm movements and dips, often known as deathdrops" (Ibid).

To conclude, as G. Dunham's "Out of Obscurity: Trans resistance, 1969-2016" and A.J. Lewis's "Trans History in a Moment of Danger: Organizing Within and Beyond 'Visibility' in the 1970s" suggest: "organisations were less important than the friendships and familial or sexual relationships that constituted community" (Dunham, 2017, p. 93) and the priority was given to "the relations of intimacy, support, and caretaking […], particularly during a time that saw such mounting hostility from other sectors of society" (Lewis, 2017, p. 62).

4. Resistance and kinship in *Pose*

In this part of the dissertation, some selected scenes will be analysed as they are descriptive of of the theoretical framework that has been developed. Firstly, the analysis will focus on the first and the seventh episodes of the second season, called respectively *Acting Up* (2.1) and *Blow* (2.7), which both depict examples of ACT UP's direct actions and protests. Secondly, it will be dedicated to *Pose*'s depiction of the rejection of transgender women of colour from white gay spaces by focusing on the second episode of the first season, called *Access* (1.2). These first two points will, therefore, discuss the series' depiction of queer people of colour as resistant figures, as aforementioned. Finally, the last part of the analysis will deal with the relationship, which Blanca undertakes with the other members of her house as well as the solidarity within their community.

Act up! Fight back! Fight AIDS! (Murphy et al., 2019a, 20:30)

The first episode of the second season (2.1), which has already been mentioned, focuses on ACT UP as a movement of resistance. Before analysing how this episode depicts the movement itself, this part will have a look at how the series depicts people living with AIDS' need to have access to a cure, the urge to "get drugs into bodies" (see p. 56), as well as the problems linked to AZT. To recontextualise the beginning of this episode, the series now focuses on the early 1990s and shows Blanca and Pray, who are going to Potter's field where Keenan, Pray's ex-boyfriend was said to be buried:

Blanca: Why are we the only ones out here?

Pray: Who wants to come to the most remote part of New York?

Blanca: You'd think people would come to pay their respects.

Pray: Out of sight, out of mind. I'm tired. I've been to three funerals this week. *Three*. Where's the cure? (Murphy et al., 2019a, 0:30)

This short dialog reflects what has been written earlier about the propagation of the virus as well as the priority given to having access to a cure. Indeed, Pray's words underlines the swiftness of the spread of HIV and its devasting and deadly effects on the population. He has attended three funerals in only one week. In the early 1990s, AIDS did not cease growing and even attained its peak incidence of deaths in 1995, after which "there has been a steep decline in AIDS mortality" (Dennis, 2003) which is "probably attributable to the effectiveness of the multidrug treatment regimens that became widespread beginning in 1996" (Ibid). The fact that Pray insists on the number of funerals he has been to could be interpreted as a means of showing that he is afraid of the situation. His fear and despair lead him to ask, "Where's the cure?" (Murphy et al., 2019a, 0:30) Once more, this sentence allows the spectator to understand that there is an urge to find a medication and that it became a priority for most people living with the disease.

Later in the same episode (2.1), Blanca goes to the hospital where Judy works as a nurse. The purpose of the examining is to read Blanca's labs. At this moment, Blanca has been feeling great, she started taking her "Flinstone vitamins every day" (Murphy et al., 2019a, 6:20) and even stopped drinking. Judy announces that, unfortunately, "sometimes being healthy isn't enough for [the] virus" (Ibid, 6:30). Although she certifies Blanca that her level of red blood cells is good, she also notices that her CD4s, or T-Cells, which "are what we want a lot of" (Ibid, 6:15), "have fallen below 200" (Ibid). In order not to let this number keep on dropping, Blanca has to be monitored once a month instead of once every three months. Judy also tells Blanca that "[her] diagnosis of being HIV-positive [has to be moved] to having AIDS" (Ibid, 6:45) Faced with this news, the young woman feels lost and in total incomprehension as she had been "feeling amazing" (Ibid, 7:30) until then. However, as Judy says, "sometimes you can't tell what HIV is doing to your immune system" (Ibid, 7:40)

Blanca: So I'm dying.

Judy: No. You're not dying. You still have plenty of T-cells to fight with, but we can't let those numbers drop any lower.

Blanca: So what do I do? It ain't no cure for this thing.

Judy: Not yet. But there is this. AZT. It helps slow the progression of the virus and it's all we've got.

Blanca: Ain't that stuff for rich folks?

Judy: Well, pharmaceutical companies are in the business of making a profit, but there are folks in our community who care about the less fortunate. And they're the ones who can get us this shit for free. (Ibid, 7:15)

Once more, this dialog allows the spectator to realise that AIDS was associated with death. As soon as she is told that she has got the disease, Blanca becomes more fatalistic by saying: "I'm dying". This fatalism is firmly tied to the fact that, in such a time, there was no cure for AIDS, which led people living with the disease to have no other choice than to face their 'fate'. However, as mentioned earlier, the late 1980s also marked by the entrance of AZT on the market (see p. 56). Unfortunately, "its accessibility ran disproportionately along lines of class, race, and gender." (Lindsay, 2019) Indeed, "AZT treatment often cost[ed] as much as $6,500 a year, which is prohibitively expensive for many AIDS patients," (Spinello, 1992, p. 617) thus it "simply isn't a financial reality for *Pose*'s protagonists" (Lindsay, 2019). The only way Blanca, and other poor queer people, can get access to AZT is "through Judy, who gets the pricey medication from deceased, wealthy, often white men who could afford it in life; in death, they donated what they had left to the less fortunate and infected." (Ibid) Furthermore, although AZT also "had a laundry of toxic side effects" (Ibid), it was the only drug that permitted to slow the progression of the virus, even though it did not cure it (see p. 56). Therefore, it was highly "sought after as a breakthrough drug in the years *Pose* is set." (Lindsay, 2019)

Another interesting scene to discuss is Pray Tell's first ACT UP meeting. While at the funerals of a young black man, who "barely started living" (Murphy et al., 2019a, 17:20), he is led to the meeting by Judy, who also attended "[her] 452nd memorial" (Ibid, 16:30). Although reluctant to join a crowd of people, which "have never had to fight for a goddam thing in their lives" (Ibid, 17:40), he finally sits on the floor and listens to what is said. One could interpret this reluctancy as a means of showing that, to Pray, the ACT UP movement does not include people like him. The idea that, as some critics pointed out, ACT UP "was a majority-white organi[s]ation and, as such, an alienating place for many people of [colour], but even more, white participants at times disregarded and in other ways oppressed participants of [colour]" (Gould, 2012, p.55) has already been mentioned (see p.57). Therefore, Pray may have the impression that he does not belong there. However, he eventually takes place, and the meeting begins. The spectator learns, thanks to a white lady who speaks up, that ACT UP's "Last week's fund-raiser brought-in $650,000" (Murphy et al., 2019a, 19:00). Moreover, "now that [ACT

