

From Fandom to Future Representation:
Sapphic and Alternative Media as Creation

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Abstract:

“From Fandom to Future Representation:
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For my research creation project, I wrote and produced a web series script and pilot centring 2SLGBTQIA+ Jewish women and their daily lives. I made an original narrative through the web series, as a device to explore fan production and subversion of the text *Wicked*. I did this by creating my own “Fan” production— a script featuring positive representation of queer women in fandom, with the novel as a back drop and story catalyst, titled *Mazel*. The project was created in three stages: three interviews with members of the Canadian sapphic community pertaining to what they would like to see from sapphic representation, the completion of a script for a web series written with inspiration from said interviews, and the filming of a short pilot webisode. I was then privileged to host a community talk-back in coordination with the Museum of Jewish Montreal, wherein we discussed what sapphic folks considers good representation and negative representation. The project’s aim is to provide an invitation to fellow sapphic creators to explore how they want their stories told, on their own terms.

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Introduction:

The development of sapphic representation has shifted fundamentally, especially in the past decade. 2SLGBTQIA+ representation has been seeing a renaissance of sorts on mainstream television, film, and other forms of media, particularly alternative means. Here I mean fan communities, web series, online blogs, or popular online spaces like Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr. These alternative, or non-mainstream, spaces have been of particular interest here due to the abundance of content from everyday individuals—these are people, like myself, who are self-taught writers, actors, artists, producers, directors, and anything in between. I came of age in sapphic fan communities, so I was curious to consider what alternative sapphic representation looks like and how it differs from mainstream representation. What does it mean to be a fan creator and a sapphic artist intent on developing art that speaks to not just your experience, but other sapphic folks who will ultimately consume your content or work? What does making a fan series with other fans reveal about what kinds of representations sapphic fans are seeking? How might using a creative production as a prompt, open up discussions and future prospects for positive representations?

To consider these questions, I produced a script, subsequent webisode, and an academic paper analyzing my findings through the project, the creative process, and the scholarship that I conducted. Each method was simple in its execution, but was an important contribution to the “homemade” style that resonates so heavily with queer fandoms. The aesthetics of home-shot, home-edited, and singularly produced works are paramount to my project here. What came to pass was an important exploration of community-driven medias and creators taking their everyday into the artist realm as a form of self-expression and self-representation. What this meant for me was the representation of my lived experience as a sapphic, Jewish woman who is trying to explore both of these identities in a city I feel safe doing so. The interviews were important here because they were a foundation for the issues I wanted to consider when creating this series: the everyday that is sometimes missing from mainstream sapphic representation; the overabundance of tragedy; and the tendency to make queer folks side characters rather than protagonists in their own right. When I was using scriptwriting as methodology, it became a research method that was both frustrating and therapeutic. I considered why my narrative was an important one to tell—I thought about why it mattered that I wanted to create sapphic media. I wondered what my intentions were and if they were indeed to provide sapphic representation for folks who need it, or if it was a vanity project. Once the script was completed and the cast and crew assembled, we created our first episode—“Good Fortune” that is part of a series called, *Mazel*. The episode spoke to my experience as a sapphic, Jewish woman, alongside the experiences of my co-creators who were all sapphic themselves. It truly became a communal project that was then deeply important to all

of us. Following the creation of the web series, our team was lucky enough to receive funding from the Museum of Jewish Montreal to host a script reading and a talkback with community members associated with the museum. Alongside the new script written for the event and sharing a clip from “Good Fortune,” I was able to attain not just feedback from my interview subjects and co-creators, but a community at large.

This project was a labour of love that shows the importance of agency in sapphic representation— community-driven media is a powerful tool to establish meaningful storytelling, especially when that story is a queer one. The use of interviews, scriptwriting, film, and community discussion demonstrates the versatility and power of alternative creation and the importance of sapphic agency in filmmaking.

Literature and Media Review:

Fandom Overview

The theoretical framing I have done on this project is rooted in Fan Studies, scholarship that considers and analyzes the discourses and subsequent creations by fans of various mainstream or underground media creations, like theatrical productions, books, television, film, or visual art. “Fandom” as an essential piece of terminology for my project means ‘over enthusiastic enjoyment’ often becoming a popular target for mockery and dismissal, particularly if that enthusiasm comes from their love of a television show, book, film, or any other piece of media that generates fandom. It is a group of individuals (largely online) who share a love for the same piece of media, indulging in activities like fan fiction, cosplay, fan art, or visiting conventions housing the stars of their favourite programs (Russo 2013 450).

The analysis of discourses in fandoms and the theorists who have impacted my research the most have been: Sheila Liming, an English Literature scholar at the University of North Dakota; Caitlin Malone, a Fine Arts scholar from the University of Alabama who wrote specifically on the queering of *Wicked*; and Julie Levin Russo, a Media Studies scholar at Evergreen State College researching sapphic women’s relation to fandom pairing. They each discuss the lived experiences of searching for yourself in media like books, film, television, or video games as a 2SLGBTQIA+ individual. Their work is important for a theoretical framing of my analysis because they each discuss the results of authorial or mainstream media investing one’s audience into following a homoromantic or homoerotic narrative that will never be explicitly stated by the creator. I interpret this as queerbaiting, or “stringing along” of a queer audience so they interpret a character or a relationship between two people of the same sex to be romantic or sexual, when it never is and never will be confirmed by the original creator.

Wicked Fandom

I am an active member of one particular fandom— *Wicked*. I first read *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* by Gregory Maguire at the impressionable age of 12. It immediately became an influence on my interest in being a good student and, eventually, academia as a career path. It also assisted me in my journey towards coming out. It became such a huge aspect of my life that I spent time in the communities online, particularly in spaces like Tumblr and fan fiction websites. As I grew as a professional creator, I decided to study the fandom I spent so much time in as a teen and young adult. To demonstrate this intellectual initiative, I attended Maguire’s talk at the Toronto Public Library on November 14th, 2019, so I could discuss my theories with him and express my appreciation for his work. I wanted to cement that like myself, the 2SLGBTQIA+ members of *Wicked*’s fandom are particularly attached to the novel’s protagonist, Elphaba, specifically because she is a figurehead for the *Other*, and they see themselves in her otherness. They model themselves after her journey and indeed see representation in her, without Gregory Maguire explicitly stating she is one thing or another. It brings me great joy to consider that *Wicked* is, itself, a sort of fan fiction. It is an alternative retelling of *The Wizard of Oz* from the Witch’s perspective, as told from a fan. When I think about this more deeply now, as an academic, I feel a huge sense of validation as a fan creator.

What then becomes interesting, following the inception of *Wicked* from fandom roots, is that the book itself is explicit in every way, except explicit representations of members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. There is a definitive queer-coding of a number of characters, namely Elphaba and her relationship with Glinda the Good (which is often times hinted at as being romantic), and their friends, Crope and Tibbett, who appear to be in a romantic relationship with one another. Interestingly, despite all of these implications, the only explicitly queer person in the series is Elphaba’s son Liir, who has a same-sex relationship with a guard named Trism. While his story was the last to be released, and thereby was lucky enough to enjoy the capacity for explicit 2SLGBTQIA+ representation without fear of being removed from the shelves, fans, including myself, were intrigued by Maguire’s willingness to be explicit about men’s but not women’s sexual identities. This ambiguity is a good thing because it leaves an open space for interpretation by those sapphic communities to create our own narrative retellings of queer-coded language from coded to specific. This is done through alternative medias like fandom.

