



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

An abstract, textured background image with a color palette of deep blues, greens, and oranges, resembling a close-up of a mineral or biological surface.

**Readers, there is a
lesbian in my book!**
**An exploration of the lesbian
literature mediating possibilities
of BookTube**

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Abstract

In this thesis I look at five YouTube videos recommending lesbian literature within the YouTube subcommunity known as BookTube, with the purpose of exploring how BookTube creators mediate lesbian literature and stimulate a reading desire among lesbian readers through their recommendation videos.

Using a deductive content analysis, I analysed the BookTube videos to gain an understanding of why and how the video creators recommend lesbian literature to their viewers. This was then followed by a thematic analysis of each respective videos comment section, to explore the responses left by the commenters and understand what they gained out of the videos and how it has affected their desire to read, using the literature stimulating theories of *subjective relevance* along with *personal/impersonal experiential/instrumental reading*. I also explored the identity strengthening opportunities regarding the lesbian literature and community offered through BookTube. The theory of *Compulsory Heterosexuality* and the *Lesbian Continuum* have been used when discussing the lesbian angle of this thesis and connects to the reading stimulation through *subjective relevance*. The last theory used when analysing the comments of the video is *the digital closet*, which refers to when people use the selective anonymity of the internet to determine how much of their sexual identity they share.

The study found that lesbian literature had a positive effect on the identity building of both the people making the video as well as on the commenters commenting on the video. The videos also had a literature stimulating effect on the commenters, with many commenters reporting they put the recommended books on their own to-be-read list, or recommending more books to the video creator and other commenters. Furthermore, the anonymity of the internet appears to give commenters who are not out with their sexual identity in real life the security to come out to the other people within the lesbian BookTube community.

Key words: Reading stimulation, lesbian reading stimulation, BookTube, reading stimulation on BookTube, reading and the lesbian continuum

1. Introduction

“The Lesbian in The Book,’ to borrow Nestle’s phrasing, acted as a conduit through which isolated lesbians could ‘find themselves’ and access some form of lesbian community.” (Statton, 2018, 4)

The above quote is taken from Sarah Louise Statton’s essay *More than throw-away fiction: investigating lesbian pulp fiction through the lens of a lesbian textual community*, a study examining the lesbian reading community formed within the magazine *The Ladder* based around lesbian pulp fiction books in the 1960’s. Non-heteronormative experiences can be difficult to navigate as language is often very heteronormative. In a heteronormative way of thinking, *woman* is the opposite of a man, and *lesbian* is a woman with a sexual desire for other women. But when removed from the heterosexual norm those descriptions do not apply and erases the existence of not only women identifying as lesbians, but also non-binary, butch, femme or other lesbians (Gay Community News, 2022). A lesbian is not the opposite of a man, but rather its own identity, separate from men and exist on a wider context than that of the man-woman binary. This can be called the lesbian continuum (Rich, 2003, 27). Here the lesbian continuum refers to the lesbian existence throughout history and within the individual and the community, encompassing both sexual and non-sexual relations between women¹. It includes sexual and asexual lesbians, friendships where one or all partners are lesbians, bisexual or pansexual, and to a degree straight women who are lesbian allies.

As the above quote demonstrates, reading identity and community are closely related to personal identity and community. Back in the 60’s, the lesbian reading community could be formed thanks to the magazine giving people opportunity to connect to each other. Today, in the year 2022, social media on the internet is the leading method of connecting to others around the globe, and access different forms of community.

YouTube is a video sharing social media platform founded in 2005 and bought by Google in 2006. As of 2021 YouTube has over two billion unique active monthly users and over five hundred hours' worth of video content is uploaded daily (YouTube, 2021). Within the YouTube platform there exists communities of varying sizes within different video genres. One of these communities is the informal BookTube community. BookTube is centred around books and consists of creators uploading videos related to books and reading, and the viewers watching the videos. These people all interact with each other either in the videos comment section, making video content together, answering each other's tags or making other

¹ *Women*, in this thesis, is used to describe those who, in a heteronormative society, get categorised as women or non-men. It is a limitation of the heteronormative language structure of the everyday English language and is not intended to invalidate or make lesbians who do not identify as women invisible.

types of video responses, or just being silent watchers (Dubroc, 2021, 60). BookTube videos can vary from book reviews, recommendations, reading vlogs, book hauls, book tags and more. As it is centred around reading BookTube can be seen as a method of literature mediation; the practice of providing information about literature, nurturing a reading desire, making literature visible and guiding readers towards literature of their taste (Andersson, 2015, 12). Literature mediation is part of reading stimulation.

Reading stimulation, also known as *reading promotion*, is one of the librarians' missions. It refers to activities that aim to stimulate, or promote, reading habits within a group of people, with the goal to make the individuals more confident in their identity as readers (Andersson, 2015, 14). Reading stimulating activities can be done in a variety of ways; by holding book talks and giving book recommendations, to provide information on the different types of reading available, to provide tools for the potential readers to find their own way, just to name a few methods. Everyone has the right to be a reader, hence it is of utmost importance to make sure reading is available for all reading levels and reading difficulties. The purpose is not to teach people how to read but to foster a positive attitude towards reading. *Joy* and *pleasure* are both key words within reading stimulation, along with *benefit* and *encouragement* (Andersson, 2015, 11). The goal is to motivate people to read, spark their reading desire. *Subjective relevance* is one of the reading stimulating theories that has been shown to be a great factor within reading motivation (Andersson, 2015, 19). *Subjective relevance* means that a reader can make a relation between their own life and what they are reading, for example a lesbian reading a novel about a romance between two women.

Queer literature has not always been accessible to the masses. Homosexuality has been stigmatised and even made illegal in many countries around the globe in the post-colonisation history (Human Dignity Trust, 2022). The legality regarding homosexuality has also affected media with themes of queerness, for example the American Comstock laws which made it illegal to promote material of an “obscene” nature until the 1950’s, with “obscene” in this case including depictions not seen as heterosexual (Statton, 2015, 19). However, even after the legislation regarding queer literature was lifted many lesbians could still find a “virtual or total neglect of lesbian existence in a wide range of writings [...]” (Rich, 2003, 13).

When it comes to lesbian media there is another aspect that affects it beyond the queer. That is the female aspect. Female sexuality has, in the western world, been very much defined by a patriarchal heterosexual norm where a male sexuality is forced upon women, and the sexuality of women are in some degree owned by men (Rich, 2003, 18). Women in

media are often put in an exhibitionist position, meaning they are portrayed with the purpose of being looked at, taken in by the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975, 837). While the male gaze theory originally discussed women's roles in motion picture, the concept applies across all types of media. Women are presented as passive creatures for the active male onlooker. This means that when lesbian literature managed to get published it would be printed with the purpose of being pornography directed towards heterosexual men. One example of this would be when lesbian pulp fiction gained popularity in the United States of America during the 1950's. These short novels featured female main characters in homoerotic relationships with other women and were then marketed towards men for a voyeuristic purpose and meant to be discarded of shortly after having been bought (Stratton, 2018, 24).

The lesbian pulp fiction ended up having literature mediating effect for the lesbian continuum, as it made books featuring lesbians somewhat accessible to the general public. As *subjective relevance* would have it a fanbase of lesbian readers started to grow. The lesbian readers even built a small reading community through a women's magazine called *The Ladder*, as mentioned previously. Women were given an opportunity to send in reviews and discuss the lesbian pulp fiction they read, connecting with one another as lesbian readers (Statton, 2016, 34). This can be seen as the predecessor to the modern lesbian BookTube videos. The internet birthed an opportunity for queer individuals, in this case lesbians, to build communities in an otherwise heteronormative world that might hinder closeted people from safely coming out or learn about themselves and their own identity or stunt the opportunity to gain a community (Liliequist, 2020, 10). BookTube is one of these communities, giving lesbian literature a chance to be made visible, and people are given an opportunity to connect with one another through YouTube as the platform.