UP] finally [has] the cash to meet [their] momentum, this Sunday's protest up at St. Patrick's Cathedral is an even more crucial step in starting a global conversation around HIV and AIDS" (Ibid). The protest they are planning is a means of countering and opposing the Catholic Church's "false message […] that condoms don't work and that abstinence is the only way to fight HIV" (Ibid, 19:25). In order to do so, ACT UP's members are going to stage a 'die-in'[24] "in the middle of that congregation as a peaceful protest against the annihilation of [their] community." The end of the lady's speech reinforces the idea that there was a strong desire, within ACT UP, to allow "specific communities [to come] together across the dividing lines of race, gender, class and nationality, citizenship and sexual orientation" (see p. 56). Indeed, she says, "[ACT UP] will not allow [Cardinal O' Connor's[25]] racist, sexist, homophobic ideologies to affect the health of every single person on this planet" (Murphy et al., 2019a, 20:10). It is at this point that Pray stands up and chants, along with everyone else present, "Act up! Fight back! Fight AIDS" (Ibid, 20:30)

On the Sunday, Blanca, Pray and the entire house of Evangelista, apart from Elektra (Figure 6), participate in "the historic die-in[26] at St. Patrick's Cathedral to protest the visit of Cardinal John O'Connor, who opposed condom use at the height of the crisis" (Lindsay, 2019). Gradually, every single member of the movement stands up, raises their fists as a sign of protest, joins the central aisle and lays on the ground as if they were dead (Figure 5). Faced with this growing initiative, the priest, taken aback, stops his sermon. After a few seconds, he asks his followers to stand up and pray, to which Angel replies: "Prayer won't cure AIDS. Prayer won't stop the spread of HIV. Only condoms will. Abstinence is not a human solution; abstinence is the erasure of our sexuality" (Murphy et al., 2019a, 32:30). A little bit later, ACT UP's activists raise their voice and chant: "Stop killing us!" (Ibid, 33:25) before being interrupted by the police's arrival.

[24]According to Cambridge Dictionary: "a type of protest in which a group of people lie down in a public place as if they are dead and refuse to leave or allow normal activities to continue there" (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/die-in).

[25] "John Joseph Cardinal O'Connor , (born January 15, 1920, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.—died May 3, 2000, New York, New York), American Roman Catholic prelate, who served as the archbishop of New York (1984–2000) and was regarded as the Vatican's leading spokesman in the United States. […] An ardent traditionalist, O'Connor was an outspoken defender of Roman Catholic teaching on sexual and moral ethics, and his views often caused controversy." https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Joseph-Cardinal-OConnor

[26] This scene is a reference to the actual die-in that took place in December 1989 (Linday, 2019).

Figure 5

Figure 6

In *Blow* (Mock & Livingston, 2019), ACT UP strikes again. While many characters "[seem] to swirl in despair at the foul hand life has dealt with them" (Street, 2019) (e.g., Candy's death impact on Lulu or the lack of attendance to Damon's voguing classes), "in an effort to get the group out of their slump, the elders — that's Pray and Blanca — challenge them to get creative and find a way to wrap a house in a condom as a direct action for ACT UP" (Ibid) (Figure 8). The house they decide to customise is Frederica Norman's. This political action, which aims at opening the world's eyes on the importance of condom use, is also a means for Blanca to take revenge on the woman who got her salon closed. This scene is another nod to a real historical event that took place in September 1991. Indeed,

> Peter Staley and other activists wrapped the house of Senator Jesse Helms[27] in a condom […] printed with the words, "A condom to stop unsafe politics. Helms is deadlier than a virus." The phrase referred to the politician's staunch opposition to federal spending for HIV research, treatment, and prevention. According to Helms, the disease was a just punishment for homosexuals, and as such deserved no support. (Ibid) (Figure 7)

Interestingly, *Pose* reimagined the scene in an inaccurate way. Indeed, as mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the movement was mainly white as "[it] was 80% white gay men" (Staley as cited in King, 2019). Even if "black and trans people were involved in ACT UP" (Strub as cited in King, 2019) and activism in general, the media representations "inevitably [boiled] down to a group of cute white ivy league boys of tremendous privilege" (Ibid). One could see *Pose*'s reinterpretation of the event as a means of paying tribute to those "black men and women and trans folks [who] fought for scraps of visibility" (King, 2019) without getting much. As Staley argues: "[*Pose*] reimagined and paid homage to ACT UP by saying [that the] ballroom

[27] "Jesse Helms, in full Jesse Alexander Helms, Jr., (born Oct. 18, 1921, Monroe, N.C., U.S.—died July 4, 2008, Raleigh, N.C.), American politician and longtime member of the U.S. Senate (1973–2003), who was a leading figure in the conservative movement. Nicknamed "Senator No," he was perhaps best known for his vehement opposition to civil rights and gay rights." https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jesse-Helms

community interacting with [the mainstream gay community], and in doing so they have elevated and [honoured] our history" (Staley as cited in King, 2019).

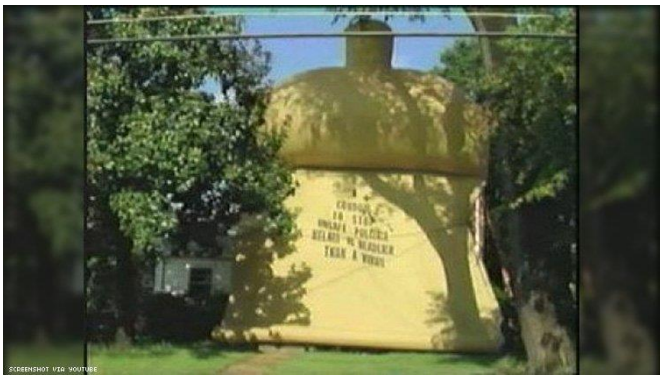

Figure 7

Figure 8

Excluded from white gay spaces: "I'll be here every night until you serve me" (Falchuk et al., 2018b, 57:08)

Throughout the second episode of the first season (1.2), Blanca Rodriguez is trying to oppose herself to a gay bar's policy in terms of racial segregation as well as its rejection of transgender women. This conflict becomes apparent to the viewer when Blanca makes an appointment with Lulu in a gay bar called "Boy Lounge" in order to celebrate the House of Evangelista's first trophy winning. The scene begins with Lulu entering the bar and being stared at and judged by all the other patrons, the great majority of them being gay white men, while joining Blanca's table.

