

Ways of Percieving

Curation Project / Essay

Student Name: Madeleine Povey

P Number: 1900721

Programme of Study: MArts Games Design

Module: ADAD4019

Tutor's Name: Ryan Moule

Word Count: 1677

The exhibition I intend to curate, titled *I'm Real and I Don't Feel Like Boys*, consists of three music videos by the artist Hayley Kiyoko, with the title itself derived from the lyrics of Kiyoko's 'coming out' song (Wenner and Stuart, 2019), *Girls Like Girls*.

Centring around showcasing the potential for positive endings for sapphic characters, given historically they have been denied, perhaps in part due to tropes long established as a result of the restrictions imposed upon films by the Hays Code; the exhibition aims to dispel the idea that sexual relationships between women are unnatural or immoral and should be hidden, and to celebrate rather than conceal lesbianism.

For this reason, I intend for the videos to be shown in succession on the Big Screen in Castle Square, Swansea – a “25-square-meter” (Wikipedia, n.d), outdoors screen, in the centre of a busy city. As John Berger says, “the meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it” (1977, p.29); therefore, *where* one views the exhibition is important, as the context in which it is seen can either amplify or eradicate its message: hosting it in an open, public space, therefore, is to emphasise the goal of celebrating and refusing to conceal sapphic love, whereas to host it in a building, behind closed doors and hidden away from public view would be to enforce antiquated notions this exhibition intends to oust.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

The above figures show a map (of Castle Square) showing the location of the screen (1) and edits showing the exhibition in-situ (2,3,4).

Additionally, I intend for the videos to be shown over a week's period, beginning on the 20th of April and showing for the final time on the 26th; the latter date is recognised as *Lesbian Visibility Day*, while the week as a whole has, since 2020, been established as *Lesbian Visibility Week* by *DIVA Magazine* (Wakefield, 2020).

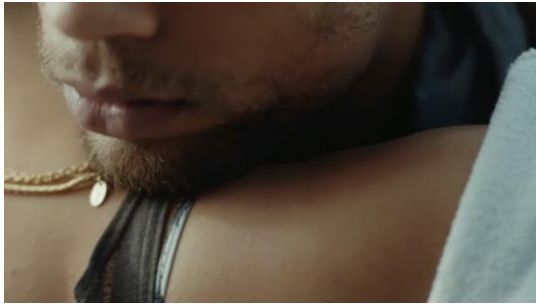
While “Kiyoko is no way the first successful lesbian artist, nor is she the only queer girl making pop music with a wide audience” (Skelley, 2018), for a lot of young women she is one of the most well-known given her music is relatively “mainstream” despite it not making any attempt to conceal her sexuality (Smyth, 2019). Initially reluctant to come out to her audience and to label herself as a lesbian artist, the “outpour of support” she received helped her realise she “was helping normalise that for so many other people” (Gulla, 2019). The use of female pronouns in her songs rather than gender-neutral terms is important for this reason, as well as allowing her fans to connect with her music; the heteronormative lyrics of the music she listened to while growing up made her feel as though the songs “weren’t made for [her]”, therefore she provides her listeners with songs they can identify with.

Referring back to the Berger quote, the order of the videos is important, as “what comes immediately after” an image (in this case, a video) alters its meaning (1977, p.29).

Therefore, the three should be shown in a specific order, starting with *This Side of Paradise*, *Feelings* then *Girls Like Girls*, as in this order one could see them as forming a narrative, beginning with self-discovery (*This Side of Paradise*), moving through self-acceptance (*Feelings*), to conclude with an uplifting ending (*Girls Like Girls*).

Figure 5

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQzbk5HY8TE>



The first of the three, *This Side of Paradise*, was released on the 12th of November 2014. As this was several months prior to *Girls Like Girls*, Kiyoko was not officially 'out' when the song or video were released, therefore the meaning was originally obscured; Kiyoko herself revealed the true nature of the song later. In a video of Kiyoko speaking at one of her concerts, she describes the "paradise" she invented for herself in her own mind during her years in elementary school, with that "safe haven" being a "place where there was no judgement" and where "the girls [she] liked, liked [her] back" (sierra, 2017); this "paradise" in her mind is, as she says in the video, what the song is about. This was hinted to in a 2014 interview, where she revealed the inspiration for the song's title:

This Side of Paradise was inspired by the author F. Scott Fitzgerald's book. I immediately fell in love with the phrase and wanted to write my own interpretation of it. It represents a world where you can finally be with the one you love, and the only time you can be, is in your dreams (iheartcomix)

One must consider this when watching the video (which was directed not by Kiyoko but RJ Sanchez, a director she collaborated with on a previous video), which may otherwise be misinterpreted given it shows Kiyoko with a man.