1.1 Aim and Research Question

Lesbian representation within literature aid in the personal identity building among lesbian readers. Lesbian literature has also helped its readers gain a sense of community. Today, in the year 2022, social media is the leading way for people to connect with others, and multiple reading communities have showed up across the internet. One of these reading communities is the BookTube community on the social media platform YouTube. This dissertation aims to better understand how BookTube contributes to lesbian literature mediation and how it relates to a lesbian reading identity and community.

- How do BookTube creators utilise YouTube as a platform for lesbian literature mediation and how can the video be understood as a reading stimulating activity?

- What response do the commenters leave, what insight can the comment section give regarding the (lesbian) reading stimulation aspect of the video?
- What opportunities can BookTube offer in strengthening the lesbian reading identity as well as creating a lesbian reading community? What effects can this have on the individuals personal and reading identity?

1.2 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of six chapters, not including references and appendices.

This has been the **introductory chapter** where I presented the thesis, gave insight to the background of what is to come, and presented the research questions that will be answered at the end of this thesis. The following five chapters are as follows:

Previous studies and conceptual framework. This is where I go through the literature this thesis is based on, as well as explain the theoretical ground used for this thesis. The concept of *Compulsory heterosexuality* and how this study defines the word “lesbian” is explained in this chapter. I also go through studies related to lesbian reading identity and habits. This is followed by a discussion of online communities in relation to a queer identity and how queer people navigate the internet and form communities online, and how BookTube as a community functions. Lastly the reading stimulating theories used within this thesis will be discussed.

Method. This chapter presents the data corpus and how the data has been selected and collected. Two methods for analysis have been used within this thesis; a deductive content analysis and an inductive thematic analysis. These methods will be presented and explained under this chapter. The chapter ends with an ethical research defence and disclaimer.

Analysis. This chapter contains my findings of the analysis from the collected data.

Conclusion. The wrap-up of this thesis where everything is summarised.

2. Previous studies and Conceptual frameworks

This thesis explores reading stimulation activities within the BookTube community in connection to the lesbian continuum. The hope is that this study will be able to further research within lesbian reading stimulation or reading stimulating work targeting sexual- and gender minority groups. Any previous studies within this specific field, i.e., lesbian reading stimulation on BookTube, could not be found. Therefore, the literature this study is based upon are a mixture of the three core elements: lesbian identity and reading habits, [queer] online communities and BookTube and, last, reading stimulation research and theories.

The conceptual framework this thesis is based upon will also be discussed within these three categories as well as how each respective theory is being utilised for this thesis. The first part of this chapter explains the theory of *compulsory heterosexuality and the lesbian existence*, which includes the theory of the lesbian continuum. It is with this theory I motivate why my thesis is limited to lesbian reading habits/stimulation/mediation rather than a wider queer group. The following part will discuss how queer people use the internet to explore their own identity and access a community, and the concept of a *digital closet* will be presented. BookTube will be presented further as a reading community, and how BookTube mediate literature and stimulate a reading desire will be discussed. The last part of this chapter explains what *literature mediation* and *reading stimulation* means, and *subjective relevance* and *personal/impersonal instrumental/experiential reading* will be presented as reading stimulating theories.

2.1 Lesbian identity, reading habits and the theory of Compulsory Heterosexuality

The essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence* (1980) written by Adrienne Rich has been used within this thesis to explain the need for lesbian literature by giving an insight to lesbian erasure using the concept of compulsory heterosexuality. A definition of the word *lesbian* and *lesbian continuum* will then be conceptualised from that standpoint.

Compulsory heterosexuality refers to the theory that women are socialised to believe they are heterosexual, or that the sexuality of women is always in relation to men. In a patriarchal heteronormative society, women are conditioned to believe that they are in some way inferior or submissive in relation to men, and in many ways are forced to depend on men, for example financially or through other societal structures. Rich argues that even within dynamics where women are meant to have some sort of independence, they are still at the mercy of men's

sexuality being subjected upon them and therefore forced to act in accordance to a heterosexual norm. She references Cathrine A. MacKinnon's study *Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination* and connects this to her own theory of compulsory heterosexuality, explaining that women within the workplace are being subjected to men's sexuality and should expect a level of sexual harassment. MacKinnon explains how being sexualised is to some degree part of a woman's job, and Rich argues that this forces women into a compulsory heterosexuality and goes on to explain how this in turn also leads to suppression of lesbians.

Economically disadvantaged, women—whether waitresses or professors—endure sexual harassment to keep their jobs and learn to behave in a complaisantly and ingratiatingly heterosexual manner because they discover this is their true qualification for employment, whatever the job description. And, MacKinnon notes, the woman who too decisively resists sexual overtures in the workplace is accused of being “dried up” and sexless, or lesbian. This raises a specific difference between the experiences of lesbians and homosexual men. A lesbian, closeted on her job because of heterosexual prejudice, is not simply forced into denying the truth of her outside relationships or private life. Her job depends on her pretending to be not merely heterosexual, but a heterosexual woman in terms of dressing and playing the feminine, deferential role required of “real” women.
(Rich, 2003, 21)

The above quote gives an understanding of the differences between a person who appears to be female and deviates from the sexual norm compared to a person who appears to be male and deviates from the sexual norm. These social differences between lesbians and homosexual men are why my own thesis focuses on lesbian literature mediation rather than queer people in general. This is just one of the ways Rich explains compulsory heterosexuality being forced upon lesbians and other women. Aside from this she discusses further how compulsory heterosexuality is forced within the private life of women as well, and how a glorification of heterosexuality (and female oppression) is essential in order to uphold a patriarchal society where men assured a position of power, and the existence of lesbians threaten this dynamic.

Rich argues that the lesbian existence is often overlooked and misunderstood within feminist theory, and often completely omitted from a wide range of writing (Rich, 2003, 13). She talks about the assumptions and faulty conclusions people, many of them feminists, have drawn regarding the lesbian identity and sexuality and what this means for women of all sexualities. When talking about the lesbian existence many feminists disregarded it as a choice, a way for women to escape the abusive nature of men and to take control of their own finances and escape the patriarchy. They do not view a lesbian sexuality as a legitimate sexuality but rather a political statement and in doing so invalidating lesbians, stating that every woman is inherently heterosexual and desire the core family lifestyle (Rich, 2003, 17).

This is something Rich sees as counterproductive within feminist theory and politics and sees a connection between this limitation of feminist theory and the erasure of the lesbian existence (Rich, 2003, 26). She argues that the erasure of the lesbian identity leads to great harm towards lesbians, and straight women who contributes to this erasure are in turn harming themselves as well.

The assumption that “most women are innately heterosexual” stands as a theoretical and political stumbling block for feminism. It remains a tenable assumption partly because lesbian existence has been written out of history or catalogued under disease, partly because it has been treated as exceptional rather than intrinsic, partly because to acknowledge that for women heterosexuality may not be a “preference” at all but something that has had to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force is an immense step to take if you consider yourself freely and “innately” heterosexual. (Rich, 2003, 26)

This notion of assuming heterosexuality on all people is something that will be demonstrated again within other studies that will be presented under this chapter, further proving the need to make lesbians visible.

The theory of compulsory heterosexuality is vast, and this has only been a brief insight to the phenomenon.

The lesbian continuum and *the lesbian existence* are concepts coined by Adrienne Rich within the article. What these concepts mean is partly demonstrated within compulsory heterosexuality, however, in an attempt to summaries them, *the lesbian continuum* refers to the lesbian experience on a wider scale and encompass both the sexual and non-sexual relationships between women. It centres around lesbians, however as demonstrated within how compulsory heterosexuality also affects others aside from lesbians, women of other sexualities fit in to the continuum as well. *The lesbian existence* refers to the existence of lesbian people in past, present and future. As the concept is vastly broad and encompass a wider social, global, and time encapsuling phenomena, an adapted definition has had to be adapted for this thesis, relating the concept of the lesbian continuum and lesbian existence to *subjective relevance* and *personal/impersonal instrumental/experiential reading*. These concepts will be discussed in further detail under the reading stimulation part of this chapter, but a brief explanation will be offered now. For the purpose of this thesis the continuum includes all those who self-identify as lesbians or any other identity relating to “woman attracted to other woman”, these are the people who fall under *personal instrumental/experiential reading* and *subjective relevance*. Heterosexual women fit in only when actively engaging with lesbian literature, this is the *impersonal instrumental/experiential reading*.