Lulu: Why are we meeting here? Is this some kind of joke?

Blanca: No, it was in the *Village Voice*. Best gay bar in Manhattan two years running. I wanted something special to celebrate snagging my first trophy.

Lulu: You do know they don't serve our kind here?

Blanca: Bitch, shut up. Our money is just as good as anyone's

Unknown: Happy Halloween, ladies.

Lulu: I'm done.

Blanca: (insists) Uh-uh. No! One drink. (Ibid, 20:40)

As soon as Lulu gets in the bar, she knows that she is not welcome in such a place and starts feeling uncomfortable. Although "gay bar[s] [exist] as space[s] for leisure outside of heteronormative discourse where gay men have negotiated an alternative discourse based on

their shared sexual identity" (Knee, 2019, p. 501), they tend to "mirror hegemonic notions of misogyny, racial preferences, and respectability" (Ibid). In other words, even if queer spaces are important as they are gathering places for people who are often excluded by society, the way they are constructed creates LGBTQ+ spaces that are "raciali[sed], gendered, sexuali[sed], and classed" (Ibid), thus excluding more marginalised and stigmatised parts of the community. Lulu asking Blanca whether her invitation in that particular bar a joke is, as well as her question "You do know they don't serve our kind here?" (Falchuk et al., 2018b, 20:40) are both clear references to this idea of highly segregated and little inclusive gay spaces. In addition, when Lulu uses the expression "our kind", it reinforces that, as mentioned above, there is an existing form of ostracising within the LGBTQ+ community, that is, according to Merriam-Webster, the "exclusion by general consent from common privileges or social acceptance.[28]" Transgender and gender non-conforming people "live in a culture that stigmati[ses] non-binary, non-cisgender identities and expressions of gender" (Riggle, 2018, p.3), as well as non-heteronormative identities and, to some extent, non-homonormative people. Therefore, they are socially ostracised and, as B. Bastian & N. Haslam noticed in their study "Excluded from humanity: The dehumanizing effects of social ostracism" (2009), social ostracism can "undermin[e] people's sense of belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningfulness" (p. 107). In other words, by feeling othered, stigmatised, rejected, and estranged by the white gay community, transgender women of colour are left aside, which can sometimes lead to lower self-esteem as well as to the impression that they are underserving individuals and less than human beings.

To go further, this notion of dehumanisation is also to be found when the anonymous customer says: "Happy Halloween, ladies". Indeed, as Halloween is a holiday that is supposed to be scary, one could interpret this reflection as a means of 'monsterising' and 'beastifying' transness. This monstruous image tied to transgender individuals has always been used in [media] to represent "transness, crossdressing, and/or gender-play […] as a symptom of insanity, a precursor to violence" (Sanders, 2019). In one her essays called "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Race" (1994), Susan Stryker linked her experience as a transgender woman and her transexual body to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein's monster:

> The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that

[28] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ostracism

> in which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster's as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist. (Stryker, 1994, p. 245)

In other words, this monstruous image attached to transness is tied to the idea that the transsexual body is unnatural and relies on a person's desire to change their body in order to be their true self. As this idea of being one's true self "requires another physical form in which to manifest itself, it must therefore war with nature" (Ibid). Transgender individuals are often perceived as mutants, self-made freaks, deformities, or insults (p. 246), which can eventually lead to the destruction of "transsexual lives". For instance,

> On January 5, 1993, a 22-year-old pre-operative transsexual woman from Seattle, Filisa Vistima[29], wrote in her journal, 'I wish I was anatomically 'normal' so I could go swimming. . .. But no, I'm a mutant, Frankenstein's monster.' Two months later Filisa Vistima committed suicide. (Ibid)

As it seems that a link has been established between transgender people and their alleged transsexual body, I think it is important to make the distinction between these two terms. Firstly, the term transgender "entered widespread use in the early 1990s, although the word has a longer history" (Stryker, 2017, p. 36). During the 1970s and 1980s, 'transgender' referred to

> a person who wanted merely to temporarily change their clothing (like a transvestite) or to permanently change their genitals (like a transsexual) but rather to change their social gender in an ongoing way through a change of habitus and gender expression[30], which perhaps included the use of hormones, but usually not surgery. (pp. 36-37)

In the 1990s, the term was used to "encompass any and all kinds of variation from gender norms and expectations, similar to what *genderqueer*[31], *gender non-conforming* and *nonbinary* mean now." (p. 37) Secondly, the term transsexual was popularised in the 1950s by Dr. Harry Benjamin who started using the word "to draw a distinction between [the] transvestites […] who sought medical interventions to change their physical body (that is, their 'sex') and those who merely wanted to change their gendered clothing" (p. 38). In other words, the term

[29] Filisa Vistima was a transgender and transsexual bisexual woman who experienced rejection from the community she claimed membership in. Not only was she rejected by mainstream and the dominant society, but she always felt othered and excluded from the community which she thought she would be supported by.

[30] "External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through [behaviour], clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined [behaviours] and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine." *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Definitions*. (n.d.). HRC. Retrieved August 16, 2021, from https://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-terminology-and-definitions

[31] "denoting or relating to a person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identifies with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders." *Common LGBTQ Terminology*. (n.d.). Cpp.Edu. Retrieved August 16, 2021, from https://www.cpp.edu/%7Eoslcc/pride/common-lgbtq-terminology.shtml

transsexual tends to refer to "trans identities, practices, and desires that require interacting with medical institutions or with legal bureaucracies" (Ibid). However, as Susan Stryker notes, nowadays "the boundary between transsexual and transgender has become very blurry" (p. 39) because individuals who do not consider themselves to be transsexual

> have increasingly started using the same medicali[sed] body modification practices transsexuals have long used – for example, people assigned female at birth who have mastectomies or take testosterone – without using these practices to make a legal or social claim to being a man. (Ibid)

This confusion is the reason why I would rather use the term transgender when referring to people whose gender identity differ from the one they were assigned at birth.