“*Oh my G-d, they were roommates!*”— *Queering Subversion in Alternative Media and Fandom*:

The theorists previously mentioned assisted me in asserting that queerbaiting¹ in mainstream media forces women to, as Liming theorizes within her qualitative interview-based research, “read for” (86) their queer existence, creating an emotional barrier for them to resolve

¹McDermott, Michael. "The (broken) promise of queerbaiting: Happiness and futurity in politics of queer representation." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 24.5 (2021): 844-859.

while likewise seeing their own lived experiences erased by mainstream entertainment. Russo, similar to Malone, compliments my emphasis on the necessity to “queer” media (452), particularly when it is a tool of resistance and a challenge for writers who have achieved mainstream success to facilitate positive and outward representation of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. I have analyzed Maguire’s ambiguous language throughout the novel wherein his characters can be read as queer-coded or homoromantic. I consider this textual analysis in my written work below and as references in my script (see the appendix), which details a romantic relationship between two women who bond over queer fandom.

The *Wicked* fandom and the patterns of their fan fiction demonstrates a desire for Gelphe (the fandom pairing name for Elphaba and Glinda) to be canonized. The relationship between the two women certainly goes beyond friendship, and whether this is read as a sisterly bond or a romantic one, there is no denying that the relationship is foundational to the novel’s narrative. Likewise, it is important to consider the authorial intent of Elphaba and Glinda’s relationship. Holly Wagg, a Media Studies scholar from Concordia University who speaks to adolescent lesbian women’s experiences with visibility and representation writes “the challenge with situating the politics of representation at this nexus resides both with the evaluative stance and the treatment of the image as subject/object until injected with meaning by the audience or the theorist, or, if a bit more interrogative, by the singular group who created it” (Wagg 44). Thereby, Maguire’s interpretation of Elphaba and Glinda might begin as ambiguous but is fully developed and articulated by fans. These fans have pointed to the potentiality of a romantic relationship between the two, specifically the scene where they kiss: “You’ll be alright,” Elphaba said, “now you’re a seasoned traveler. This is just the return leg of a voyage you already know.” She put her face against Glinda’s and kissed her. “Hold out, if you can,” she murmured, and kissed her again. “Hold out, my sweet” (Maguire 178). This is an explicit instance of same-sex intimacy, but it is never again revisited in a romantic sense. It is not until later, when the two women see each other again after years of separation, at the somber affair that is Elphaba’s sister’s funeral, that Glinda’s intimate feelings about her closeness with Elphaba are explored. Maguire writes “For when she chose to remember her youth at all, she could scarcely remember... that daring meeting with the Wizard. She could recall far more clearly how she and Elphie had shared a bed on the road to the Emerald City. How brave that had made her feel, and how vulnerable too” (344). These are two examples of what a reader would interpret as a queerbaiting of the two women. It is additionally interesting to contrast their relationship to Elphaba’s son, Liir, who, in fact, has sex with another man in *Wicked*’s sequel, *Son of a Witch*, making his queerness explicit and non-contestable.

There are no romantic feelings between Elphaba and Glinda that are deeply explored, but the intimacy between the two is undeniable. Their relationship is constantly pulled into question by the readers and it is done even more so in the musical, where the two women’s relationship is the central plot point. Sapphic representation is in abundance in Gelphe fan discourse on Tumblr

and Archive of Our Own that speaks to both the novel and the musical². However, the fan fiction writers often struggle to cement their narratives because of Maguire's ambiguity, allowing fans to read between the lines and queer the narrative to find representation. Malone writes,

Various authors on fan fiction websites and blogs have penned pieces that feature Glinda and Elphaba as reuniting after the musical's [and book's] ending, in alternative storylines during their time at school, and in a romantic relationship outside of *Wicked's* script. These works are named "Gelphe" because of their focus on the two women. While these public documents discuss the possibility of a homosexual relationship, they do not provide any reasoning for the focus of their writing. Other than the personal opinion and desires of these authors, there is nothing in these stories for readers to understand these alterations in the story that they know (11).

While I disagree with Malone's exegesis that there is no evidence to support the author's queer readings of the two's relationship, I argue that it is because of Maguire's ambiguity or the musical's insistence on their platonic relationship that readers often have to imagine a scenario in which the relationship is more romantic than is depicted. I explore both the book and the musical in my webisode, as lines depicting the characters' romantic relationship can be explored through hints in the novel ("Hold out, my sweet") and songs in the musical depicting the women's deep love for one another in a way that can be interpreted as romantic by queer listeners, like "For Good". This is ultimately the issue I take with Maguire's writing, the musical's plot, and the discourse surrounding the work itself. Queer fans, like myself, feel dismissed by comments like "not everything needs to be gay." The issue is not that queer women, or more specifically queer women in fandom, want everything to be gay, but rather that we want to be seen.

While we do not expect mainstream authors to do this now, we want our lives depicted as we experience them. This is why the space of sapphic fandom is so important for alternative creation, "given slash's [a term here that means fan fiction pairings] mostly female community of readers and writers and its same-sex romance narratives, discussions of gender, sex, and sexuality have always been central when the genre is discussed" (Clemons 76). Gregory Maguire, as a gay man himself, is certainly responsive to his work being read as 2SLGBTQIA+ and is proud that readers have picked up on his hints³. Ultimately, regardless of creators being supportive of fan's queering of characters and content or criticism of fan fiction and queering of narratives, independent creativity and sapphic fandoms will continue to exist, as both a source of representation and even female empowerment.

² This information was collected and referenced in the tags on Tumblr and in the author's notes on Archive of Our Own.

³ Maguire and I had a lengthy conversation about representation in his work wherein he disclosed to me the importance of his 2SLGBTQIA+ readership seeing themselves in his work.

Webisodes

Fan fiction sites, like Archive of Our Own, are spaces for sapphic creators to realize their readings of a text that has integrated queerbaiting or has otherwise not cemented the queerness of beloved characters. This website is a foundational space for my creativity, as it demonstrates the very active and passionate fandom behind the “Gelphe” pairing. A case for fan fiction, and at that a case for female queer fan fiction is that mainstream artists are simply not doing enough to represent othered women. We are consistently an afterthought, in relation to men. It is often the case that women are making content for themselves to combat this gendered imbalance in media. This is because queerbaiting his readers, while not Maguire’s intention, is what is being read by sapphic fans. They see the queerness of Elphaba and Glinda, but it is never addressed. This is, ultimately, a good thing. It does leave room for more creative content from queer artists within the fandom who are inspired to produce their own 2SLGBTQIA+ shows, stories, and art.

This is why I position myself as a fan creator when considering why I created my webisode. Therefore, what is necessary for fan film production is what theorist Barton calls “fan social capital” where fans call attention to a book, film or text (Barton 11). She explains: “What builds on the need for fan culture capital is that fan social capital brings together like-minded fans that, in most cases, already have an extensive working knowledge of a particular fan object” (Barton 11). A benefit to “fan creations”, a term that I have yet to see explicitly in Fan Studies, but is helpful for my scholarship, is the diversity that stems from their solo projects, should they write a fan fiction that inspires an original work with 2SLGBTQIA+ characters, create a show inspired by their beloved fan media, or create any form of representation that is either connected to or independent from their original source material.

While there are problematic aspects to fandom, like fetishizing queer relationships and identities that do not belong to the creators, an aggressive approach and attachment to celebrities and real people they do not know, and gatekeeping that can occur in certain fandoms, independent creation is an important part of being 2SLGBTQIA+ and involved in fan culture. Queer creators are important and without fandom as an initial stepping stone for them, there might not be as much visibility of 2SLGBTQIA+ relationships and identity without these social media outlets. These projects, while important for the inclusivity of queer women and non-binary people, are also important for the creation of other, larger products.