Studies directly related to lesbian reading stimulation appear to be non-existent, and studies made on the reading habits, practices, and experiences of lesbian readers are sparse. How lesbians encounter books is related to the field literature mediation within reading stimulation and is therefore valuable information when trying to study reading stimulation within the group. Furthermore, understanding the reading practices among lesbian readers is vital in understanding what would be important when building a reading stimulating activity toward the group.

Finding and Creating Possibility: Reading in the Lives of Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer Young Women (2004) by Paulette Rothbauer, Ph.D. explores lesbian, bisexual and queer women's voluntary reading habits and how they access lesbian and queer books. Rothbauer motivates her study by explaining she was interested in exploring the power reading can have in an individual's life, stating that she could not find many studies within the field including queer women. She brings up the issue with invisibility of lesbians within Library and Information Science research, adding on that she finds studies regarding reading among women tend to assume that readers are heterosexual, and that this assumption is seen even within studies dealing with gender and patriarchy in relation to LIS (Rothbauer, 2004, 2), such as compulsory heterosexuality predicts (Rich, 2003, 26).

Rothbauer's study brings up aspects of queer women's identity in relation to reading. Having access too and being able to read lesbian books had had a part in the self-acceptance and coming out process of some participants (Rothbauer, 2004, 56). Lesbian literature had normalised a lesbian identity, and by doing so helped the readers remove stigma surrounding their own identity, something that had been especially helpful at a young age when a sense of belonging (Rothbauer, 2004, 61). However, there is more to the lesbian identity than just coming out, something that was brought up by the participants. The participants mentioned what they want out of the books they are reading, with many of them expressing a want for a variety of plot points and storylines within lesbian literature, aside from just traditional coming out stories or lesbian stories cantered around homophobia (Rothbauer, 2004, 74). They give examples of other themes they would like to see more of within lesbian books, one participant expressing her want for a lesbian break up story, and many of them saying they want the lesbian identity to be normalised in the novels they read, in the same way the straight identity is normalised in straight novels (Rothbauer, 2004, 75).

Under the subchapters *Reading for experience* (Rothbauer, 2004, 80) and *Making connections with the textual other* (Rothbauer, 2004, 86) the participants talk about how they want books to not just fulfil an entertainment need, but to read books that can also have an

actual impact in how they see themselves, their identity and their place in the world. One participant explains the impact the novel *Stone Butch Blues* had had on her in terms of shifting her perspective of how she herself can live and express herself and what that can mean in terms of community building (Rothbauer, 2004, 81). Another participant talked about the want for stories about real lived [lesbian] experiences and emphasizing the validation and comfort these types of stories bring. This aspect of reading, *personal instrumental reading*, will be discussed further under the *reading stimulation* section in this chapter of my own thesis.

Rothbauer brings up the community aspects of reading and what this means for the queer women participating in her study (Rothbauer, 2004, 95). This aspect of Rothbauer's study was interesting for my own thesis, as I myself am exploring the possibility of a lesbian reading community. She offers a definition of what social reading and reading communities mean in terms of a lesbian reading identity.

Reading groups are places where participants can publicly enact lesbian and queer identities, exercising an affinity between personal identity and the genre of books read. In other words, lesbians and queer young women reading lesbian and queer texts, create a space in which to explore, contest and embody what it means to be lesbian or queer (Rothbauer, 2004, 105)

Rothbauer's participants express how books have led them to find a greater community in their local area, partly by reading [lesbian novels] written by local [lesbians] (2004, 99), or through lesbian book circles or other book-related events. However, the book-community connection also worked the other way around by participants being introduced to books from others within the community (Rothbauer, 2004, 97) and how this sharing of books help reinforces relationships with others (Rothbauer, 2004, 97). Furthermore, many participants talked about the role the internet played for their lesbian community building. One participant talked about the reading community she formed online through a joint interest of a book series, and how these social interactions had shaped her life.

But it is not so much these books themselves that had an impact on my life. At about this time I was becoming fascinated by the new world known as the Internet. Not content with simply emailing my friends and doing research for school reports, I joined mailing lists and discussion boards dedicated to several of my favourite books and movies. A list centred on *Dune* was one of these...These discussions definitely shaped my view of the world in those important years...I still make sure that I think of fiction in terms of real life, and vice versa (Rothbauer, 2004, 104)

The role the internet plays in young lesbians voluntary reading habits is discussed further in Rothbauer's study when she explores how the internet factors into the finding and accessibility of lesbian literature. It was found that the internet played a big part in the

participants search for lesbian literature, both when looking for digital text and titles for physical copies, using a mixture of online search engines, libraries search catalogues and looking for books available in online bookstores (Rothbauer, 2004, 116). Some of the troubles the participants reported were that if they did find lists containing titles of lesbian literature those titles could then not be found within the libraries catalogue, and if they were found in stock with one of the online bookstores, they were not financially accessible (Rothbauer, 2004, 117). Regarding the library catalogue it is also worth noting that some participants did not even look towards their universities library to find lesbian books as the invisibility of lesbian literature just led them to assume they would not find anything (Rothbauer, 2004, 60). Many participants did report that they would find other lesbian book titles from the online bookstores, for example through the “people who liked this book also liked...” on amazon.com (Rothbauer, 2004, 123). It is important to note that Rothbauer’s study was made in 2004 and that the everyday use of the internet have changed since then, however this makes it even more interesting to see how the internet plays a part in the search for finding and accessing lesbian literature today in the year 2022. Rothbauer mentions in the beginning of her study four different cohorts for gay and lesbian youth, stating her study belongs to a fifth, and at the time of the study, final cohort.

Gay, lesbian, queer and bisexual youth who are coming of age in the early years of the twenty-first century, with visible agencies of support, have categorically different experiences than the generations that came before them. Herdt and Boxer (1993, 9) have defined four previous historical age cohorts for gay and lesbian youth: 1) 1910: coming of age after World War I; 2) 1940: coming of age during/after World War II; 3) 1969: coming of age after the Stonewall Riots and Gay Activism; and 4) 1983: coming of age in the era of AIDS. A fifth and current cohort can be described as coming of age in an era of increased visibility and support for gays and lesbians (rothbauer, 2004, 5)

I would like to propose to my own thesis belonging to a sixth cohort of coming of age during the time of the internet and social media as part of the human everyday life, where the internet plays an even bigger part in literature mediation than it appears to do at the time of Rothbauer’s study. I will be discussing the use of social media and the queer experience further under *BookTube and Online Communities* of this chapter.

In the study Rothbauer found that reading had a great significance for the participants from a personal instrumental and experiential reading perspective, that rendered “escapism” an inadequate metaphor, saying that a common theme within the interviews “appear To Be Reading less for *escape from* than for *engagement with* the worlds in which they live.” (Rothbauer, 2004, 65). Furthermore, the participants reported literature as being a gateway to connecting to others and lead to greater communities. It was also found that the internet was used as both a searching tool in order to find lesbian literature as well as give access to

alternative literature with more success than trying to find it in the regular bookshops or libraries, however with varying success of accessing the literature found.

More than throw-away fiction: investigating lesbian pulp fiction through the lens of a lesbian textual community by Sarah Louise Statton, Ph.D., explores the reading community that surrounded the lesbian pulp fiction books of the 1950's and 60's, and how they used a lesbian magazine to write reviews, get recommendations, and connect with other readers. It was found that the physical, paper-back books had helped the readers to feel a connection to a wider community, and the periodical *The Ladder* had also given them a voice to express themselves within this community and gave them a platform to express their rights and share their experiences as lesbians. This can be seen as an historical predecessor to a modern day lesbian reading community on social media.