To come back to my analysis, in addition to being a scary holiday, Halloween is also a period of time when people are expected to wear costumes. In this sense, one can also interpret the customer saying "Happy Halloween, ladies" as a means of implying that Blanca and Lulu are not real women but rather men wearing frightening costumes. This sentence contributes to the neglecting of transgender people's realities and experiences as it is a means of denying, in this particular case, Lulu's and Blanca's womanhood. They are not seen as who they really are but rather as men in dresses or frauds. It is a means of rejecting their gender identity as Lulu and Blanca are seen as "transvestites". The term "transvestite" was coined by Hirschfield to describe "what he called the 'erotic urge for disguise', which is how he understood the motivation that led some people to wear clothing generally associated with a social gender other than the one assigned to them at birth" (Stryker, 2017, p. 39). Moreover, it "primarily refers to people who wear gender-atypical clothing but who do not engage in […] body modification. It usually refers to men rather than women […]" (p. 40). Therefore, implying that Lulu and Blanca are wearing costumes is a means of highlighting that in the eyes of mainstream society, they remain men wearing female garments, or cross-dressers. Cross-dressing is a term that replaced "transvestite" and is considered much more neutral. "The practice of cross-dressing can have many meanings and motivations" (p. 14) such as being "a theatrical practice, part of fashion or politics, part of religious ceremonies, or part of celebrating public festivals and holidays" (Ibid), as well as "a way to resist or move away from a birth-assigned social gender" (Ibid). However, it is of great importance to remember that "Transgender people who are dressing in the fashion of the gender they [identify with] do not consider themselves to be cross-dressing – they are simply dressing" (Ibid).

After a while, the bartender comes up to the two ladies and the scene continues.

Blanca: Well, hello, handsome. I'll have a Manhattan, and my friend here is going to have a Malibu…

Lulu: Malibu Rum and Tab on the rocks.

Bartender: This one's on me but then you got to go. I got ten guys in here asking me if it's drag night.

Blanca: Well, I'm sorry. We're not in drag. We're women.

Bartender: Even better. We don't like women in here. This is a gay bar.

Blanca: Well, I want to see a manager.

Lulu: Girl, why you always got to pick fights you can't win?

Blanca: Because these are the ones worth fighting. (Falchuk et al., 2018b, 22:20)

Once more the bartender refers to Blanca and Lulu as drag queens and not real women. He misgenders the two patrons by considering them as men in drag. The term "drag" already existed in the 14th century but it was not until the 19th century that it was used in connection with performing in clothes or a persona different from your own gender[32]. It is believed to have originated in the theatre scene "where male performers wore petticoats to perform as women. Their petticoats would drag on the floor, and so they referred to dressing up as women as 'putting on their drags'[33]." By the early twentieth century, the term was being used by the gay community and linked with them as "A.J. Rosanoff's *1927 Manual of Psychiatry* defined drag as 'an outfit of female dress worn by a homosexual' or as an actual event, 'a social gathering of homosexuals at which some are in female dress'[34]." Although, nowadays, the art of drag is often related to men impersonating women, women also performed as male impersonators. Drag queens became increasingly popular until the rise of masculinity in 1970s gay culture[35]. As mentioned above, homonormativity follows the path of heteronormativity by stigmatising more 'feminine men' considered, to some extent, inferior. This being said, Lulu and Blanca are not men wearing 'female' clothing nor female impersonators, but they are trans women. By referring to them and calling them drag queens, the bartender deprives the two protagonists from their right to be who they are, to exist and to be recognised as their true self.

Furthermore, when Blanca says "We're not in drag. We're women" (Falchuk et al., 2018b, 22:20) and the bartender answers "Even better. We don't like women in here" (Ibid) reinforces

[32] *Trixie Mattel Breaks Down the History of "Drag."* (2018, September 20). Them. https://www.them.us/story/inqueery-drag
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

what has just been discussed. The white gay culture, at least, is depicted as androcentric and homonormative. Interestingly, it seems that the bartender does not feel any kind of embarrassment at assuming his misogyny. Misogyny has been defined by philosopher and writer Kate Manne "establishing a conceptual distinction between what she calls a *naïve conception* and a *feminist account of misogyny*" (Hale & Ojeda, 2018, p. 312). The former refers to individuals, usually men, "who are prone to feel hatred, hostility, or other similar emotions towards any and every woman, or at least women generally, *simply because they are women*' (Manne as cited in Hale & Ojeda, 2018, p. 312, emphasis in original). The latter, "ought to be understood as the system which operates within a patriarchal social order to police and enforce women's subordination, and to uphold men's dominance" (Ibid).

Despite being mainly related to straight cisgender men, misogyny as well as a form effeminophobia, the fear and rejection of effeminacy, are also frequent within the gay community. In their study "Acceptable femininity? Gay male misogyny and the policing of queer femininities*"*, S.E. Hale and T. Ojeda have pointed out, as many other scholars before, the existence of a gay's "problem with effeminacy – and crucially, therefore, femininity […] whether as a way of rejecting what is perceived to be anachronistic campness, or as a means of distancing themselves from what they were bullied for as schoolboys" (p. 315). As Richardson suggests, 'feminine' boys and men are punished for "moving down the gender ladder" and "renouncing [their] masculine privilege by 'doing' femininity" (Richardson as cited in Hale & Ojeda, 2018, p. 315). This hatred towards what is considered feminine is to be seen in "*no fems*[36]" attitudes such as the bartender's rejection of Blanca and Lulu that "reflect this hostility to femininity and also spring from the aspirational quality attributed to the *straight-acting* gay man who embodies a hegemonic form of masculinity […] – namely physically fit, high-earning, sexually assertive, usually white, and usually dismissive of women" (Ibid). As S.E. Hale and T. Ojeda argue:

> This dual desire in popular gay male discourse to be *masculine* and to have *masc credentials* has the effect of reproducing a widespread denigration of femininity in other gay men, and has at its centre a fundamental hostility to, disinterest in and degradation of women – including queer and trans women, whose femininity is called into question because their gender expression can be read as masculine, and therefore insulting to the traditional gender order. (Ibid, emphasis in original)

[36] *No fem* is a form of rejecting femininity and every feature that is related to womanhood. These attitudes are really common within the gay community and especially in gay dating apps where one can see sentences like: not looking for 'effeminate guys'. 'Real men only'. No 'girly dudes', etc.