An example of this is the creation of shows like *Carmilla*, a web series on YouTube that is essentially a fan fiction, or alternative reading of Sheridan LeFanu’s novella of the same name. The web series, which has amassed worldwide viewership and has generated over 70 million views on YouTube is similar to *Wicked* as it is a positive retelling of a figure that was initially vilified in LeFanu’s novella and the homophobia of the masses. *Carmilla* is an important example, and a good one to contrast with *Wicked’s* fandom, because it is queer art made by women and non-binary people for women and non-binary people to consume. It details a similar narrative to those frequently told in *Wicked* fan fictions— two young women, one more outgoing and bubbly,

the second reclusive and othered for a feature outside of their control (for Carmilla, it is her vampirism and for Elphaba, it is her green skin). *Carmilla* demonstrates the power and tenacity of queer fandoms creating a fandom of their own from their creations, elevating sapphic narratives, and encouraging inclusive and progressive art from an alternative lens. This is why *Wicked* fan fiction is so important to sapphics, as it serves the same purpose— inclusivity and representation for sapphics from an alternative (meaning alternative to mainstream cinema and literature) lens.

I cannot agree fully with queerbaiting as it ultimately silences queer relationships to appear marketable to heterosexual audiences, but it does inspire and give a wink and a nudge to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and thereby elevates them to create their own work. This is because “queerbaiting often relies on subtext and narrative techniques to code characters as potentially queer to viewers ‘in the know,’ allowing queer viewers a space to identify themselves within the show without needing to make an explicit statement regarding the issue” (Collier 2). This demonstrates that the power of representation in a mainstream sense falls into the hands of the show creators. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing. Underground or independent queer content gets an audience and visibility to a much larger extent now, with services like Tumblr, Ao3, and YouTube. Independent artists can create their own shows and develop their own fandom from their web-series, their own readership from fan fiction, and representation that makes *them* feel welcome and accepted.

There will always be dissension for queer retellings or readings of popular media particularly if they are from the perspective of lesbians and bisexual women, because lesbophobia, biphobia, transphobia and misogyny is so deeply ingrained in Western social structures. To consider where communities go from here, it is important to consider that minorities are always forced to create their own spaces due to fear of violence or dismissal. Sapphic fandom is, in fact, a playful and alternative effort to foster a community within a community. Sapphic spaces online are designed to be spaces for women and non-binary people alone and as such, are directly combative to the heteronormative, lesbophobic, biphobic, and misogynistic mainstream understanding of what media should be.

Description of the Theoretical Perspective:

Queerbaiting

I specially chose this topic because of my personal relationship with *Wicked* and how the novel, musical, and its fandom, helped me proudly come out as sapphic. As I feel such a connection to Elphaba as a character, as well as to her ambiguous sexual identity, it was important to me to clarify with the source whether or not such ambiguity was intentional. When I travelled to Toronto to hear Dr. Maguire speak, there was a brief reception held in the building and I had the opportunity, trembling and cautious, to ask him directly “Is Elphaba 2SLGBTQIA+ [I said ‘gay’

in the moment[]?” His answer was not surprising to me, as he details that he did not want to make her anything explicit, because he wanted her to be a fully realized human being, explaining indeed that he hints at her bisexuality and at her possibly being intersex, as well. He wanted her to be emblematic of “the other” and told me the one thing he did not want her to be was a victim. It makes sense that Maguire emphasizes her general personhood rather than the identity politics of the character, but it still leaves fandom disappointed⁴. For commercial reasons, it is controversial to make such assertions about a popular character’s sexual identity to shut down such possible identifications and he theoretically may not have sold well or at all if he made her explicitly 2SLGBTQIA+, especially in 1995. However, what myself and other queer women or non-binary folks in the fandom, particularly friends of mine that I have spoken with, find bothersome about his ambiguous writing is that still, he chooses to remain ambiguous— not about Liir’s or other male character’s sexuality, but strictly about Elphaba and Glinda’s. The relationship is implied, teased even, in both the book and the musical, but never fully realized. This is indicative of not just heteronormative, misogynistic and homophobic commercial practices, but a fundamental misstep in the narratives in Elphaba’s story due to the levels of ambiguity and, ultimately, queer-baiting encountered by his 2SLGBTQIA+ readership.

Campy subversion of mainstream media

What then becomes troublesome is that the book itself is explicit in every way, except explicit in representations of members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. For this project, I analyzed 2SLGBTQIA+ fandom’s scholarship and its theories that are applicable to what I see in *Wicked*’s fandom discourse. The fandom theory I examined was solidified by Russo, Barton, Meggers, Limming, Jenkins, and Clemons’ work. These authors were helpful for my contextualizing of what it means to be a sapphic community online. This is because they each speak to being queer women in scholarship who establish a foundation for the discussion of representation in fandom. I, like the previous scholars, want to contribute to sapphic fandom as it subverts the media I enjoy. I utilized these scholars to determine how the narratives of romantic pairings in *Wicked* are determined through the queering of Maguire’s purposefully ambiguous text.

I likewise utilize and discuss the fandom communities of women and non-binary people who are creating queer fan production as a Camp concept. We, meaning sapphic creators, as Susan Sontag famously stated about Camp, are “esoteric— something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques” (2). This is the very understanding of why I involve myself in sapphic creative spaces, like fandom. After all, Maguire himself even wrote in a personal essay that “*Wicked* can sound like a campy send-up of the lovable MGM film—and it is partly meant to be just that—but *Wicked* is also a serious fantasy in the tradition, I hope, of T.H. White and Tolkien” (np). I feel comfort in reading Maguire’s words there— there is a queer tradition, then, of disrupting the normative nature of the mainstream with our said queerness. It is

⁴ This is deduced through the community discussions I have read and observed taking place on spaces like Tumblr and Archive of Our Own.

due to this sentiment that I feel understood in a way that I have not in mainstream creative spaces. This is also because “fandom scholars largely acknowledge the community as a female-dominated space, and one of the primary activities in which females engage is the reading and writing of fan fiction” (Meggers 2012 58). By females, Meggers is referring to heterosexual females. Therefore, as a creative outlet, Meggers observes that the representation there is palpable and ever evolving in terms of feminist creativity, but oddly enough the focus seems to be on heterosexual or MLM (men loving men) content. This is because of a perceived inherent reliability on men being so vital to sexuality.

Meanwhile, some lesbians and bi women or non-binary people want to circumvent the abundance of men and masculinity so present in almost every space they occupy, and have to learn to read for their existence between the lines. Limming suggests that fan work might fill a void:

What do these women glean from these texts, and how does that information shape their lives as lesbian women, as individuals, and as modern people in modern society? Most importantly, though, how does this literature help, if at all, to fill the void left by popular media that generally excludes images of lesbians or lesbianism (Limming 2011 88)?

This indeed makes queer women “the other” not just in mainstream heteronormative contexts, or mainstream 2SLGBTQIA+ contexts, but in fandom communities as well. This is harmful for queer women because even in spaces where they are meant to feel safe— their queer fandom communities — they are othered. Fan fiction sites are important space for queer individuals to navigate not only their identities, but their critical reading and writing skills— engaging in a Campy subversion of mainstream media. It becomes an important community, particularly for women and non-binary people to elevate their narratives and lived experiences, as both mainstream media and fan fiction culture by and large refuses to do so.

The Sapphic Everyday and representation

The biggest part of my webisode is the sapphic representation in it. But here I had to consider what type of representation I wanted to see. There is the obvious romantic representation, which is present in my webisode. More than that, however, is the representation of the Sapphic Everyday. Here I mean it quite literally— how does a sapphic individual go about their everyday life as a sapphic person? I wanted to explore this concept through the lens of how I perceive the world as a sapphic individual. Here, I do this through the very specific mode of sapphic friendship circles.