2.2 BookTube and Online Communities

The internet has offered a greater chance for people around the world to connect with other people and access communities they may or may not otherwise have come in to contact with, depending on their geographical belonging. This is greater connection to others means queer people globally have a greater chance of accessing a queer community through the internet. Evelina Liliequist, Ph.D. *Digitala förbindelser: Rum, riktning och queera orienteringar* (2020) explores how people orient a non-heteronormative life and what role the internet has in that experience and is the study that first inspired me to write my own thesis.

Understanding how queer people make use of the internet to build community and find their own identity outside of a heteronormative society, is important when exploring how lesbian readers use internet to form book communities. In her study, Liliequist concludes the importance of the internet and the unique opportunities it offers in building a person's identity and building community. The study is an ethnographic internet study consisting of interviews, text- and photo materials and observations of digital environments, with a queer-centered focus (Liliequist, 2020, 24). In the study, the interviewed participants share experiences from a queer life outside of the internet. One of the participants talks about how hard it had been navigating social interactions when everyone was assumed to be straight, and how seemingly normal social behaviours became stressful, such as hugging a friend of the same sex when the straight culture socialised people to act differently with people of the opposite sex (Liliequist, 2020, 42). Another one of the participants talk about how she, at a very young age, started to understand that she had no interest in men, however she dismissed this part of herself as she had never seen a same sex couple or trans person, and only heard

about queer people as an “other” in a heteronormative world (Liliequist, 2020, 47). The participants of the study express feelings of a “heteronormative happiness” being promised to them, and this paired with the lack of coming in to contact with, or seeing other queer people represented in media, left the participants feeling like they had to succumb to a heterosexual lifestyle (Liliequist, 2020, 48). This mimics the theory of compulsory heterosexuality discussed previously under *Lesbian identity, reading habits and the theory of Compulsory Heterosexuality*.

Liliequist’s study focuses on queer experiences in Norrland, the northernmost provinces of Sweden. Her motivation for this is partly to explore the impact the internet has for those queer individuals who grow up isolated from larger communities in general due to factors such as infrastructure layout and commutes to the bigger cities, which renders Norrland’s provinces more isolated than other provinces in Sweden (Liliequist, 2020, 3). Feelings of isolation and loneliness due to lack of queer representation or community were a recurring theme of the participants. They report their geographical belonging as being unaccepting, even for those participants who did not report their situation as being threatening to their safety there was no sense of acceptance (Liliequist, 2020, 53). This aspect of Liliequist’s study is important in my own thesis as well. Understanding how queer people navigate internet to strengthen their own identity and find community, and what that means to queer people who have little to no access to a queer community outside the internet, gives further insight to my own study when looking towards a global website such as YouTube where many who watch and engage with lesbian BookTube videos may come from countries or communities where lesbian identities may not be accepted, and gives further understanding of the importance of lesbian BookTube videos. The internet is described by Liliequist as not only transcending geographical boundaries, but as a place that can create actual spaces, rooms, for people to meet up and socialise, where the normative systems, systems that exclude the queer people of her study and rule interactions in the physical world, don’t necessarily apply (Liliequist, 2020, 61). Participants in Liliequist’s study reports the internet as opening up a new world for them, one participant stating that finding a queer website had felt as that had been a beginning for her to exist in the world (Liliequist, 2020, 59).

Using the phrase, *the digital closet* Liliequist explains the internet a much more flexible space the people themselves has a larger control over. Internet users have a greater anonymity online than in the physical world, and more control over what is shared with who and how visible they make themselves when sharing, depending on which website and how open they are about their identity (Liliequist, 2020, 87). This means, for example, that one can come out

as a lesbian and explore that part of their sexuality and connect with other lesbians, having the option to choose either use their legal name or a screenname, deciding which spaces of the internet they are openly lesbian within. Or, it can mean one can explore lesbian spaces of the internet and not having to interact or state their own identity while still being able to see and explore a lesbian community, something that would not be possible without the anonymity of the internet. The concept of *the digital closet* will be mentioned again within the *method* chapter of this thesis as it will be used for the analysis of the comment section.

From the findings mentioned within Liliequist's study, similarities can be seen between the identity affirming and strengthening opportunities the internet can offer a queer person, and the identity affirming and strengthening aspects of lesbian literature discussed previously. Further studies that have researched the internet's impact on queer identity and community includes Jesse Fox and Rachel Ralstons' article *Queer identity online: Informal learning and teaching experiences of LGBTQ individuals on social media* (2016). This study explores how social media is used as an information seeking tool by queer individuals. They found that one of the important elements of social media for queer people were in finding information regarding queer identities or queer related issues, and that social media was a common factor in many queer individuals coming out process. This alludes towards the importance of both literature and the internet to being vital within the identity building for queer individuals, and, as is the focus of this study, vital for lesbians. This brings us to BookTube.

To Be Read: The Educational Opportunities of Booktube (2021) by Anita Michelle Dubroc, Ph.D. is a study exploring BookTube as a network knowledge community. Dubroc defines BookTube as "a digital space where readers come together to share their knowledge and love for literature and reading" (2021, 40).

She finds that BookTube creators often build their identity as readers from an early childhood, as well as being diverse within their reading habits in regards of genres. In this dissertation Dubroc used a content analysis method to study 162 BookTube videos in order to get an overview of the BookTube community and the BookTubers experiences with their identity as readers and content creators, as well as using sixteen videos to study the BookTube creators' interaction with their viewers to explore how they influence each other's reading habits (Dubroc, 2021, 60). Though a substantially more extensive study to the one I have done the aims of the two have a similar, albeit not identical, goal. Therefore, Dubroc's study has inspired the method used within my own when analysing the videos. This method will be discussed further within the *method* chapter of this thesis.

Other studies that explore BookTube include Tara Anderson Gold, Ph.D., *A Book Club for the 21st Century: an Ethnographic Exploration of BookTube* (2020) explore BookTube as a social reading practice. Anderson found that BookTube creates possibilities for creating reading communities within classrooms, helping students build reading identities through BookTube activities such as reading challenges and creating social interactions between readers. She also found how young people build literary skills through YouTube by both the distribution of knowledge and by learning to use new technologies.

2.3 Reading stimulation

The Swedish Art Council states that reading stimulation aims to:

- make readers of the literate
- open roads to literature for those who do not read
- increase access to a variety of literature in different languages and in different formats for readers of all ages
- provide more opportunities for an artistic experience through literature
- remove the obstacles to reading, broaden the repertoire and boost the reader's self confidence and identity as a reader. (Andersson, 2015, 11)

The term *reading stimulation* will be used within this thesis rather than *reading promotion*, as the thesis study aims to explore the stimulation of a reading desire and motivation, rather than exploring how reading can be promoted. Therefore, the phrase *reading stimulation* has been deemed more appropriate, however there is no formal difference between the two phrases (Andersson, 2015, 11).

One aspect that has been shown to stimulate a reading desire is the sense of community within the reading habits (Gambrell, 2011, 175). Social interaction, and the opportunity to engage with others about what they are reading, has been linked to students within school settings to be more motivated with their reading.

Another successful method of reading stimulation is called *literature mediation*. *Literature mediation* refers to libraries practices of making literature visible, providing information about literature, guiding readers in their literature searching and igniting a desire to read within potential readers (Andersson, 2015, 12). There are two types of literature mediation: *direct* and *indirect* (Andersson, 2015, 13). *Direct literature mediation* refers to personal one-on-one meetings, typically between a librarian and library user/potential reader, for example through traditional book talks. *Indirect literature mediation* is when literature is being made visible to people through means such as literature lists, or as in the case for the subject matter of this thesis, through BookTube videos, and therefore BookTube has been deemed a literature mediating tool within this thesis. When a BookTube creator talk about a book they

are engaging in *indirect literature mediation* by providing information regarding literature, and in the case of book recommendation videos they are sharing information regarding literature with the intention to stimulate a reading desire. It is important to note that these two types of literature mediation do not have to be separate from each other and can be combined. It is these two types of reading stimulating practices, i.e. social reading habits and literature mediation, that are relevant for this thesis. BookTube is a tool both for mediating literature, and for creating reading communities.