This second part of the scene ends with an interesting note when Lulu asks Blanca "Girl, why you always got to pick fights you can't win?" (Falchuk et al., 2018b, 22:20) and Blanca answers "Because they are the ones worth fighting" (Ibid). As have been mentioned during the more theoretical framework of the third chapter of this dissertation, transgender women are figures of resistance. Blanca's answer is a clear depiction of her will to resist and to fight for what she considers right. Lulu's question, itself, is also really interesting to analyse as it implies that she suggests that Blanca is going to lose the fight no matter how hard she tries, the outcome will always be her losing. The defeatist attitude showed by Lulu may come from the fact that she, as well as the other queer people of colour, feel abandoned by society in its whole. However, her resignation is counterbalanced by Blanca's unquenchable thirst of justice and recognition.

After this short conversation, the two women are asked to join the manager outside to have a talk in a quiet place:

> **Blanca**: How could you discriminate against me in my own community?
>
> **Manager**: This bar is called Boy Lounge. We have a specific clientele—gay, under 35…
>
> **Lulu**: White?
>
> **Manager**: Frankly, yes. The New York City nightlife is segregated. Look, I've got a friend. She works at the Cubby Hole. I'll call her. You guys can go. You can drink free all night.
>
> **Blanca**: But I don't want that scene tonight.
>
> **Manager**: I'm sorry. I'm not throwing a costume party.
>
> **Blanca**: Oh, this is not over.
>
> **Lulu**: Bitch, it was over before it started. Everybody needs someone to make them feel superior. That line ends with us, though. This shit runs downhill, past the women, the Blacks, Latins, gays until it reaches the bottom and lands on our kind. (Ibid, 23:15)

This conversation compiles many problematics that have already been discussed. Firstly, the segregation of the gay community, which prioritises gay white men over queer people of colour and exclude them from the community as it is shown in the manager's sayings. Secondly, the trans body considered as a costume when the manager says: "I'm not throwing a costume party" (Ibid), thus rejecting and denying the existence of Lulu and Blanca as transgender women of colour. However, this scene is also accompanied by another important means of representing transgender women of colour. Indeed, when Lulu ends the conversation saying: "Everybody needs someone to make them feel superior. That line ends with us, though. This shit runs downhill, past the women, the Blacks, Latins, gays until it reaches the bottom and

lands on our kind" (Ibid), she highlights the hierarchy that exists in society. This social hierarchy that places transgender women of colour at the very bottom can be linked to Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality that was mentioned earlier in this dissertation (see p. 31). Intersectionality is linked to the notion of social identity, which is "[the] part of the individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tafjel as cited in Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2014, p. 10). These socially constructed identities are internally hierarchised – "a social status with 'dominant and non-dominant groups[37]". The non-dominant groups are more likely to experience forms of oppressions, such as limitations, disadvantages, or disapproval both at an individual or institutional level, or even at both levels[38]. In the USA,

> systems of oppression (like systemic racism) are woven into the very foundation of American culture, society, and laws. Other examples of systems of oppression are sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism, and anti-Semitism. Society's institutions, such as government, education, and culture, all contribute or reinforce the oppression of marginalized social groups while elevating dominant social groups[39].

The concept of intersectionality highlights how people, as members of multiple groups of individuals, experience marginalisation and inequality and how these socially constructed identities are interconnected, thus influence one another[40]. In other words,

> Race, class, gender, and sexuality simultaneously operate in every social situation. At the societal level, these systems of social hierarchies are connected to each other and are embedded in all social institutions. At the individual level, we each experience our lives and develop our identities based on our location along all dimensions, whether we are in dominant groups, subordinate groups, or both. (Weber as cited in Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2014, p. 15)

In this situation, the characters of the series are evolving withing an androcentric, cis-centred, heteronormative, and white dominated Western world that, by essence, favour wealthier white cisgender straight men. These people are considered superior, given more power, and tend to rule the world, imposing their beliefs and authority on those they consider inferior. Therefore, it seems evident that Lulu and Blanca, who are both transgender women of colour, represent the least dominant group within the social hierarchy, thus the most

[37] *Social Identities and Systems of Oppression*. (2020, July 17). National Museum of African American History and Culture. https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/social-identities-and-systems-oppression

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] *What is intersectionality, and what does it have to do with me?* (2017, March 29). YW Boston. https://www.ywboston.org/2017/03/what-is-intersectionality-and-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-me/

stigmatised, ostracised, marginalised and rejected one. If one follows the sequence established by Lulu, transgender women of colour are placed in the lowest position within the social hierarchy. The latter's position at the very end of the hierarchy is due to their intersected system forms of oppression. Lulu and Blanca are women, thus considered inferior to men. They are also women of colour, thus considered inferior to white people. Finally, they are transgender, thus considered inferior to cisgender people.

The day after, Blanca goes back, with a confident step, to the Boy Lounge and sits at the bar to order a drink. Unfortunately, she is still not welcomed. As she orders a Manhattan, she is grabbed from behind and violently thrown out of the bar. However, this event does not stop Blanca, who firmly affirms that she "should be able to drink wherever [she] want[s]" (Falchuk et al. 2018b, 29:00). The next day, she, once again, goes back to the bar and approaches the counter.

Manager: Don't you have anything better to do?

Blanca: Told you, I'll be here every night until you serve me.

Manager: I'm not dealing with your shit tonight. I'm calling the cops.

Blanca: Call them. I'll be right here. I'm not afraid of Five-O. (Ibid, 57:00)

Blanca's determination to be served appears during the whole episode. "I'll be here every night until you serve me" confirms the idea that Blanca will never renounce. Interestingly, what has happened through the whole episode is similar to acts of resistance that occurred in the past. This movement to which I am referring is called the "sit-ins[41]", which have already been mentioned (see p. 59). The sit-in movement was born in the 1960s as a new peaceful strategic tactic performed by Civil Rights Movement's activists. On the first February of 1960, "four freshmen from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (A&T) College in Greensboro occupied the lunch counter of Woolworth's after being refused service" (Andrews & Biggs, 2006, p. 753). Although many protesters were often threatened, beaten, and jeered by segregationists, nonviolence was a central component in order not to undermine the spirit of the movement. Indeed, "sit-in organizers believed that if the violence were only on the part of the white community, the world would see the righteousness of their cause[42]." This event "inspired blacks in other cities to adopt this form of protest. After a week, sit-ins began elsewhere in North Carolina; soon the wave of protest surged into other states" (p. 754).