The majority of the video centres around Kiyoko standing on a beach, watching a man, a pane of glass separating them. Occasionally, she envisions herself beside him, but herself is always on the other side of the glass, only ever seeing the envisioned couple from a distance. Barthes and Heath said, "man likes signs and likes them clear" (Barthes, R. & Heath, S., 1977, p.29), therefore if one were to look at the simplest (and thus clearest) possible signified meaning of these scenes, it would be that she feels distanced from him and men in general, with the glass between them allowing her a glimpse of the life she should want but does not, yet is unable to say so as she is not out. The glass breaking at the end perhaps suggests she accepts that what lies beyond it (that is to say, him and heterosexuality) is not what she wants.

Figure 6

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0MT8SwNa_U





The second video, *Feelings*, was released on the 19th of October 2017. By this point in her career, Kiyoko was directing her own videos, as is the case with this one.

Though perhaps less symbolic than the aforementioned video, *Feelings* is significant as it was made after the other two videos and marks a continuation of Kiyoko's determination to celebrate women-loving-women in her music and videos. Although the lyrics of the song do not specify the gender of Kiyoko's love interest, the accompanying video does; she is played by Alexandra Rodriguez, as per the end credits.

Several other videos were released between *Girls Like Girls* and *Feelings*; however, it marks an important milestone for Kiyoko, whose insistence on filming music videos featuring female love interests has been questioned by "music industry execs" who asked if she were "doing another music video about girls?" Kiyoko criticised this attitude by stating, "Taylor Swift sings about men in every single song and music video, and no one complains that she's unoriginal" (Sullivan, 2019).

Figure 7

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0MT8SwNa_U



Kiyoko released the music video for *Girls Like Girls* on 24th of June 2015, some months after the release of the song itself. Kiyoko co-directed the video with Austin S. Winchel, as per the end credits. The video depicts Kiyoko's "vision of what [she'd] always dreamt of seeing in a relationship between two best friends" (Spanos, 2018).

Kiyoko's video shows something relatively rare: a happy ending for a sapphic couple.

LGBT+ characters (predominantly lesbians) are significantly more likely to die in television shows, according to figures from 2015-2016 (Franke, Zarracina & Frostenson, 2016) – a trend which extends to all media, thus making happy endings sparse. This is likely to be an after effect of the Hays Code, enforced from the beginning of July 1934 (Stanley, 2014, p. 19-26) until eventually being abandoned in favour of the MPAA ratings in the 1960s; it "stipulate[d] what must not be shown but also defined what should be seen instead" and insisted upon the maintenance of "wholesome, American values" (Stanley, 2014, p. 19-26). Homosexuality, contained on the list of topics films should not explore, went (for the most part) unmentioned due to the "conspiracy of silence" which prevailed until the 1950s, when "open condemnation" began (Noriega, 2018, p. 20-41). Though male homosexuality was therefore largely ignored, lesbianism was discussed and vilified by critics, who noted its erasure in films adapted from other sources, describing the relationships in the original material as "abnormal" and "unnatural" (Noriega, 2018, p. 20-41).

However, the characters in the original source material were rarely (if ever) granted a 'happy ending' regardless, until the publication of the novel *The Price of Salt* (retitled *Carol*) by Patricia Highsmith in 1952, widely known for being "the first serious work of literature with lesbian protagonists that didn't end with suicide, despair or a cure thanks to the love of a good man" (McDermid, 2010). One of the reasons for these dismal endings was the Code's insistence on so called morality and the consequences of sin, and as homosexuality,

particularly lesbianism, was deemed sinful and immoral: “sin could be shown but only if it was shown to have bad consequences” (Stanley, 2014, p. 19-26).

To this day, it is rare to find sapphic couples who are granted a ‘happy ending’, in both visual media and literature. The ‘bury your gays’ trope is still prevalent, with it being noted that a disproportionate number of “mainstream queer narratives” will “end in tragedy” (TVTropes, n.d). Such endings (and their frequency) are disheartening, especially for young women and those not ready to acknowledge their sexuality, which is why the positivity Kiyoko’s lyrics and videos encourage is heartening; in particular *Girls Like Girls*, as their aim (especially the video) is to demonstrate ‘happy endings’ are possible. Kiyoko herself discussed this in an interview with the Rolling Stone, stating the video’s narrative, of best friends realising their feelings are more than platonic and ending with a kiss between the two, came about as she “grew up with stories of girls killing themselves, never getting the girl”, and described it as “very disheartening” as it produces pessimistic expectations (Spanos, 2018). Concluding with this video is best, therefore, as it sends a powerful message of positivity by enthusing that not all endings need be despondent.