Sapphic friendship circles are a clear understanding of the Sapphic Everyday, because we are simply able to coexist as queer people experiencing similar understandings of the world. Karla Jay poignantly writes that “friendship plays a special role in the lives of lesbians and gay men as some of us are cut off by our families of origin and many more are not treated as equals of their heterosexual siblings. As a result, lesbians in general rely heavily on friendship networks

that may include former lovers, lesbian friends...” (np). This is exactly why I wanted friendship or platonic sapphism to be the central focus of the Sapphic Everyday.

Here, though, I have to wonder why that was the concept I chose to focus on, alongside fandom and participatory creation. Henry Jenkins is helpful here. As I was considering the nature of community and participatory culture, his scholarship was suggested to me in feedback and I find his understanding of what it means to be critical of fandom to be helpful insight for this project:

[Fandom] is a tricky space that I think we’re all struggling with right now. When I write—having come out of a certain generation of academics— I still feel an enormous pressure to someplace say, “Is this progressive or is this reactionary?” It is probably both progressive and reactionary in some ways, both good and bad...” (Jenkins 2012 10).

It is important if my work with fan production is progressive or reactionary because I did not fully see myself how I wanted to in Maguire’s work. By “reactionary” or “progressive,” here I mean am I reacting angrily to not seeing myself how I want to be seen or am I progressing the narrative of queer people. I do keep these concepts in the back of my mind whenever I consider why I want this representation from fandom and not another mode of media, or why I feel such a connection to fandom communities online— but why I am critical of them at the same time. I worry that I am being reactionary, hopeful, prejudicial, or perhaps too congratulatory of the content online. I should like to use this query to consider my positionally in this research and consider if I am being reactionary or progressive in undertaking this research of participatory cultures within the *Wicked* fandom.

Methodology:

Shifting from fandom to community co-creation:

My project’s shift from fandom to independent creation is a dramatic one. I consider it such because I was originally going to solely use members of the fandom community for this production. I ended up focusing more on the project participants’ identities as sapphic individuals, because community sapphic creation became the most important aspect of this project for me. My discussion of my own sapphic creation— which is combined with original fan productions depicting the two actors in a romantic relationship and fan fiction detailing what my interviewees would have liked to see in the original novel— assist my argument that sapphic communities are an essential space for creating representation.

To ground my script and the writing in the fan arguments that play out in digital spaces, I utilized the discourse and arguments of two separate authors, Boyd and Hine, as it was and is helpful to consider the technique of independent production in the two authors’ ethnographic epistemology. Each author considers the importance of online community, which was helpful for

me to consider why I want to engage in this space. Boyd and Hine's work was relevant for me, as it helped me consider my space within online creation by reading about these spaces before I started working within them.

Hine writes, and I agree, that "relying on recording activities both online and offline and then subsequently working through them with participants may be a useful form of co-presence [of online and offline communities]. This makes activities both observable and the topic of dialogue with participants, albeit not at the same time" (Hine 2017 NP). Boyd argues that "networked affordances do not dictate participants' behaviour, but they do configure the environment in a way that shapes participants' engagement" (Boyd 2011 40). This is an important analysis to me because I occupied both an online and offline existence as I created this project. The online was the consideration of fandom and alternative communities, as well as creating a webisode commenting on these communities. The offline, then, was my understanding of my sapphic everyday life and the process of writing and creating the web series offline. These are two analyses that I kept in mind when I analyzed the discourses of sapphic communities I interact with and created my webisode with.

The *Wicked* fandom and the patterns of their fan fiction demonstrates a desire for Gelphie to be canonized. Therefore, it was part of my methodology to examine the style explicit in Maguire's own writing, as using discourse analysis on the source material was a strong indicator of how fandoms read specific scenes as queer. It is here that I use his writing as a tool to examine how members of Tumblr and Ao3 (Archive of Our Own) have cemented their exegesis and readings of the characters, so I too may develop my own queering of Elphaba and Glinda as a romantic pairing. Three scholars use the method of gathering community creations to understand fandom communities— Ziegler, Paulus, and Woodside. They are medical and educational psychology scholars from the University of Tennessee, and their literature on understanding online communities by gathering community creations. Likewise, I did the same thing in my own creation. I have collected online to demonstrate the importance of this solidarity. The authors emphasize the importance of understanding that "since most research on informal learning positioned it as a process of individual acquisition and/or reflection, new research approaches may be needed to understand the informal *group* learning that is made visible through conversations such as those that occur in online communities" (Ziegler et al 2014). This methodology perfectly intertwines with the literature previously mentioned, as it focuses on attributing the discourses and knowledge of communities— leaving behind privileges and prejudices of individualized discourses.

Overview: Resources and Process

Ultimately, it became my priority to do this work because something was missing and it was my responsibility to fill a gap in theory through my lived experience and through sapphic alternative medias that I so admire, creating a space for them as both creation and art. In considering the aesthetic for the work I was dependent on equipment available to me and also fond of

the “homemade” aspect of my series and I thought it would speak loudly in the backdrop of fandom analysis. My concern at that point was gathering the folks that would be my interview subjects, or would join my cast and crew to complete the webisodes. My methods became interviews, editing, filming and editing the webisode and finally arriving here— collecting my findings. This meant that each aspect I had been considering for two years— participatory art, alternative media, webisodes, Camp, research-creation, reshifting sapphic representation, interviews, and a table read, involving my sapphic crew — were all to become reality.

My primary methodology was creative writing and filmmaking— creation as research. I situate myself within critical fan production through my own unique understandings of queer media and how I felt my narratives were ignored. I believe by utilizing my lived experience as a site of academic inquiry reached queer audiences and participants that have experienced similar feelings of isolation, exclusion, and prejudice. I did not want my voice to be the sole foundation of this project. I wanted to include the voices of other sapphic creatives in conversation with my lived experiences.

My process of collecting interviews proved to be an insightful and grounding task, as it solidified why I wanted to explore sapphic representations in alternative and mainstream media. My participants, Kim Jerkovits (a childhood friend of mine, out lesbian woman, and fan of *Wicked*), Emily Barber (an artist, educator, and sapphic person) and Mary Kroiter (an out sapphic person, a former active fandom member based in Montreal, and fan of *Wicked*), were instrumental in shaping how I considered why the everyday sapphic matters to narratives regarding our lives. Each of the interviewees are personal friends of mine, which was helpful when selecting them. I knew they had a strong understanding of sapphic creation and the *Wicked* fandom’s discussion of sapphic representation. Each of the interviews lasted for an hour and they were open ended conversations that addresses questions such as; What do you consider strong sapphic representation? Why do you think that? What intrigued you about the *Wicked* fandom? (See the appendix for the full list of interview questions). Through these conversations, we explored how too often we are given tragic narratives, noting how often lesbians or otherwise sapphic women are condemned to death or further tragedy once their queerness becomes evident rather than implied⁵. Through these conversations, my participants and myself deduced that all we truly want from sapphic media is to see the everyday— the mundane, the fluff, the love, yes, the arguments, but— as my participants most concretely asserted— we have seen enough trauma.

Following these interviews, I prepared to write, shoot and edit my webisode, which I titled “Good Fortune.” Once I was happy with the script, I sent it over to my friend and colleague,

⁵[All 225 Dead Lesbian and Bisexual Characters On TV, And How They Died](#)



Figure 1: Mara, Matilda, and Lyne on set.

Lyne Dwyer, who I hoped would act alongside me. As the scene was romantic in nature, I did not feel comfortable performing it with someone I did not know, or was not at least friends with. I was, at this time, overwhelmed with how to begin, so I began asking my colleagues, who I knew to be sapphic, if they were interested in assisting me on-set. With the support of a small grant from the Museum of Jewish Montreal (MJM), I was able to pay my cast, crew, and interview participants for their work. This not only incentivized my small cast and crew, but it made me feel better that I was providing compensation for the labour on my set.