[41] A sit-in consists in sitting quietly and waiting to be served, in a place that does not, normally, serve you.
[42] *The Sit-In Movement*. (n.d.). Ushistory. Retrieved July 18, 2021, from https://www.ushistory.org/us/54d.asp

In *Pose*, Blanca's behaviour can be interpreted as a form of sit-in performance. Indeed, when she first arrived in the bar and waits for Lulu, even after being told that she needed to leave because she was not welcome, Blanca remained sitting while waiting for the manager to show up. The day after, she came back, took a sit and waits for her order. Unfortunately, she was quickly thrown out of the bar and yelled "I should be able to drink wherever I want". The next day, she came back, sit again, and was finally arrested by police officers because she was "disturbing the peace" (Falchuk et al., 2018b, 58:00). The only difference with the usual sit-ins is that Blanca was alone. She was facing adversity on her own without any back-up to take her sit once arrested by the police. To conclude, Blanca Rodriguez appears as a resistant character who fights back and is not afraid to be arrested in order to defend her ideas and beliefs. Furthermore, she does not hesitate to impose herself in situations in which she is not socially welcome to try to make things change. By performing a form of sit-in, she embodies the resistance that led transgender women of colour before her to be central figures in gay liberation movements (see subchapter "1960s-1970s: more than a decade of resistance*"*) as well as the resistance that Black people performed during the segregation and the Civil Rights Movement.

Kinship and Community Support

This last part of the analysis aims at discussing how *Pose* challenges the heteronormative vision of family. In order to fulfil this purpose, this section will first focus on the notions of house and motherhood, especially by looking at Blanca as a character, in the ballroom culture. Secondly, it will analyse how supportive the underground ballroom community is when some of its members are facing mainstream society's discriminatory treatments.

Foremost, before talking about family and motherhood in *Pose*, it seems important to differentiate two family-related concepts: the nuclear family and the alternative one. As Torres Fernández argue (2020), the former term would refer to the "traditional structure known to be the foundation of a family by following the biological and the binary distinctions of society on parenting and motherhood" (p. 164). In other words, the nuclear family is considered "the 'traditional' family and consists of a mother, father, and [their] children[43]". Although these families have often been described as the norm, they are not reflective of the multiplicity of

[43] Libretexts. (2021, February 20). *12.1C: Family Structures*. Social Sci LibreTexts. https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Introduction_to_Sociology/Book%3A_Sociology_(Boundless)/12%3A_Family/12.01%3A_Family/12.1C%3A_Family_Structures

"alternative configurations of families" (p. 164) that exist. Indeed, alternative families, which refer to those not considered traditional such as same-sex relationships, single-parent households, adopting individuals, etc, have become more common[44].

In *Pose*, rather than being "traditionally" configured, which means based on biological and legal bonds, kinships are socially constructed. Despite them being non-traditional, *Pose*'s families and houses "preserve some of the values present in traditional families such as, for example, the educational system and supporting strategies within the family sphere" (p. 165). To go further, by "mirroring the traditional family institution, [ballroom] houses not only become a source of protection, care, trust, and knowledge, their very structure […] induces a queer repro-generational time" (Klitgård as cited in Torres Fernández, 2020, p. 165). To be clearer, the houses' structure challenges the heteronormative time, both at a reproductive and generational level, by allowing, for instance, a housemother to become one of her children's child as well as allowing the mother to have children that are older than her. These two phenomena are represented in *Pose*. While Blanca Evangelista (MJ Rodriguez) appears as Elektra Abundance's (Dominique Jackson) daughter at the beginning of the show, she becomes the latter's mother when Elektra ends up homeless after her break-up. Therefore, the mother, who is older, becomes the child and vice-versa.

In addition to challenging the heteronormative time, in *Pose*, a house represents "the family [one] get[s] to choose" (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 26:40). As discussed in this dissertation, "the ballroom community members suffered from the homophobic and transphobic rejection from their nuclear families" (Torres-Fernández, 2020, p. 165). In response to these rejections, they often had "the urge to create alternative forms of families in which to care and trust one another" (Ibid). In the series, Blanca's role is "clearly defined from the very beginning of the narrative […] as a trans woman with HIV/AIDS who wants to be a mother and have a legacy" (p. 171). Before analysing her relationship with her house children, it seems important to illustrate Blanca's relationship with her biological mother because, as she was rejected by the latter, Blanca decided to "[construct] her motherhood in response to [this rejection] and [to build] something completely different" (p. 170). In *Mother's Day* (1.5), Blanca receives a call announcing that her mother died. Although the two women have not talked for years, Blanca cannot contain her emotions and starts crying. She swiftly visits her biological sister, Carmen, to know why the latter did not tell her that their mother had died:

[44] Ibid.

Blanca: Why didn't you call me to tell me that Mami died? I sent you a Christmas card with my number and everything.

Carmen: Must've got lost in the mail.

Blanca: I'll be there at the funeral home on Thursday. I was one of her kids, too.

Carmen: You made your choice Mateo.

Blanca: That's not my name, Carmen.

Carmen: Whatever you're calling yourself, this ain't the time for your confusion. Mami suffered enough.

Blanca: You're still blaming me for her pain.

Carmen: Where were you when Mami had all her appointments? Or when she was up all night in pain?

Blanca: You're right! I wasn't around, and I'm sorry. But how am I supposed to show up? You won't even invite me in. (Canals & Howard, 2018, 10:30)

This conversation allows the spectator to understand what happened in Blanca's family. Indeed, she was rejected and abandoned by her family because she was a transgender woman. Interestingly, it seems that Carmen blames her sister for her absences in their mother's life even though Blanca did not have any choice to be isolated from her biological mother. In other words, Carmen incriminates her sister, who, in fact, is nothing more than the one who powerlessly suffered from her family's abandonment. Moreover, one could interpret Carmen's words as a means of blaming Blanca for their mother's death as she implies that Blanca was the source and the reason for her pain. At the funerals, Blanca is accompanied by the members of her house, that is her chosen family. She approaches her biological mother's coffin and starts an internal monologue:

> I'm a mother now. I got a house of kids. Pains in my ass, too. So I hope, finally, you're proud of me, wherever you are. I said some messed up things the last time we spoke. And I hope you know that I'll always love you. I know you didn't know how to raise a child like me. You tried your best, and I want you to know that I forgive you and I love you. (Ibid, 30:45)

This sequence does not only show that Blanca forgives her mother but also highlights the similarities between the two women in their role of mothers. Indeed, as mentioned above, even if the House of Evangelista is not a traditional family, Blanca mirrors some features of traditional family. Even if she is not the biological mother of Damon, Lil Papi, Angel, etc., she raises them as if they were her biological children, which allows her to understand, to some extent, her own biological mother's feelings, thus growing closer to her.