Subjective relevance is a concept used within literature mediation in order to stimulate reading motivation. This refers to when a reader can see themselves within the text they are reading (Andersson, 2015, 19). This would be for example providing a lesbian with a lesbian romance novel rather than a heterosexual romance novel. This concept is seen within other reading stimulating theories as well, for example the theory of *personal/impersonal instrumental/experiential reading* that is used within this thesis.

Impersonal experiential reading refers to reading that has no other purpose for the reader other than entertainment. The readers personal life experience is separate from their reading activity, and they take on an observational role (Furhammar, 1997, 137). This type of reading can be likened to that of the heterosexual men who consume lesbian literature for their own pleasures' sake. Within *impersonal experiential reading* the meaning of the story has its worth within the text, and the end of the story usually means the end of the effect it has on the reader (Furhammar, 1997, 138)

Personal experiential reading is when a reader can relate the reading material to their own personal identity. The reader takes on the text in a manner akin to how they would take on new real life experiences, and the text is processed and understood in relation to the readers own life experience (Furhammar, 1997, 140). *Personal experiential reading* can be described as a reflective type of reading. The personal engagement in the reading material means that the reading material has meaning beyond the printed text and creates a bond between the text and the reader, and that the end of the story does not mean the end of the meaning of the text as the impact of the text follows the reader after. It is within this type of reading we see the concept of *subjective relevance*.

Impersonal instrumental reading has a general educational or otherwise greater purpose to the readers own life, other than that of simply enjoyment, without the text being directly related to the readers personal life or identity. The term “objective knowledge” can be applied as a descriptor of this type of reading, as the reading provides knowledge toward something and has a lasting effect on the reader with insight from a text-to-reader relation that also

translate to other relations within the readers life (Furhammar, 1997, 142). This can be compared to heterosexual women's role within *compulsory heterosexuality* and *the lesbian continuum*. For example, the notion of lesbians being included within literature showing heterosexual women a wider range of relations between women, and attraction between women as more than a political statement (Rich, 2003, 13).

Personal instrumental reading is the reading that occurs when a text has an educational effect on the reader directly related to their own life (Furhammar, 1997, 143). This type of reading is often connected to a therapeutic reading experience. Examples of this can be seen earlier in this chapter under *Lesbian identity, reading habits, and the theory of Compulsory Heterosexuality*, where I discuss Rothbauer's study and how she found her study participants to make connections to a "textual other" (Rothbauer, 2004, 86) and how one of her study participants saw herself and place in the world through the book *Stone Butch Blues*. *Personal instrumental reading* can mean that the reader gets to explore their own identity and learn about themselves within the text. It can also be a distraction to an otherwise problematic (Furhammar, 1997, 144) reality such as a closeted lesbian reading a lesbian novel to escape her reality of a homophobic environment. This type of reading is another example of *subjective relevance*.

3. Method

3.1 Data Collection

The total data corpus for this study consists of two sets: BookTube videos along with their respective comment sections. These two data sets were analysed separately using two separate methods that will be discussed further down in this chapter.

The videos that are explored in this study are limited only to BookTube videos that focus on recommending lesbian literature. Here “BookTube” refers to the community on YouTube of people who engage in book related content or have channels dedicated to reading, book reviews, book recommendations and more (Andersson Gold, 2020, 13). In the sampling of this study, I have chosen BookTube creators with channels exclusively dedicated to books. There are creators who publish BookTube videos on their channels while the channel itself is not dedicated towards only books. These channels will not be featured in the study. Some creators use the term “BookTube” in video titles, in the tags, in channel descriptions, or say it verbally, while some don’t state the term explicitly at all while still fulfilling the criteria of being part of the community. Most BookTube creators are also active on other social medias book communities, such as Bookstagram on instagram or BookTok on TikTok. The video sampling for this study are videos dedicated to only lesbian literature, however the channels who hosts these videos do not have to be dedicated to lesbian literature or even be created by a person who self identifies as a lesbian. The title of the videos had to include the word “lesbian”, “sapphic”, f/f or “wlw”/”Women Loving Women” along with the word “books”, “book recommendations” or “book recs”, as these labels are all commonly used online to refer to lesbians (Llewellyn. 2022, 2349). From the result gathered I have sampled five videos to use for this study.

In order to find the relevant videos, I had to build a strategy on how to find them and which to choose from. I decided to go for the most upfront and user-friendly way to find anything on YouTube: I searched in the search bar. There are three factors that determines what show up in the YouTube search results; how well the video titles match the key words in the search question, then from the videos that match the title you get the videos with the most engagement, and from there the videos that have the most watch time (Sproutsocial, 2022). During the timing of this study YouTube’s search results work in a way where it gives nine videos as results from the search, and then it suggests results for “people also watched” where it recommends a few videos not directly related to the search, before providing more search results. As YouTube’s search algorithm is supposed to give the most relevant search results, I have chosen to focus on the first nine videos and not look beyond the unrelated suggestions.

My goal was to access videos recommending lesbian literature. In order to find these videos, I tried out a few different search queries. The first search was “lesbian book recommendations”. Considering the algorithm this one search should have been enough, however I wanted to make sure I would not miss any video due to a communication error between me and YouTube, so I recreated the search but with variations of the word “lesbian” using the terms “sapphic” and “wlw”, and “recommendations” to “recs”. The results varied slightly, but most results were recurring through all searches. After removing the results from non-BookTube channels, and the videos recommending other books than exclusively lesbian literature, I was left with six videos from five different BookTube creators. As I did not want two videos from the same creator, I decided to use the video with the most comments of the two.

The five videos chosen for this study were all published within the past three years as of writing this study (2019-2022), all have between 11.000 to 73.000 views and are all made by five different BookTube creators. Out of these five creators two identify as lesbians, one as a sapphic-bisexual, one as queer and one identifies as a firm lesbian ally. Going with the theory of *the lesbian continuum* I decided that this is a fitting sampling of BookTube creators, as majority identify as lesbian or other terms used for women-loving-women, with one non-lesbian woman who still centres lesbians within her video, and all of them fitting within the lesbian continuum.

For the data corpus consisting of comment sampling from the videos comment section, I harvested all the comments available from the day I documented my video observation. I copied all the comments and put them on to the same document as their respective video transcript, to make sure I had it all in the same place and would not mix-match comment section and video. Neither of these documents would be used in my finished thesis as their only purpose for these were to keep my data manageable, therefore adhered to any ethical guidelines, that will be discussed under the *ethics* section of this chapter. I decided to document the number of likes on the comments to get an overview of how the comment was perceived, however for the sake of time management I opted to not include comment threads in my analysis and decided that the original comment will be context enough.

In a similar manner to Dubroc (2021) I opted to keep a “viewing log” in an excel spreadsheet, with the purpose of organising information about the videos. In Dubroc’s viewing log the data includes the upload date, watch date, BookTube creators screen name, title, genre, setting, runtime, and a link to the video. In order to suite the purpose of my own thesis better I have modified the viewing log. The data I chose to include consist of the

BookTube creators' identity in relation to the lesbian continuum, the videos' runtime, upload date, the date on which I watched the video and the number of comments left on each video on that date and lastly the number of books recommended in each video.

	Lesbian continuum	Video Runtime	Upload Date	Watch Date	No. Comments	No. Books recommended
Video 1	Lesbian	0:28:24	21-04-26	22-11-14	243	8
Video 2	Lesbian (they/she)	0:21:16	21-04-27	22-11-22	175	15
Video 3	Bi-sapphic	0:32:07	22-02-10	22-11-14	104	37
Video 4	Ally	0:14:48	21-04-26	22-11-29	24	9
Video 5	Queer	0:13:33	19-07-22	22-11-21	154	8

I decided to also keep transcripts of all five videos I studied in order to manage the data from the videos. This would assist in keeping track of what was being said in each video and to minimise the risk of errors in my analysis. I accessed these transcripts through YouTube's own video transcriptions by using the "show transcript" option available from the closed captions of all the videos. I then double checked the transcript to ensure there were no errors in the text and that the timestamps aligned with the video. The transcripts were then used for coding in the analysis.