This led to the weekend-long shooting of *Mazel*, episode one— “Good Fortune”. My co-producer and director of photography, Matilda Cerone, my mic operator Mara Zapata, myself, and Lyne began shooting the episode. March 4th and 6th, 2022 were exciting and went by without a hitch, thankfully. The atmosphere of four sapphic creators was tangible and heartwarming, truly. We discussed script alterations, continuity, lighting, shot setups— it felt like a professional set, but still DIY as our burgeoning professionalism as filmmakers and artists was being fostered.

To cement fandom and Camp on set, this was demonstrated in several ways— simple decisions like using a handheld filming style as opposed to a tripod was a nod to the original “films” I made as a young girl with friends during play dates. Another example of fandom taking precedent on set was the plethora of little instances wherein we discussed *Wicked* or *Carmilla*, as sapphic fans, and how we might integrate their styles of storytelling into our webisode. For instance, *Carmilla* is shot like a play— a single, wide angle shots of the actors with no cuts. While

we enjoyed this format, we chose to take inspiration from the homemade aspect of the show's aesthetics with our own flare— a handheld camera, peachy, soft filters, and the simple set dressing. As well, we debated how we would incorporate fandom within the story, I wanted to insert nods to the *Wicked* narrative within the characterization of Lindsay and Miriam, the two protagonists. Fans of *Wicked*, hopefully, would notice the characterizations of Miriam and Lindsay— Lindsay is perhaps more flippant about her studies while inhabiting the “blonde” stereotypes of the character Glinda that she is based on. Miriam, on the other hand, is a nod to Elphaba through her studious, more serious nature as well as her darker aesthetic. Alongside this, the atmosphere on set was jovial almost— we each wanted to create a space where our different perspectives were accommodated and there was a calm lack of hierarchy on set. The jovial aspect almost reads as Camp to me in some ways, with us using fandom and storytelling to queer filmmaking. A literal example of this was when we all wore a similar outfit on set one day— plaid shirts, beanies, and Doc Martens— jokingly called the “Lesbian Uniform.” Each of these little things contributed to our establishment of a queer or sapphic film crew and cast intertwining fandom and mainstream storytelling.

The shooting was completed at this point and Matilda and myself arranged to edit the episode together. This involved many Wetransfers back and forth, alongside detailed edits, colour correction, and audio mixing from our mutual friend, Alice Reiter. What we produced was an honest, episode that we were to discuss our project with with the MJM community members, as per the requirements for the microgrant program. The event, titled “What does representation mean? A Script Reading for *Mazel* with Hannah Grover” occurred on Monday, March 28th via Zoom. During this event, we shared a brief clip of the episode we filmed, which was followed by a table reading of a potential second episode, that I wrote in preparation for the event. There were three components to this event: screening a small clip from the episode (the scene when Miriam describes how she reads *Wicked* as queer), a script reading of a new episode that is yet to be filmed, and a community talkback with the 21 attendees. Thankfully, the event was well attended and I received feedback on what the Jewish and sapphic communities at large would like to see from a piece of work like *Mazel*. The attendees were diverse— from all age groups ranging from my age (28 at the time of writing this) or a bit younger to older adults. They were all eager to explore the themes in my webisode, particularly the sapphic representation and the Jewish representation, obviously. One person in the audience, a representative from JQueer, a Montreal-based Jewish 2LGBTQIA+ organization, was sapphic herself and discussed how she was excited to see this project being realized. As well, I explained that I came at this project hoping to create something I saw myself in— that discussed being gay, being Jewish, unsure, but at least outwardly confident, and just trying to survive and honour those two identities. In the feedback, we discussed BIPOC visibility— particularly the visibility of Sephardic Jews— alongside disability, the conflicts of being queer roommates, and navigating their relationship while harbouring romantic feelings for one another and their insecurity in their sexuality. This was an exciting prospect for me because, once we begin casting the webisode we want to release to the public, this will give

me more opportunities to meet members of the Sephardic community in Montreal, alongside queer members of the Jewish community. Following this, we discussed homes as safe spaces for queer people— what does it mean to be away from your parents, living with another queer person, allowing that space to be a haven of sorts, where you can be yourself? The event gave me confidence in my writing capabilities, as well as boosted my confidence as an actor and filmmaker generally. I do not wish to speak for everyone else on set, but I feel as though we achieved a strong and positive space for specifically Jewish 2SLGBTQIA+ alternative media and representation to blossom.

It is important to note the intersections of the plot, as it intertwined the experiences of each person on set. The web series follows two young women, Miriam and Lindsay, through graduate school as they navigate the development of their respective sexualities. It is an important exploration of various privileges and lived experiences as they pertain to sexuality, religious upbringing, and political endeavours. Each topic was explored by the characters— Miriam as a Jewish out lesbian who expresses a deep interest in queer fandom, particularly the book *Wicked*, as she sees herself portrayed positively in the queer undertones of the narrative, and Lindsay, a closeted bisexual woman who struggles with embracing hers due to internalized biphobia. After a few months of being roommates in Montreal, the two women forge a friendship that later develops into a romance that allows for the flourishing of their respective marginalized identities.

The webisode presented for this thesis, titled “Good Fortune”, shows Miriam and Lindsay working side by side on course work. They have some playful banter about the respective state of each of their term papers. The audience realizes that Lindsay is perhaps less restrained by deadlines and has yet to complete a term paper for a class, due in a few days. Miriam chides her, playfully, for this. In response, Lindsay inquires about Miriam’s paper, ultimately finding out that her roommate has written about sapphic representation in *Wicked*, which she finds to contain representations of queer women. Miriam then comes out to Lindsay, who exclaims she’s glad her friend could confide in her, but ends up leaving rather abruptly to “get some work done”. The two women meet up later in the evening, back at home, when Lindsay presents Miriam with a signed copy of *Wicked*, hoping to support her in her interest and perhaps learn more about it in turn. This leads to a more than platonic hug and some awkward flirting. Changing the subject, Lindsay then expresses her thanks for being included in Miriam’s Chanukah celebrations, to which Miriam exclaims “Mazel Tov on your first Chanukah!” After hearing the meaning behind Mazel Tov, “congratulations” or “good fortune”, more directly”, Lindsay, rather abruptly kisses Miriam, who slowly but surely returns the kiss. Confirming Miriam liked and welcomed the kiss, the two women begin festivities by lighting the candles for the first night of Chanukah together.



Figure 2: Online poster for script reading event.

Findings

In initiating this research-creation – I had several questions. What does making a fan series with other fans reveal about what kinds of representations sapphic fans are seeking? How might using a creative production as a prompt, open up discussions and future prospects for positive representations? What does it mean to be a sapphic artist intent on developing art that speaks to not just my experience, but other sapphic folks who will ultimately consume my content or work? In considering these questions, the form of my project, a set of interviews, a webisode, and table reading of a second script revealed to me that sapphic representation is an art that can and should embody the everyday. What the sapphic folks I spoke to want to see is our day to day, particularly detailing our lives beyond our romantic interactions. It was important to me to do this webisode to explore the importance of collaborative filmmaking. The table read and talk back served as a creative mode of research into critical fandom production and the necessity of independent creative outlets for marginalized communities, specifically sapphic communities. Here, the detailing of the project’s preparation, production, and post-production indicate the importance of community-based narratives to explore.