Figures

Figure 1

Edited Google Maps image, showing the location of The Big Screen

Figure(s) 2,3,4

Edited image(s) of the Big Screen, depicting the three videos in-situ

Figure 5 (and accompanying screenshots)

Hayley Kiyoko. (2014). *Hayley Kiyoko - This Side of Paradise* [Video]
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQzbk5HY8TE>
Accessed: 29th of April, 2020

Figure 6 (and accompanying screenshots)

Hayley Kiyoko. (2017). *Hayley Kiyoko - Feelings [Official Video]* [Video]
Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TV-_Yuc228s
Accessed: 29th of April, 2020

Figure 7 (and accompanying screenshots)

Hayley Kiyoko. (2015). *Hayley Kiyoko - Girls Like Girls* [Video]
Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0MT8SwNa_U
Accessed: 29th of April, 2020

Bibliography

Books

Barthes, R. and Heath, S. (1977), *Image, music, text*
London: Fontana Press.

Berger, John. (2008), *Ways of Seeing*
London: Penguin.

McDermid, Val. (2010), [foreword]
In
Highsmith, Patricia. (2015), *Carol*
New York: Bloomsbury.

Online Journals

Noriega, Chon. (2018) "'Something's Missing Here!': Homosexuality and Film Reviews during the Production Code Era, 1934–1962.', *Cinema Journal* 1000.1, 20-41. Web.

Stanley, Tim. (2014) 'Speaking in Code,' *History Today* 64.10, 19-26. Web.

Stuart, T. & Wenner, J.S. (2019) 'Women Shaping The Future,' *Rolling Stone*, (1325), 40-46,48,50,52-54,56,59,61-62,66-68,70,72,74,77-79,94-95. Web.

Websites

Gulla, Emily, (2019). *Hayley Kiyoko explains why she labelled herself as a lesbian*
Available at: <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/uk/love-sex/a28695639/hayley-kiyoko-label-lesbian/>
Accessed: 28th of April, 2020

IHEARTCOMIX. (2014). *The Girls Room: Exclusive Interview With Hayley Kiyoko*
Available at: <https://iheartcomix.com/girls-room-exclusive-interview-hayley-kiyoko/>
Accessed: 1st of May, 2020

Miyazato, Christine. (2019). *3 ways hayley kiyoko earns her fan-dubbed title, lesbian jesus*
Available at: <https://www.glaad.org/amp/why-westan-hayley-kiyoko-lesbian-jesus>
Accessed: 28th of April, 2020

sierra. (2017). *Hayley Kiyoko - talking about This Side of Paradise (and part of the song) - Toronto March 28 2017* [Video]
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcu9KCODzaQ>
Accessed: 8th of May, 2020

Simon, Samantha. (2018). *We Asked Hayley Kiyoko How Her Real Love Life Compares to Her Steamy Music Videos*
Available at: <https://www.instyle.com/reviews-coverage/hayley-kiyoko-music-videos-based-on-real-life>
Accessed: 1st of May, 2020

Skelley, Jemima. (2018). *Here's Why Hayley Kiyoko Is The Lesbian Jesus Of Pop Music*
Available at: <https://www.buzzfeed.com/jemimaskelley/hayley-kiyoko-lgbt-lesbian-jesus>
Accessed: 29th of April, 2020

Smyth, David. (2019). *Hayley Kiyoko interview: 'Singing about my sexuality helps people like me know they're not alone'*
Available at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/music/hayley-kiyoko-interview-girls-like-girls-a4055131.html>
Accessed: 29th of April, 2020

Spanos, Brittany. (2018). *#20gayteen: The Year of Hayley Kiyoko*
Available at: <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/how-hayley-kiyoko-became-lesbian-jesus-695667/>
Accessed: 29th of April, 2020

Sullivan, Corrine, (2019). *10 Fascinating Facts About Hayley Kiyoko, One of the Biggest Badasses in Music Right Now*
Available at: <https://www.popsugar.co.uk/celebrity/fascinating-facts-about-hayley-kiyoko-47012804>

Accessed: 28th of April, 2020

TVTropes. n.d. *Bury Your Gays*

Available at: <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BuryYourGays>

Accessed: 7th of May, 2020

Wikipedia. n.d. *BBC Big Screen*

Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC_Big_Screen

Accessed: 9th of May, 2020

Wakefield, Lily. (2020). *To mark Lesbian Visibility Week, here's 29 lesbian activists who're loud, proud and making the world a better place*

Available at: <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2020/04/21/lesbian-visibility-week-activists-icons-women-ellen-page-jaqueline-wilson-megan-rapinoe/>

Accessed: 7th of May, 2020