As previously mentioned, the data corpus of this study is split up in two sets: the videos and the comments. The two were analysed separately using two different methods to fit the aim of the research questions best.

3.1.1 Deductive Content Analysis

When analysing the videos, research question one and three that were the focus. I was interested in seeing *how* BookTube creators use YouTube, specifically with lesbian literature mediation in mind as stated in the first research question. Furthermore, I wanted to explore *what* BookTube can offer regarding a lesbian reading *identity* and lesbian reading *community* in accordance with the third research question. This means that a theory driven deductive content analysis was used for the video analysis portion of this thesis, as inspired by Dubroc's (2021) content analysis. Deductive content analysis use categories and coding rules based on the theoretical framework (Cho and Lee, 2014, 10), meaning the categories I would be using had to be established before the analysis process began but after the data had been collected (Cho and Lee, 2014, 10).

In order to identify the reading stimulating aspects of the video I referenced the Swedish Art Councils definition of reading stimulation (Andersson, 2015, 11) as well as their

explanation of literature mediation (Andersson, 2015, 12) and the concept of experiential and instrumental reading (Andersson, 2015, 19). Both the theory of compulsory heterosexuality and the theory of the lesbian continuum (Rich, 2003, 27) have been used as guides for some of the categories when analysing the lesbian angles of the videos. All of these theories were discussed under the *Previous studies and Conceptual frameworks* chapter. Based on these conceptual frameworks I came up with the following categories (marked in in **bold**):

When evaluating the **Literature Mediation**, I looked out for number of books recommended, how they are presented within the video and how or to who they recommend them. Under this category I also noted down how the video is structured, if it is noticeably scripted or not and how easy it is to follow.

In order to evaluate the reading stimulating goal of giving access to different formats of literature I looked for if they recommend **literature of alternative mediums** such as graphic novels or audio books. I also looked for if they mention **reading levels** such as audience designations or notably difficult language or alternative writing styles, and book lengths. I also put book genres being mentioned as a theme under this category.

To identify a connection to a **reading community** within the videos I looked for social reading activities such as mentions of reading vlogs, linking to other book related social media, or any notable interaction with the audience aside from simply publishing a video.

Lesbian identity strengthening is the category I used when looking for things relating to compulsory heterosexuality, for example if a video creator states they want to make lesbian literature visible because they find that it is often invisible, or if a video creator talks about how a piece of lesbian literature helped them find their own identity. I also noted themes regarding strengthening or supporting lesbian identity, or the concept of compulsory heterosexuality are brought up in other ways throughout the video. The reasoning to why the BookTube creator made a video dedicated to lesbian literature is also themed under this category.

Lastly when looking at the video's connection to the **lesbian continuum**, I made notes of the video creator's identity and make correlations to **personal/impersonal experiential/instrumental** reading, and if these concepts are hinted towards in who they recommend the book for. I also look out for how they talk about what makes a book “lesbian literature” in their definition, if the books connection to the lesbian continuum is made explicit, for example if the characters relationship is mentioned or if lesbian identity is the main theme of the book. Here I also looked for if the creator mentions how the book handles

the lesbian aspects, for example if it is a coming out story or the fact that a character is lesbian is normalised and not made a big deal off.

3.1.2 Inductive Thematic Analysis

For the comments analysis, an inductive thematic method was utilised. I was interested in the *response* commenters give to the video, *what* they comment and *what* their feelings are regarding the video. Therefore, thematic analysis was appropriate as I did not have any pre-existing categories I wanted to code the data in to, and the purpose of thematic analysis is to categorise the data in order to identify patterns (Brown & Clarke, 2006, 79). The inductive approach means the collected data determines the themes. The question I want answered is primarily *what* the commenters responses are to the video, meaning I was not looking for a specific type of comment or theme within the comments, but rather came up with themes as I was going through the data according to what I found (Brown and Clarke, 2006, 83). One exception to this was looking out for commenters using the comment section as a *digital closet*, here meaning I was looking to see if any commenters talked about not being open with their identity in real life, or where selective in the “amount” of open they are with their identity.

Though the comments themselves are leading the creation of themes, the analysis of the data is not separate from the existing research aim and question. Not having predetermined categories based on the theoretical framework does not mean the analysis is separate from the thesis aim (Brown and Clarke, 2006, 84). This means, for example, comments that are deemed unrelated to the videos purpose, and the purpose of this thesis, of talking about lesbian identity or lesbian literature will not be discarded from the data corpus, however they will not be analysed and instead be labelled *unrelated*.

The process of analysing the data material began at the collection stage. As the comments were harvested, I started making mental notes as to what the commenters were leaving comments about. These patterns are then identified according to how the comments correspond to the research questions this study is based on (Brown & Clarke, 2006, 82).

3.2 Ethics

When researching the ethical boundaries of internet research I took to the *Association of Internet Research*, or AOIR for short.

In *Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the aoir ethics working committee*, or the IRE 1.0 (AOIR, 2002), the section on cross cultural awareness

bring up the fact that countries laws regarding internet use, which means users can have different expectations on how the published material. This is something AOIR think is important for researchers to keep in mind when using material on the internet in studies, especially when the website being studied is a globally popular website such as YouTube. Furthermore, it is important to understand that individuals will have differing ideas regarding the right to use their materials within a study. A platforms own guideline may allow for such use, as may the research ethics. However, the creator of the material being used may feel differently depending on regulations within their own country or views within their culture, or just personal preference. It is also important to keep in mind that the analysis in this study is my own, and any themes identified are from my personal observation and understanding. The creators of the materials being used may feel miss represented or taken out of context. Therefore, I have opted not to show any channel name, screen name, video title, or any other information that can lead to a direct identification of the video creator. All videos are publicly available on YouTube and are the most popular within their category and therefore the protection offered regarding their identity is limited, and these restrictions are more in the hopes to direct focus towards my analysis rather than the content creators themselves.

Under the section *Involved Subjects* of the IRE 3.0 document (AOIR, 2019) they bring up the importance of not subjecting harm unto any of the people involved in the study, whether the researcher or the subjects. One aspect of this includes protecting people belonging to groups of people who might be in greater risk of being harmed. LGBTQ+ individuals are suggested as one of these groups. I have therefore chosen to remove commenters usernames and not use direct quotes from the comments.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis portion of this thesis is divided into the two sections of video analysis followed by comment analysis. First all five videos are presented, and their content is discussed in relation to the previously decided categories and conceptual framework. This is then followed by the analysis of the comment sections that is started off with a presentation of the themes, followed by the full analysis of each of the five comment sections.

4.1 Video Analysis and Discussion

Video 1:

The video opens with the video creator introducing herself and the video. She explains that it is lesbian visibility day and in honour of the day she has decided to publish a video to make some of her favourite lesbian books visible. She goes on to talk about her personal feelings towards lesbian visibility day, explaining that it is the day on which she first came out as a lesbian. She then goes on to talking about the invisibility of lesbian literature and lesbian identity within literature.

One thing most people haven't reflected upon is the fact that the word "lesbian" is seldomly stated within literature and other media, but once you see it you cannot un-see it. The lesbian identity is always left ambiguous, and this is because the word "lesbian" has negative connotations associated with it, and is heavily associated with pornography.

This statement mimics what Adrienne Rich argued for within her essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence* (2003), both with the invisibility of lesbians within literature (2003, 13) and the connection to lesbians and pornography (2003, 20). She goes on to talk about her feelings towards "lesbian" as a term, explaining her experience with stigmatisation around the word, and how this stigma hemmed her from accepting her own lesbian identity.

I internalised [the negative connotations] and in turn that made me struggle to come out because I could not see "lesbian" as the beautiful word that it is, and not something filthy. [...] "Lesbian" is such a lovely word I want more of on paper, which sadly is not the case for books right now. This is why I want to use this video to show you a few books that do use the word lesbian.

