Defining the Queer Film Genre Through Color Scheme
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Introduction

Cinematographic representations within queer feminist films project feelings of identity and connection among targeted audiences through their diverse depiction of culture and relatability of every-day drama. But as the era of film and television shifts from mainstream Hollywood to internet streaming services, we see a change in how filmmakers define their own set of queer tropes and how they tend to visualize queer movies. Now, as we enter a new period of film watching, we must ask ourselves as viewers: how has film and television implemented queer identity throughout the years, and how has this genre created its own set of tropes and visual imagery?

Queer Identity and Color Themes

Since the beginning of colored television and film, directors utilized the magic of color within cinematography to convey certain feelings onto the audience. With queer cinematography, it has become its own genre of fiction with its own sets of tropes and visuals. Even outside the queer genre, strong colors have been associated with feminine sexuality. Similar to the horror movie *Carrie* (1976), directed by Brian De Palma, brought to life the contemporary horror of growing up by adding the surrealistic visuals. Such as the bright red color of the pig's blood and lighting represented the chaos and her breaking point for her peers humiliating and bullying her. Visual mediums are supposed to bring life and subtly as a representation of a youthful queer lifestyle. A nonconforming way to express mood and feelings outside typical norms in both the film industry and in real life. Like 1980's fashion, where queer fashion and extraordinariness rose in popularity amongst the youth, along with the rise of gay and nonbinary icons, like Freddie Mercury, David Bowie etc.

Queer cinema tends to share common themes in terms of color palettes during certain scenes to invoke particular feelings within viewers. Beyond sentimental projection, there lies an almost literary analysis of the common use of three colors: violet, pink and turquoise. The neon and strong colors contrast against the traditional pastels of femininity and the dullness/cool colors associated with masculinity. Intertwined aspects of "feminine" colors with the high contrast of "masculine" colors. Violet colors bring feelings of imagination and vibrancy, typically, the color of royalty because of the difficulty of making purple. Turquoise brings feelings of peace and femininity, a feminization of the typical navy blue. Bright pinks and fuchsias bring powerful feelings of love and acceptance to demonstrate how femininity doesn't need to be quiet and subtle. It can be as loud and as passionate, while promoting the idea that anyone should be open about their love.

Visual Mediums and Storytelling

To illustrate, 2016's Academy-award winning film, *Moonlight exemplified* the importance of adding colorful visuals to create depth for audiences to explore. Even the original play was titled *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue,* referencing the metaphorical and literal

importance of color theme. According to IndieWire, "[They] wanted a dreamlike feel that immersed the audience in the world of the protagonist Chiron, but that was also rooted in the color and light of Miami." The film delivers the serious yet dramatic elements of its plots through its high contrast and rich colors. Cinematographer, James Laxton, and colorist, Alex Bickel, took inspiration from German film stock to add a greenish-blue hue at the midpoint of the plot. Oftentimes, green hues and lighting in film project feelings of discomfort and almost disgust for the unnatural lighting we typically don't see in real life. Here, the main characters have hit their lowest point and completely rejected parts of themselves in favor of revulsion and anger.

An excellent and straightforward example comes in the form of *But, I'm a Cheerleader (1999)*, directed by Jamie Babbit. A closeted lesbian is sent to a conversion camp and comes to terms with her own sexuality. The film utilizes vivid imagery by contrasting the pinks and blues to highlight gender differences and showcases how much heterosexual culture obsesses over gender roles. It is only after the main love interests begin to flirt with each do the colors converge into a bright violet. So, it attempts show the struggles of queer sexuality through clear-cut comedy. But the light-heartedness carries heavy weight because queer characters face danger of conversion therapy and deal with their role within family, friends and within oneself.

On another visual medium, *Euphoria* (2019) is a modern and dramatic take on young adolescents' sexuality. It deals with the troubles of everyday life and the bigger issues plaguing contemporary teens on an obscene level. Utilizing a familiar filming technique, the show's vivid imagery and cinematography resembles more surrealist filmmaking. Like the crazy makeup, still shots and slow-motion scenes. The show's season finale gives us one of the strongest visual images because the showrunners understand their target audiences and appeals to them through its outlandish colors and melodrama. Doniella Davy, the head makeup artist of *Euphoria*, claimed in a Cosmo interview, "These young people are pushing the boundaries and not living by mainstream archetypes or stereotypes. It's not just corrective and pretty stuff. I see it as emotional stories on their faces being told through makeup. It's a completely new language, a totally new style." Today's modern makeup culture influenced *Euphoria* to dramatize their designs. The abnormal feeds into the fantasy aspect of teen imagination. It's a melodrama that knows that it is and allows its queer viewers to project their own fantasies onto relatable queer characters in a safe controllable space.