Preparation and Interviews:

The preparation for this project involved the perspective of three sapphic individuals in my life who detailed what types of representation they would like to see. This practice was immensely helpful for me to both gather inspiration for my script, as well as its solidification of what I previously assumed— there needs to be more variety of people, settings, class, race, religion, or gender identities within sapphic media. The interviews were largely informal in nature, due to the fact that I was friends with each of the participants. I met with each of them on Zoom and recorded our meeting, which lasted about an hour each time. Aside from the notion that my sapphic subjects wanted more portrayals of the everyday life of a sapphic person, based on the writer’s perspective, as a sapphic person, they also detailed that they wanted to see more sapphic friend circles. There is always a variety of experiences— while we may discuss similar interpretations of being closeted or out, we each have different class backgrounds, faiths, races, abilities,

or interests. These all contribute to the uniqueness of each person's sapphicness. In the conversations, I realized that we draw on media ancestors from a range of forms— from mainstream depictions of lesbians to more alternative ones, like the *Carmilla* series. I appreciated considering who came before us as sapphic folks and creators in this particular cultural realm; as did my interviewees.

During this discussion, one of my interviewees, Emily, referenced shows like *The L Word*. While the show focuses on the love lives of each of the characters, it centred an all-sapphic friend group and their daily lives as people beyond their romantic attachments, and in doing so, they explore issues of race, class, different sexual or gender identities, or different life goals. The reboot, *Generation Q*, does an even better job of exploring more identities within the 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym. This show was important to me when I was closeted, as it was for many young sapphics my age— as well as out sapphics in the early 2000's when it first aired. The show and its reboot continue to be influential to my work as an adult and emerging sapphic creator because it does a good job of exploring the intricacies, not only of being queer romantically, but of being queer platonically. This helped me explore the relationship between my characters Miriam and Lindsay because their initial relationship is platonic, eventually evolving into a complicated romantic one that questions where one can be “closeted” or “out,” based on your physical surroundings.

The interviews were a fantastic tool for my writing process because, due to these discussions, I allowed myself to consider my interpretations of queer friendships, the mundane in queerness, and what ones physical space (ie a home) means for one being out. The concepts of everyday life, sapphic friendship circles, and the safe space of the home were common themes with each interview subject. This indicated to me that these were massive themes that I would like to see more of in mainstream sapphic representation. Thereby, I decided that each of these themes were to be explored in my script and were taken into consideration as we approached production.

Production:

The process of producing this project was invaluable to me when I consider what I did learn about sapphic representation by doing a production myself. It made me consider what goes into the budgeting, the revisions, the team input, the rehearsals, schedules of each person on set, the boundaries, the oversights, and the pride that comes with creating something of your own. Specifically, sapphic representation in community co-creation allowed me to explore beyond the limitations of textual analysis that I would have gleaned from doing a single written thesis as opposed to a research-creation project. The on-set experience provided me with what I envisioned going into this project would mean to me— it tested my skills as a sapphic creator and made me question why it was not simply my perspective that was important. Sapphic representation

through the creation of this project meant considering lived experiences of closeted individuals, the perspectives of non-Jewish and Jewish folks interacting with Jewish faith, and the different abilities of each person on set. My hearing loss and the community support of me being unafraid to ask people to repeat what they said became an act of care and accessibility on-set, which I read as a queering of mainstream production. It also made me consider what I learned about fan production by doing this project. I learned that fandom, while not the primary focus of my final project, serves as a foundational influence for my work. I consider my final webisode to be a homage to fandom and sapphic creation. While *Wicked* does play a part in the dialogue between the two characters—the queerness of the story itself being one of the things that bring the two women together—fandom became less and less of a consideration as production continued. It became more of a homage to the project’s beginning rather than a major point of contention for my analysis. While I maintain that the project hints and nods, similarly to Maguire’s hinting and nodding at queerness, at fandom involvement and fan production, intended audience goes beyond other fans of *Wicked*. The audience then shifts from other fans to folks looking for variety in sapphic and generally queer, or even Jewish, narratives. I feel that my experience as a Jewish sapphic woman was a unique one for this project, and it came about because I do not see as much representation of Jewish sapphism in the media I consume. I felt that my perspective here would be helpful, considering the goal of diversifying the sapphic voices in my webseries. The visibility of a variety of marginalized identities becomes the primary focus of the webisode, rather than the interactions with fandom, while still keeping the stories roots in queer analysis or sapphic fan interpretations of mainstream media.

Post-Production and Outreach

Upon completion of this webisode, the first audience was the Museum of Jewish Montreal. They were an instrumental first viewing, because they echoed my experiences as a Jewish sapphic woman, but they also provided differing perspectives, as their Jewish upbringings were all different from mine. They were raised in diverse Jewish homes, in cities that had large Jewish communities, or they practiced Jewish rituals far more often or “more correctly” than I, due to their proximity to representation. I was provided with feedback regarding BIPOC visibility, disability visibility, religiosity and Jewish cultural identity, as well as the subtleties of using “bubble” instead of “grandma.” This talkback also allowed me to consider my plans for dissemination of this project, upon completion.

Unfortunately, while this was a huge high, oversights happened here on my end as a researcher. In my excitement to share this project, I used a still of my co-actor in the webisode and I kissing in a collection of stills shared on Facebook. This became an issue, as my co-actor was not out on this particular social media platform and they were unintentionally outed as a result of my

action. What I learned from my own oversight becomes ever the more important for researchers to discuss dissemination with their participants long before the project is completed and this means the specifics of each social media platforms, which stills can and cannot be used, and to what degree each person is comfortable with being out. The nature of the project— sapphic identity— is complicated because one does not necessarily need to be fully out to participate and the risk of outing needs to always be mitigated and prevented here with kindness and communication on the part of the researcher and participants.

Currently, my plans for dissemination of this particular webisode are limited. My teams' plan is to use it as a proof of concept for a grant this summer, as we continue to plot out the rest of the series. We are currently hoping to film eight episodes of this season, should we secure funding, and search for a home for this web series through queer media channels on YouTube or other queer creative spaces online. While the future of this web series is up in the air currently, I predict that this project's home, for the time being, will be in online queer or Jewish spaces, as was intended from its inception.

Conclusion:

When I first initiated this research creation, I identified myself as a fan-creator. I wanted fandom to be considered a legitimate form of creation and alternative media. I began by using my own story and I drew on the support of fan friends to help. I used my passion for *Wicked* as a plot point within my larger story of coming out and of exploring my Jewish identity. To broaden this personal and subjective experience, I conducted interviews with fan friends and I produced a collaborative production in the form of a webisode, titled "Good Fortune". My goal with this project from the onset was to create a piece of media that I saw myself in and I am glad for the incorporation of my friends' perspectives, because it showed me why my story is important when it interacts with my community at large, both in person and in digital spaces.

Throughout this experience, I learned so much about alternative media and fan culture. Primarily, though, I learned a great deal about myself as a creative and academic. Through alternative production, I now know that I want to make sure the teams I work with are diverse and that we create trust on the site through open dialogue and consistent learning. In taking these practices forward, I want to use media to open dialogue, because this is so much a part of fan culture – the conversational mode. Vetting is key here, as well. Because I wanted the conversation to centre the lived experiences of people I identify with, namely sapphic and Jewish circles, I vetted two times for my project- with my interview subjects and with the Museum of Jewish Montreal. I sent them both my script and during the two events, I received feedback from both my interviewees and my MJM focus group relating to what they liked, did not like, and what they want to see. Test screenings are not unique, but it was a good practice. I reached out to the communities that I want to be a part of because I wanted to make sure they felt seen and that their perspectives

played a role in how my final product turned out. This practice was incredibly helpful and I look forward to carrying it in to my future work as a multimedia artist and academic.