The video has an explicit literature mediating purpose as the creator is very vocal from the beginning about the video's purpose of making lesbian literature visible. She makes it clear that she only intends to recommend books that are explicitly lesbian with lesbian main characters and are positive towards lesbians. This does not mean all characters within the

books are accepting towards lesbians, but that the author has not written with any negativity towards the word lesbian or towards lesbian as an identity.

Other connections to compulsory heterosexuality exist within the video. The video creator herself mentions the phenomena within one of the recommendations, explaining that the book dealt with themes of compulsory heterosexuality. She then expressed her own struggles with the concept, and positive feelings about the topic being explored in a fantasy setting. When talking about another book she described how the positive lesbian representation of the books main character had been important to her in her own coming out process and acceptance in her own lesbian identity.

Two proud lesbians take centre stage which meant everything to me! I had never encountered that before and thought “Amazing, holy cow!” and it gave me the strength to accept my own identity. I have plans on reading this book again this summer and making annotations in it, which is why I have a paperback version as well. Let me know if you want to see that because I would love to make a video of it.

This alludes to the importance of lesbian representation for the strengthening of a lesbian identity, and specifically the importance it had for the video creator. With these recommendations the video creator is leaning into *personal instrumental* reading by stating how the *subjective relevance* of the characters paired with the themes of the book had a personal impact on her (Andersson, 2015, 19). Worth noting is that none of these books recommended have been self-help books but rather fantasy fiction and contemporary young adult fiction and are purely reading for enjoyment.

In the video the creator recommends eight books. She has a consistent structure throughout the video, beginning with presenting the books title and author while holding up a copy of the respective book she is talking about for each recommendation. She then explains a short summary of each book. The video itself seem to be semi scripted as it contains little to no rambling when presenting the books as well as always providing sufficient information regarding the book for anyone viewing the video to get an understanding of what to expect if they were to pick the book up themselves. When recommending each book, the video creator varies between different approaches. For some books she finishes the summary by stating who would like the book, either by associating to another book or author, or by connecting to a certain element of the book that might fulfil a specific literary need. She would often share specific elements of the book she was recommending, often sharing how she felt while reading and the emotions the book awakened within her

This story is told through the format of diary entries and letters between two girls in the seventies who are pen pals. The first girl is a closeted lesbian living with an extremely religious family, and she want to fight for her own right to live, and it is just a bad

situation. I got emotional straight away when reading the early parts, which gave me an instant connection to her as a character.

The above quote gives an example of a *personal experiential reading* experience (Andersson, 2015, 19), a connection to the characters but not from a therapeutic experience. This type of recommendation gives the viewer an idea of if the book will offer them a personal or impersonal experiential experience, or perhaps a personal instrumental one since they are now aware the themes dealt with in the book.

In some recommendations she praised the plot itself, and for other books she would talk about the character dynamics. The video creator would also offer an idea of how the book fit in to the lesbian continuum by stating if it was a lesbian romance, friendship oriented, family oriented, or any other relationship dynamic containing one or more lesbians. All books recommended in the video were printed textbooks. No mentions of the book's availability as audiobooks or other alternative media form were made. One mention of a graphic novel was made; however, this was in the creators own *To Be Read* list and not one of the eight books recommended. The books' genres were seldomly stated out right, with a few exceptions, presenting one book as a sci-fi, one as urban fantasy, and one as a political based fantasy. With the other books she would let the summary of the book speak for itself. As one of the goals of reading stimulation is to provide different formats and make reading accessible to all reading levels this aspect of the video does not fulfil that goal.

Neither did she explicitly state the audience designation of the books. (however, most books recommended are catalogued as young adult novels in stores.) The video creator would instead remark on the writing style of the books, for example explaining that one book was written in a format of letters and diary entries, and one had a gothic writing style. This approach of not categorising based on age group but rather presenting the book unbiased with explanations fall in line with the Swedish Art Councils goal for reading stimulation “increase access to a variety of literature [...] for readers of all ages” and “remove the obstacles to reading [...] and boost the reader’s self confidence and identity as a reader.” (Andersson, 2015, 11) by introducing the viewers to books based on subjective relevance (or impersonal instrumental/experiential reading for those who do not relate to the lesbian aspects of the books), rather than matching the viewers to an expected reading level based on age.

The video creator shares in this video that she sometimes engages in social reading activities with her audience. For some of the books she finishes the recommendation by linking to a reading vlog she has done of the book, offering them a chance to read along or engage with the video dedicated to a book they will- or have read. At the end of the video the creator shares her *To Be Read* list, asking the audience if they would be interested in reading

vlogs for some of the books. She also links to her Goodreads and her book related Instagram account, saying that those are other places to get in touch with her, and she shares a hashtag created to let people share and find lesbian literature.

Video 2:

The creator of Video 2 uses they/she pronouns. For this analysis I will stick to the pronoun “they” when referring to them.

Early in the video it is stated that it is lesbian visibility day, hence why the creator has put together a list of her favourite lesbian books. It is explained that what makes these books lesbian is the fact that all books feature important lesbian elements. All recommended books except one is written by a [lesbian] author, and they make a note to mention this again when recommending the book.

A man wrote this book and not a lesbian or bisexual woman, but it is still worth reading. If I recommend a book even though it's written by a man, you know it's worth it's price in salt. This book is a must-read for anyone who is into mysteries, gay people, and have a sense of humour

A total of 15 books are presented. Their method of presenting the books vary between giving a short summary of the book, describing the concept of the book, describing the relationship between the main characters rather than a plot and at one point describing the vibe of the book and why they liked it. Some of the book presentations where also finished off by giving recommendations of who would like the book, either by comparing it to another book or by describing a type of person who would enjoy it.

The video is divided into book categories with the first category being graphic novels, straight away introducing the audience to books written in alternative ways aside from traditional printed textbooks, reaching the reading stimulation goal of mediating literature of varying formats (Andersson, 2015, 11). The video creator did not state which audience designations the books are recommended to in terms of age, neither did they state if the writing style of the books were particularly difficult or easy to follow. On occasion the thickness of some books was mentioned, and only subjective statements about the language use of some were made.

The artistic style of this book is beautiful, the way it is told is reminiscent of the structure within One Thousand and One Nights, the old Arabian story

Genre and book settings were mentioned along with integral themes of the books. The recommendations are split into two categories: books that are explicitly lesbian, and books that are not explicitly lesbian. The video creator motivates these categories by explaining that

the books in the “not explicitly lesbian” category feature books where the lesbian elements are not brought up from the beginning of the book, or books where the lesbian elements are not thematically integral. The video creator also mentions if there are other labels to the main character/s of the book by stating if it is an asexual lesbian, non-binary lesbian, or bisexual character. Furthermore, they also describe the relationship aspects of the books and describe if the book is a lesbian romance, or if it is centred around friendship, family, or ex-lovers. This gives the viewers an idea of what they can expect from the book's relation to the lesbian continuum and guides them towards what they are most interested in, whether that is reading a book that happens to feature lesbian elements or a book dealing more with the lesbian experience (Rich, 2003, 27)

Aside from the *subjective relevance* of all literature recommended being lesbian literature, the creator do not make any mentions of any personal experiential or instrumental reading experiences. In other words, the creator did not state that any of the books had a personal impact on them. However, within the recommendations, themes related to *experiential* and *instrumental reading* are mentioned to help lead the audience to find what they themselves need, for example mentions of book themes consisting of sexual awakenings.