Blanca's mothering performativity is ubiquitous throughout the show. Firstly, she depicts a sacrificial mother as she seems to place her children's needs before hers. This tendency to put her children before herself is shown, for instance, in *Love is The Message* (1.6). While she goes shopping to buy clothes for her date with a man, Lulu (Hailie Sahar) teases her:

> **Blanca**: I can get a deal for something on Saturday.
>
> **Lulu**: Ain't no ball Saturday.
>
> **Blanca**: I have a date.
>
> **Lulu**: What? Is Mother Teresa really about to get some?
>
> **Blanca**: Lulu, don't do that. I'm just picky.
>
> **Lulu**: No. You are dried up and too wrapped up in them damn kids' lives. (Murphy & Mock, 2018, 24:30)

In addition to forgetting herself by focusing on her children's needs, "there are numerous examples in which […] she navigates the world of child-rearing" (James as cited in Torres Fernández, 2020, p. 174). One of the first instance of her performativity of motherhood is to be found in the scene when she sets several rules that must be followed by her children. As Blanca states:

> Education is key if you want to get ahead in this world […], you need to be safe […], I want you to be healthy […] [and] I need you to be available to walk any of the balls. Those are Mother's rules. I know they're harder than most, but I got to be tougher on y'all than the world will be. (Falchuk et al., 2018a, 52:40)

Like in most families, there are rules that one should follow in order to preserve familial cohesion and connection. Furthermore, "these rules demonstrate that […] [Blanca's] mothering experience 'can confer both maternal power and an immense burden of responsibility'" (Torres-Fernández, 2020, p. 174; Oberman & Josselson as cited in Ibid). Alongside setting rules, Blanca also acts as a mother when she pushes her children to pursue their dreams, punishes Damon for skipping his dance classes, cooks with the latter just like her biological mother used to cook with her, or tries to "[set] traditions with her children during Christmas following those she might have had with her own biological family as a child" (Ibid). At the end of the first season, Blanca wins the title of *Mother of the Year* (1.8) as she "[has] provided moral and social support to her children. She [has] kept them in line, and [has] taught them what it means to move through life with grace and humility" (Murphy et al., 2018, 51:20). In other words, "the Ballroom community has constructed a kinship system that attempts to [fulfil] the needs, aspirations, and dreams of its members within the context of their lived experiences" (Bailey,

2013, p. 91). Ballroom members have reshaped and appropriated traditional familial experiences and practices to make them fit their own realities (Ibid). However, the fact that they appropriate these values does not make them "fictive [kins]" (Weston as cited in Bailey, 2013, p. 93) or "derivatives or a mere passive reflection of other forms of kinship in US society" (Ibid). Indeed, "although the ties that bind members together in the Ballroom community are not biological, kin ties are, nonetheless, viewed, undertaken, and experienced as real" (Bailey, 2013, p.96). To conclude this part,

> whether or not a 'house' is a 'home' – a building – house members consider themselves a family and carry out a whole host of activities together to fortify their kin ties, such as taking trips, holding family dinners and reunions, celebrating [holidays], shopping for a ball, bailing each other out of jail, and even fighting with and for one another. (Ibid)

To go further, Blanca does not confine herself to providing her children with support and housing, she also "constructs a discourse of activism against the marginalisation and discrimination queer people of colour within and outside the LGBTQ community" (Torres-Fernández, 2020, p. 171). When she is diagnosed with AIDS in *Acting Up* (2.1), Blanca cannot stop thinking about her children and states:

> It's moments like these that make your life flash right before you. Crazy thing is, it's not my life I'm seeing right now, it's my kids'. It's my kids'. Everything in this life is set up to work against them. There is still so much in their lives that I have to fix. (Murphy et al., 2019a, 9:15)

This short monologue allows the spectator to understand, as mentioned above, that Blanca is a mother that places her children's needs and life before hers. Furthermore, it also shows that all the fights that she faces are fought to facilitate, or at least slightly improve, her children's futures. This phenomenon is what has been called "reproductive futurism", which is "the belief that our participation in politics – indeed, the political itself – is motivated by a belief in and a desire for creating better futures for our children" (Sara, 2009).

Beyond focusing on Blanca's role as a housemother, *Pose* also depicts a sense of kinship between all members of the Ballroom community. Although the balls, which are "underground events that reward individuals who win competitions focused around dance, athletics, and gender expression" (Kubicek et al., 2013, p. 2), stage houses competing with one another, one can notice that, when it comes to facing the outside world's adversity, Ballroom members come together as one. As a community has been defined as "a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings" (MacQueen et al., 2001, p. 1929), it seems interesting to focus on this aspect and how *Pose* shows that, despite being in competition, "the

mothers and house children overcome their competing attitudes[45]" to fight together when it is needed. These fights in which they engage altogether are situations that endanger the life of one of their community's members.

For instance, as mentioned earlier, the entire House of Evangelista, as well as other members of the ballroom community, participate in the die-in performance at St. Patrick's Cathedral (2.1). Their participation in such protests is important as they are means of showing that "[they] care about [themselves]" (Murphy et al., 2019a, 28:00) and that they "[stand up] for [themselves] and [their] community" (Ibid, 29:10). Indeed, as argued in this dissertation, the government's silence, rejection, and lies about the spread of HIV and AIDS forced LGBTQ+ communities to have to rely on themselves to make things change. As "[they] are all being chased by the same monster" (Ibid, 27:50), it is their duty to protest and make their voices be heard. Elektra Abundance is the only important character of the series who does not show up at the St. Patrick's Cathedral. Later in *Acting Up* (2.1), she goes to the ball where she is "serving" (Ibid, 39:00) Marie-Antoinette and receives a lot of critics from Pray Tell:

> How apropos, a queen who care nothing for her kingdom. […] Remember when things were simpler, Elektra? Before our young men were dropping dead before our very eyes. […] How long did you rehearse [your act]? Is that where you were instead of showing up for your dying community? Way to set an example for the kids, Elektra. […] I'm gonna lay it out for you. One time your community needed you at the protest, and you didn't show up. […] I went to jail. 111 people went to jail. You are more concerned about winning a trophy than you are about our government spread lies about us in an effort to kill us! And you want to know why they want us dead? Because we're black and we're brown and we're queer. They don't give a shit about us, so we better start caring for ourselves. Show up for your lives! Wake up! (Ibid, 39:00-43:00)

This scene shows the spectator the importance of acting together against the outside world, which is trying to kill them, and therefore forming a supportive unity. Elektra is criticised for having abandoned the kids of her community. By using the word "kids" Pray Tell highlights the fact that the Ballroom community is like an immense family for which they need to fight.