Fantasy and Narration

Television and movies can feed into a fantasy people want to live with, even for closeted people who wish to explore a part of their lives they can't do in reality. With the outrageous makeup and video shots, the cinematography makes it easy to be entranced and have a suspension of disbelief. Likewise, it allows for the exploration of dark or taboo themes never explored before through a humanist perspective and makes way for more people to have representation within film. This new era of television and film pushes for complex narratives seen as taboo before, but many people actually deal with. For years, queer people have been

ridiculed and limited by tropes and stereotypes, but now there can be multi-level aspects to queer art. It can be something fun and lighthearted or be completely serious with a level of melodrama.

Why It Matters

At this point we ask: why does it matter? Why should we care? With more queer films, we can see the humanization of groups of people who have been demonized in modern culture for years. It creates a level of empathy and understanding by viewing the world through someone else's perspective. We started the genre with focusing on white, middle-class queer characters, until the early 21st century came with a boom of different types of queer backgrounds. The main character of *But, I'm a Cheerleader* was an upper middle-class white girl and her love interest was another wealthy white girl. But now society a wide range of queer telefilm: ranging from international films, like the South Korean erotic psychological thriller, *Handmaiden* (2016) and 2018 Kenyan drama, *Rafiki*, to American television shows like, Netflix's British comedy-drama, *Sex Education* (2019) and Cartoon Network's animated television series, *Steven Universe* (2013-19).

Especially with the rise streaming, more creators are able to explore various topics concerning queer identity, hitting the limelight across all types of genres and audiences. More shows starring and directed by people of color, like *Pose*, a 2018 Netflix Original drama which focuses on the black and Latino LGBT community of the late 80s and early 90s, which showcased a beautiful arrangement of high contrast and bold colors as part of their thematic experiences. So, we begin the period with stereotypical representations of white middle-class queer characters, often times through comedy.

Conclusion

We're moving towards more dramatic and realistic takes of queer sexuality, while keeping close to the fantasy roots through the high contrasts and bold colors. There's a mixture of genres showcasing the various types of queer films and television programs people can enjoy. Even *Euphoria* doesn't take itself completely serious with a fantasy element because often queer audiences desire an escape from the real world and are willing to have a suspension of disbelief in order to enjoy themselves. Color themes and cinematography are just part of the process ensuring a level of uniqueness and signature to the queer genre.
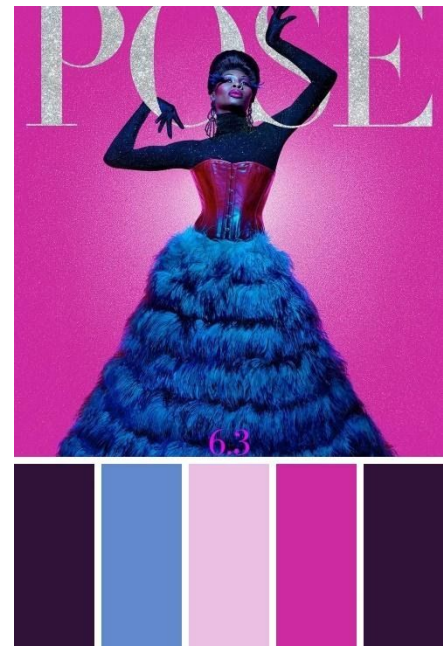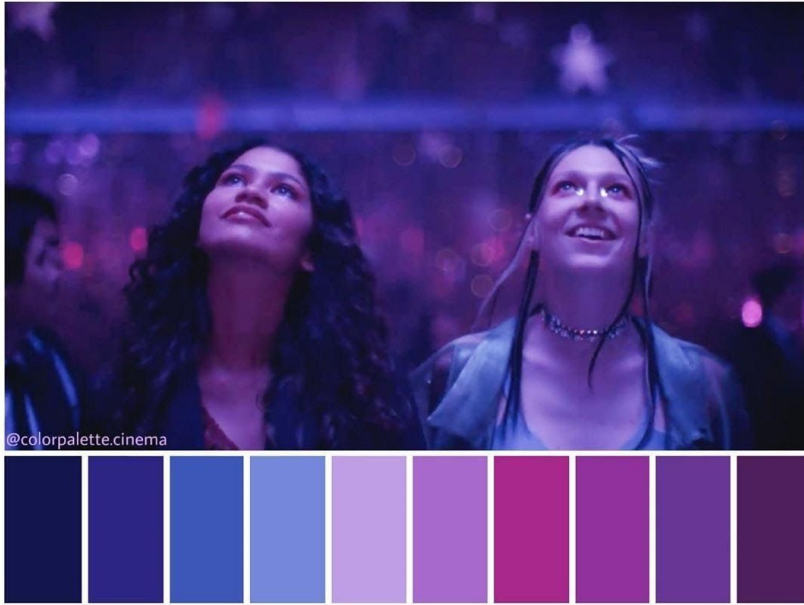
(Images Left to right) *Euphoria (2019), Moonlight (2016), But, I'm a Cheerleader (1999), Pose (2018), Rafiki (2018), Steven Universe (2013-2019).*