I wanted this project to be a homage to fan creations. Fan communities and fan culture teach us so much about conversational media. My teen years and young adulthood are a testament to how having conversations about media evolves this way. Due to being a part of the *Wicked* fandom growing up, I felt safe exploring my identity as a queer person because of the discussions that were happening around Elphaba and Glinda's relationship— everyone was eager to discuss queerness in this space. However, while I understood the importance of fandom in my daily life, I underestimated how broad fan production is. It can be as small as a five hundred word fan fiction on Archive of Our Own to as large as an international, multimillion dollar franchise like *Wicked*. These are both forms of fan production and should be respected as independent creations and a strong example of the evolutions of conversational media.

Due to the many conversations and alterations I made throughout this project, I understood that both alternative creation and fandom are a powerful form of community. I underestimated the power of the creators themselves, including my own work. Regarding my personal identities, I was able to explore being Jewish through the MJM event; queer, regarding my privileges as a cis woman who is largely able-bodied and the best way is to open conversations about these privileges— as an active member and ally; and hard of hearing. To speak to my HoH identity, I have not yet incorporated that aspect of myself in my work. In fact, there were times I pretended it did not exist. In the future, I want to make that a bigger part of my work as an artist and academic, as it is a huge part of my everyday life and I should be creating spaces where I can make the most difference.

My final takeaway from this project is how I learned that the best working environment for me is in community. I like to be working with other people. While some writers find it more beneficial to be in their own head while they write, I prefer to compose a draft, discuss it with like-minded individuals as soon as possible, and create a project together through this communication. The sapphic community that was created through this project will be carried on to the future development of *Mazel* as its own evolution of conversational media. Thankfully, this sapphic community gave me enough brains, heart, nerve, and home to take up space in my corner of the internet.

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Appendices:

A) Interview questions

1. Do you identify as a sapphic individual? What identities within the sapphic umbrella do you closely align with and why?
2. How big of a role does this identity play in the media you consume? Why do you think that is? Is it strictly seeing yourself or lived experiences on screen, or is it something else?
3. What do you consider strong sapphic representation? Why do you think that?
4. What intrigued you about the *Wicked* fandom?
5. Do you think Gregory Maguire or Stephen Schwartz successfully depicted othered women? What specifically stood out to you in their depiction of women as a whole?
6. After reading my script, what discussions surrounding fandom intrigued you the most?
7. Do you feel that my script provides positive and accurate representations of sapphic individuals? Why? Why not?
8. What do you look for in sapphic content that you consume?
9. How best can mainstream and/or alternative medias depict sapphic folks?
10. How do you see sapphic media evolving in the future or how would you like to see it evolve?

B) Script (excluding on-set revisions)

"Mazel"
Episode of a Tentative Web Series

SCENE ONE

Setting: Bright Montreal apartment; front living space. Visible is a wooden table pressed against a white wall.

Warm lights, an ornate mirror, and various art pieces litter the wall. The south-facing window is open and a light breeze allows the sheer white curtain to flow into the room.

LINDSAY sits at the table, exchanging brief glances with her roommate, MIRIAM, who is nose deep in her coursework, as was customary for her. Recently, the two women have grown closer, chatting into the night about their hopes for the upcoming semester, their passion projects, their histories.

Smiling at the thought, and taking comfort in the closeness of her new friend, LINDSAY cannot help but notice the sway of MIRIAM's long, dark, hair, framing her face as it swoops down either side—dark chocolate brackets. She looked beautiful, really. She blushes and glances away at the thought, anticipating a reprimand from her friend. It's impolite to stare, anyways.

MIRIAM, indeed, notices her friend's reticence and chuckles softly to herself. Despite appearances— that being a feigned interest in her book— her warmth towards her endearing roommate is unmistakable in her face.

MIRIAM waves across the room to get her friend's attention.

LINDSAY briefly glances in her direction, caught.

MIRIAM:

How's your night been?

LINDSAY:

Uh.... I mean, it's been fine. I haven't done much.

MIRIAM:

Oh yeah? Did you get that paper for Miranda's class done already?

Her roommates eyes widen in panic. She'd completely forgotten.

LINDSAY:

Oh fuck! Is that due tonight? I've completely lost track.

MIRIAM:

No, no, no. Sorry, didn't mean to freak you out. It's not due till Tuesday, it's okay.

LINDSAY:

Oh thank G-d. I almost had a heart attack.

MIRIAM:

Nah, you're good. That being said, maybe you can get a head start on it now, instead of staring into space.

MIRIAM tilts her chin downward and smirks at her friend, playfully.

LINDSAY:

Wow, okay. I'll have you know, I wasn't staring into space.

I was— it doesn't matter. But I'm NOT working on my paper tonight. Are you kidding? I've got like three days until the deadline.

MIRIAM:

Well, suit yourself. Just don't talk my ear off again when you get another 70% because you wrote it two hours before

LINDSAY:

That was once and it was an hour before the deadline. A remarkable feat that I got that grade at all.

MIRIAM:

Impressive. Imagine the grade you'd get if you wrote it three days ahead of time instead.

LINDSAY sticks her tongue out at her roommate and the two chuckle at one another.

LINDSAY:

What're you writing about for that paper? Have *you* finished it even?

MIRIAM:

I have, as a matter of fact. I don't harass unjustly.

LINDSAY:

Well... what did you write about?

MIRIAM:

It's a little personal, but—

LINDSAY:

OH! I'm so, so sorry. I didn't- well, no I did- no, you

don't need to tell-

MIRIAM:

No, it's completely fine! Sorry, that was a preface, not
offence.

LINDSAY:

Really, if you don't want to tell me-

MIRIAM:

I do. It's kind of embarrassing, though.

LINDSAY:

Take it from someone who gets embarrassed whenever she
opens her mouth, I'm sure it's fine.

The two smile at each other.

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MIRIAM:

It's so weird that we've never talked about this. I'm writing about *The Wizard of Oz*, actually. It's really lame, but I'm a huge fan of it and *Wicked*. Have you heard of *Wicked*?

That's so funny.

LINDSAY:

Like the show? I never took you for a musical person!

MIRIAM:

I'm not a huge fan of the show, but the book it's based on is about the Witch and... I don't know, it's always kind of stuck with me. Especially since it's such a big part of the queer community, it's nice to see a woman's narrative like that, I guess?

She glances at her roommate, hoping to gauge her reaction.

LINDSAY looks confused, but, Miriam hopes, interested?

MIRIAM:

Anyways, I'm just writing about how I felt seen, I guess, by this book, especially because of the relationship between two women in it. I think it's pretty gay. So I'm writing about that.

LINDSAY stares at her, nonplused.

LINDSAY:

That's actually really cool. Does that mean you're...

MIRIAM:

Gay? Yeah.

LINDSAY:

[Smiling] Oh.

MIRIAM:

That's okay with you, yeah?

LINDSAY:

Oh, yeah, absolutely. It's great. It's awesome. I... thanks
for sharing that with me. I feel pretty special.

MIRIAM:

Yeah, uh... thank you. No problem. That was a weird sentence,

but yeah, no worries. I'm glad I can tell you that.

LINDSAY:

Of course... you know what? You've.... Inspired me to get some

work done. I think I'm gonna go to the library for a bit,

if that's okay?

MIRIAM:

Oh, uh, yeah. Sure. You don't need my permission.

LINDSAY:

Thanks, uh I mean. Cool. Yeah, I'll be back.

MIRIAM:

I might head out for a bit to get some-

LINDSAY closes the door behind her before she can finish her sentence. She stares, befuddled, before returning to her book, confused by the conversation she just had with

her roommate.

SCENE TWO.

Setting: LINDSAY and MIRIAM'S apartment, front hallway and living room.

LINDSAY enters the apartment's hallway.

She is a complete mess. She stops for a moment to catch her breath and smooth her now frizzy hair, which are traditionally kept in perfect condition. She is carrying a book behind her back and looks around the room, cautiously, as if

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expecting someone else to be there. When she finds the room barren, she lets out a sigh of relief.