Another instance of solidarity and kinship within the Ballroom community is to be found in *Never Knew Love Like This Before* (2.4). As already mentioned, this episode focuses on Candy's death. To recontextualise, Candy has been relying on sex work for economic issues. One night she goes in a motel with a client and is beaten to death. At her funerals, the whole Ballroom community is present to pay their respects to her and Pray is the master of ceremonies:

[45] *Shade, Style, and Solidarity: Why You Should Watch POSE*. (2019, September 5). Medium. https://medium.com/@makemuse/shade-style-and-solidarity-why-you-should-watch-pose-f44e30f40efa

> So, I'm not gonna stand up here and lie to y'all today. Miss Cany… She was a pain in my goddamn black ass. Y'all know what I'm talking about. We didn't always see eye to eye, but she was still my sister. Like you all are my sisters and my siblings and my children. My cousins. Y'all know family don't always get along. It's all right. […] We are charged to continue on, living through this tragedy so that we can fight our hardest to protect our sisters from the hands of men who are weak! […] Today we mourn. But tomorrow we stand firmly together, never losing sight of who we truly are. Now… let us take a moment of silence for our dearly departed, taken too soon sister… Miss Candy Ferocity. (Mock & Murphy, 2019, 28:00-31:25)

Once more this scene depicts the Ballroom community as a united family, whose members fight together against adversity and support each other in tragic events. Furthermore, Pray's words allows the spectator to understand that the Ballroom community functions like a traditional family. Indeed, just like in traditional families, although relations between kins are sometimes difficult and tense, at the end, the remain family members.

Conclusion

The present dissertation allows for a critical analysis of *Pose*'s representation of transgender women of colour in the socioeconomic, political, and historical context of the 1980s-1990s. Although it is important to keep in mind that the analyses that were provided could not encompass the intricacy of trans people of colour's experiences in their whole, the selected scenes which have been discussed allow one to get a sense of the way Black and Latinx queer people were treated in such a time.

By comparing the analyses to the theoretical frameworks that were developed in *Chapter 2* and *Chapter 3*, one can conclude that Pose gives a faithful and plausible depiction of transgender women of colour's experiences during the 1980s-1990s. Although there is little documentation about their reality and the way they were treated, the socioeconomic, political, and historical contexts allow one to get an accurate picture. Henceforth, *Pose* can be perceived as an educational tool. Indeed, not only does the series give a voice to queer people of colour, who are too often left aside from public discussions, but it also centres its narrative on topics that commonly remain unspoken. In addition to "[providing] greater understanding of the time and era[46]" as well as the way queer people of colour were living and were being treated, *Pose* "can be considered as a 'universal language' [that] overcomes the barrier of textual learning for all backgrounds[47]". In other words, it is an educational tool that is left accessible for whomever shows interest in the topic, thus not limited to a highly educated public

Alongside its educational power, *Pose* forces one to question oneself. The series, which has the power to move people to tears, tells the story of queer people of colour living in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, focusing on how unfair society could be and how resilient these people had to be. Although it has been argued that the representations that are made in the series seem to be trustworthy, one cannot neglect that they remind one of today's society. Indeed, *Pose* fits in with the current social situation. From Trump's politics, which fostered an anti-transgender people dynamic, to BLM, which denounces the violence perpetrated against people of colour, by way of Black Trans Lives Matter, which, in turn, fights against the regular

[46] Indian Today Web Desk. (2017, August 3). *This is how movies can act as an effective educational tool*. India Today. https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/featurephilia/story/-1027271-2017-08-01
[47] Ibid.

invisibilisation of transgender people of colour and transphobia, the show allows the spectator to draw a parallel between what the Ballroom culture's members are going through and what marginalised populations are struggling against today. Therefore, one can conclude that *Pose* can be considered as a political, or at least an activist series, that functions as a wake-up call.

Furthermore, even if AIDS research made a great advance, there are still people dying from AIDS-related illnesses. Interestingly, it seems that gay and bisexual men of all races and ethnicities, African Americans, Latin-Americans and transgender individuals are among the most impacted populations[48]. Although "more people living with HIV […] are accessing antiretroviral therapy and are achieving the viral suppression required to stay healthy and prevent onward transmission of the virus" (Global AIDS Update, 2021, p. 82), people living with AIDS are still facing a lot of intersected forms of stigmatisation. To go further, it has been studied that "people living with HIV experience more severe outcomes and have higher comorbidities from COVID-19 than people not living HIV [and] most people with HIV did not have access to COVID-19 vaccines[49]". In addition, "COVID-19 lockdowns and other restrictions disrupted HIV testing and in many countries led to steep drops in diagnoses and referrals to HIV treatment[50]". Therefore one can realise that HIV and AIDS are still of great importance today.

To sum up, as it has been argued in the introduction of this dissertation, *Pose* fulfils its role as a representative medium of communication. Firstly, it renders the reality of queer people of colour visible to everybody. By doing so, the show allows for the emergence of discussions built around the experiences of predominantly ostracised communities. Furthermore, it also allows concerned people to feel represented, which "can foster a great sense of affirmation of their identity" (O'Brien, 2017). Secondly, the show's integration within the actuality may allow for self-reassessments and self-deconstruction on behalf of more privileged spheres of the population. For all these reasons, this dissertation's aims have been met.

[48] *Populations at Greatest Risk | High-Impact HIV Prevention | Policy and Law | HIV/AIDS | CDC*. (n.d.). CDC. Retrieved August 15, 2021, from https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/policies/hip/risk.html

[49] UNAIDS. (n.d.). *Global HIV & AIDS statistics — Fact sheet*. Retrieved August 15, 2021, from https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/fact-sheet

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