She then walks to the far left side of the dorm room, her roommate's side, searching for a place to hide the book, but she ultimately ends up with it clutched in her hands when she hears the doorknob jiggle.

MIRIAM enters the apartment. LINDSAY gasps and hides the book behind her back.

MIRIAM:

Hey, I'm home! I was—

LINDSAY:

HEY!

The two exchange awkward glances and smile, talking over one another, asking the other to speak first.

Silence finally falls over the two young women and MIRIAM speaks first.

MIRIAM:

Are you okay?

LINDSAY:

Yeah, I'm fine. I'm so fine. Uh...

MIRIAM:

[Chuckles} Yeah? Fine? You seem really nervous.

LINDSAY:

Oh yeah, uh... I got you something!

MIRIAM:

Oh?

Her interest is piqued and she takes a step closer to her side of the room to meet her roommate.

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The two women look at one another, each anticipating a response.

MIRIAM:

Well, are you gonna tell me what it is?

LINDSAY:

Uh....

MIRIAM takes a step closer and tries to put a hand on her friend's shoulder.

MIRIAM:

Are you okay, Lindsay? You're so jumpy.

LINDSAY:

[Moving away from MIRIAM] Yeah, I'm cool.

LINDSAY moves back to sit on MIRIAM's bed, but misses completely, landing on the floor, hard. The book that was once in her hand flies out and falls beside her.

MIRIAM rushes to catch her, mid-fall, but is not quick enough. She helps her up.

MIRIAM:

Jesus, are you okay?!

LINDSAY nods, chuckling awkwardly. She looks away from

MIRIAM.

[REDACTED]

laugh.

MIRIAM:

[REDACTED]

[Chuckles in return] Okay, I'm sorry. I'm trying not to

[REDACTED]

LINDSAY:

[REDACTED]

Oh my G-d, that was ridiculous. Haha. No, go ahead and

[REDACTED]

laugh. I completely deserve it.[She smiles at her friend].

[REDACTED]

here. Let me help you.

MIRIAM:

[REDACTED]

[Smiles back, endeared] Aww, Lindsay, that was rough. No,

[REDACTED]

She grabs her hand and helps her back on her feet. MIRIAM notices the book on the floor between them.

[REDACTED]

LINDSAY:

It wasn't making me nervous! But, uh.. yeah. Sorry, it's probably scratched or something now. Uh.. Sorry, I'm being so paranoid.

MIRIAM:

It's just the floor, Lindsay. I'm sure it's fine.

LINDSAY:

No, I know. It's just that it's important, I think. Maybe.

Uh and I.. ugh. I should've been more careful. Let me...

LINDSAY:

I'll get it! It's okay. [Retrieves the book from the ground and inspects it] Yeah, it's got a little bit of dirt on it.

Just the slightest, haha. We need to-

Tidy up, yeah. Before inspection.

MIRIAM:

[Pointing down to it] Is this the present? The thing that was making you so nervous?

MIRIAM:

No, it's fine! I'll... [Begins reaching down, as well].

MIRIAM:

The two exchange a glance.

LINDSAY:

Uh. [Breaks the glance, staring down at the book]. Well,

here you go! Sorry for the dramatics. [Hands it to her

friend}.

MIRIAM inspects the cover, which reads *Queering The Wizard*

of Oz.

MIRIAM:

[Beat] Huh.

LINDSAY:

[Beat] Okay, let me explain.

MIRIAM:

This wouldn't have anything to do with our talk?

LINDSAY:

No, that's where you're wrong. It has everything to do with

[REDACTED]
our talk!

[REDACTED]
MIRIAM:

[REDACTED]
[Chuckles] I-I know, Lindsay. That's why I said-

LINDSAY:

So, obviously I was thinking about you! And how I was with you while you were sharing something so important to you, I guess wanna say... with me? You know, that *Wicked* stuff.

[Beat]It sounds really, really important. It might even make me like musicals, or the book too, if it turned out to be an actual thing... Anyways! I wanted to thank you for being so... open with me. About, you know, stories that you like, your interpretations of them, and... you know, recommending it to me...

[REDACTED]
MIRIAM:

[REDACTED]
Uh huh. No problem.[Beat] And...

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
` LINDSAY:

[REDACTED]
And obviously, you know, with you being... uh.. a lesbian, as

[REDACTED]
well, it must be tough.

[REDACTED]
Uh-

MIRIAM:

[REDACTED]
LINDSAY:

Oh my G-d, I don't mean, like, it's a bad thing! Oh gosh.
Not what I meant. Not what I meant. I meant it must suck
because you don't see a lot of lesbians and they're... uh...

[REDACTED]
MIRIAM:

[REDACTED]
[Squinting] Marginalized?

LINDSAY:

YES! Marginalized! Thank you. I figured, uh... that it might
cool if you had a book about the story you enjoy so much,
about it also being pretty gay, you know, since you read so
much, and I saw this and thought about, you know, our talk,
and I thought about how much you taught me, and how you're
so cool, and such a big part of my life, and I just wanted
to-

MIRIAM:

It's okay. Take a breath.

LINDSAY:

I don't know, it's stupid. I thought you'd like it, but it's totally understandable if you think it's weird that I bought you this.

MIRIAM:

Lindsay, I don't think it's weird at all. It's so sweet of you to think of me. Thank you so much!

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MIRIAM goes to hug her friend. The two embrace and LINDSAY holds on longer than what would be considered platonic.

MIRIAM:

Uh, hey- [Pats her back].

LINDSAY:

[Bucks away quickly] Oh gosh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Ugh...

The two exchange looks. MIRIAM is smiling ear to ear.

MIRIAM laughs, looking down and shaking her head.

LINDSAY:

Sorry.

MIRIAM:

You're so cute.

LINDSAY:

Uh-

MIRIAM:

Uh- I don't mean, like-

LINDSAY:

No, I know! Well, like, I wouldn't mind if you DID mean...

but... you didn't, so.

MIRIAM:

I mean... Yeah... well.

The two women avert their eyes, looking anywhere but at one another.

LINDSAY:

WELL, I have a class coming up.

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MIRIAM:

Right!

LINDSAY:

Uh, I'm glad I could get you your book! [Glances at the menorah] Wow, you finally put it up! Hey, uh, side note.

Totally unrelated. I mean, I guess not. This book could be a Hanukkah present? But thanks for including me in Hanukkah this year. It really means a lot to this... goy, right?

MIRIAM:

Haha, yeah. It's 'goy'. A non-Jew. Not a problem. It's my

pleasure. Mazel tov on your first Chanukah!

LINDSAY:

I'm sorry, I don't know what that means.

MIRIAM:

[Laughs] Really? Huh. Mazel tov always seems so common.

[Beat] It means 'congratulations'. Or 'good fortune', more directly.

LINDSAY:

Huh. I've been needing a lot of that lately.

MIRIAM:

What do you mean? A lot of what?

Good fortune. [Takes a deep breath] Uh...

LINDSAY:

LINDSAY walks up to MIRIAM and kisses her. MIRIAM hesitates, but slowly returns the kiss.

LINDSAY pulls back. MIRIAM stares, speechless.

MIRIAM:

LINDSAY:

Sorry. I really should've asked first. That wasn't cool.

Uh, I mean, yeah. But.. uh. It's fine! I mean, *I'm* okay

with it.

LINDSAY:

Really? Uh, wow, okay. That's great. [Finger guns at MIRIAM as she walks backwards towards the door] Well, this has been fun! I guess I'll see you after class then! Bye! She dashes out of the room, closing the door behind her.

MIRIAM smiles and looks down at her new book, admiring it.

She chuckles to herself one last time as she sits down on her bed to read.