Next book is *We Read Upon Sticks* by Quan Barry. I love this book, it is one of those books that can really make you laugh. It follows a girl's field hockey team in the 80's and has themes of magical realism that is used humorously. We get to explore all of the girls' personalities and drama that happens in their lives. So it takes place in the beginning of hockey season, and they do a magic ritual to win their games, and the book is set in Salem and that is part of the theme as well. It is hilarious I love it a lot. Many of the characters are queer, and some of them discover their queer identity throughout the book and it is such an integral part of the storyline. I highly recommend this book it is so fucking fun to read

Impersonal instrumental reading experiences were mentioned at multiple times through the recommendations, for example when books about a group of lesbians who don't share other parts of their identity with the video creator is recommended. Books that feature other identity aspects aside from lesbian are mentioned explicitly, for example a book following a group of British black lesbians and another book that the video creator call “queer Jewish millennial”. Overall, the books being recommended vary greatly between fantasy to contemporary and follow characters of different age groups and ethnicities, but they all share the similarity of being lesbian literature. This is interesting compared to Rothbauer's (2004) study, where participants wanted to see a greater variety of lesbian literature, and how the internet's book communities have expanded the reach of lesbian literature today compared to almost 20 years ago.

Besides mentions of lesbian visibility day, no explanation of why the video creator finds it important to make a video dedicated to lesbian literature, and no explanation is given towards their own identity and whether lesbian literature have been of importance to their own identity building. The video itself appears to be a semi-structured, as the creator at times changes topic in the middle of a book recommendation to comment on something other happening around them. At other times they admit to having forgot aspects of certain book they are recommending. Aside from these elements the video is structured with categories and timestamps for each recommendation and is over all easy to follow. The video creator mentions having made reading vlogs of some books and engages with the audience in other ways by asking them to give book recommendations of their own in the comment section, as well as providing links to their other book related social media such as Goodreads.

Video 3:

Early in the video the video creator describes herself as a bi-sapphic woman, stating she identifies more with the term “sapphic”. Her motivation behind making the video is based on subjective relevance; she fits in the lesbian continuum, so she wants to recommend lesbian literature.

Welcome back to my channel, today I want to share some sapphic book recommendations! For those of you not aware of the term *sapphic*, the way I would describe it is *woman-loving-woman*, but I also feel like non-binary people fit in to this definition as well. I myself identify as bisexual, however I relate closer to the term sapphic. Therefore I thought it would be nice to dedicate an entire video to sapphic books!

Her definition of the word *sapphic* is similar to the definition used for the term *lesbian* within this thesis. Therefore, for the sake of this analysis, the word *lesbian* will substitute the word *sapphic*.

The video recommends a total of 37 books in the span of 32 minutes. This means that the video creator did not go into depth about each book, instead varying the books presentation between short summaries of the book, describing the book in only a few sentences, describe the concept of the book, or just describing the style of the book. One of the recommendations had no mention of any plot at all. The video creator appears to put a heavier emphasis towards *how* the books were being recommended. Recommendations about who would like the book were made for most books, and in some cases who would not like the book.

Girls of Paper and Fire by Natasha Ngan is about a girl who get's kidnaped from her family and given as a gift to the king. There are heavy themes of sexual assault within the book, so if that is not something you can handle reading take caution and maybe skip this book. However it is very well written, and not only do this book avoid tropes that feel very cliché at this point, the lesbian relationship is great and the world building is wonderful.

The video creator shares her personal feelings with the books being recommended by explaining certain aspects she liked, saying things about how she laughed while reading a book, or feeling happy inside while reading another. In one case she brought up criticism one of the recommended books had received and explained why she disagreed with it, giving a more nuanced insight of the book for the viewers. Beyond this she also remarks on the writing style and length of some books, at one point mentioning how one book were written in prose which she found hard to understand at times. All recommendations were categorised in genres and age groups, for example young adult fantasy and adult fantasy. Furthermore, she remarks on things such as if the book is light on the plot of keep its focus on other aspects like characterisation or worldbuilding. These insights give the audience an understanding of what they can expect if they decide to pick up the book, making the recommendations accessible to multiple reading levels.

Early in the video the video creator asked for the viewers to leave their own lesbian book recommendations, while making a recommendation of her own, establishing a community feeling and a two-way dialogue between her and the audience. She mentions how she herself got one of the books recommended to her through another BookTube creator, showing that the BookTube community have had a reading stimulation effect on her as well.

Mentions of how the books relate to the lesbian continuum were made for most every book being recommended by naming if it was a romance or the book had sexual scenes, or if the book focused on other relations such as family or friendship. Some books she described as “casually [lesbian]”, meaning the lesbian aspects of the book were not integral to the plot but just happened to be there. For one of the casually lesbian books the video creator brought up how she herself would have picked up one book sooner had she known the book featured black lesbians, showing subjective relevance importance to reading stimulation (Andersson, 2015, 19).

This book is a collection of stories that all relate to each other, and it features themes of, like, family dynamics and vignettes from different characters in the family. One of the family members are [lesbian] and it deals with her accepting her own identity and entering a relationship with a woman. It's not the main part of the book, but I wanted to include it because I don't often see black women and [lesbian] relationships within books. When I read it I just thought “I wish someone would have told me there was a [lesbian] and I would have read it sooner”, so now I'm saying it because people don't know! It is one of my favourite books because of it's themes, and it is written in beautiful prose.

When describing one of the recommended book the video creator share the same sentiment as some of the participants of Rothbauer's study (2004), that being the want to read lesbian books that are not coming out stories or stories about homophobia.

This is a really funny book and so casually [lesbian], which is one of my favourite things to read because it can be draining to only read about queer trauma. Sometimes that's necessary and important to read about those struggles and about people overcoming them, but it's nice to get a break from that, and I love just reading stuff like this book that is light-hearted and it makes me so happy. I actually laughed out loud while reading this and that does not happen often with books!

This also highlights the need for *personal experiential reading*, showing a want for lesbian literature that is for entertainment purpose and not with an instrumental intent.

In line with the reading stimulation goal of directing readers towards alternative literature mediums (Andersson, 2015, 11) the video creator makes a point of specifically recommending the audiobook version of one book, giving it high praise and describing how she felt when she listened to it.

If you do decide to pick this book up I suggest the audiobook version. I astral projected when I listened to the audiobook. Highly recommend that version, I had a great time.

The video creator appears to feel a sense of comradeship with her viewers, making direct remarks aimed at the people watching the video at multiple times. There was some bantering with the audience throughout the video in the form of jokes and light-hearted sassy comments, often as part of the recommendation in the form of comments implying lesbians with knives and dragons are the only things you need, or how only cool people will understand one book.

Next book is Honey Girl by Morgan Rogers, and it is no secret how much I love this book, it is an all time favourite of mine and I have mentioned it a thousand times by now. It is such a wonderful book with the best writing I've seen. I feel as if this book was written specifically for me, I can relate so much to it in how it deals with being a black [lesbian], and the way it deals with mental health and expectations from loved ones and society of how you should identify. There is a lesbian romance in the story but it is not a lesbian romance story. The story deals with a lot, and there is a Vegas wedding and all. The baddies get this book, and if you don't that's on you. If you follow me you are a baddie, those are the rules. Deal with it.

Beyond the community she fosters in her video she also links to an online book-club she hosts targeting lesbians or anyone else who may feel a desire to join. Furthermore, she links to her other book related social media accounts, such as goodreads where she has another list of lesbian books.

Video 4:

The video starts with the video creator explaining that it is lesbian visibility week, saying she identifies as a lesbian ally and encourages everyone to stand in solidarity with the lesbian community. It is on this basis she is making the video recommending her favourite lesbian books. As this video creator is explicitly not a lesbian this offers an insight to *impersonal*

instrumental and *experiential* reading on the lesbian continuum. She also talks about how she was inspired to do the video from another BookTube creator who is a lesbian, and she gives a shout out to said BookTuber. This hints towards the lesbian literature mediating effect BookTube have on its readers and offers an insight to the experiential reading possibilities for non-lesbian women.

The video creator shows a strong connection to community, both in the video being in support of the lesbian community, but also through BookTube as a community. As mentioned, the video creator does a shoutout to another BookTube creator who have also made a video dedicated to lesbian literature, as well as promotes this other BookTube creators instagram. Furthermore, she encourages her viewers to join an instagram photo challenge connected to lesbian visibility week and literature, interacting with her audience directly and asking them to interact back. She speaks casually with the viewers of the video, making little comments to returning viewers about her usual reading habits, as if they are old friends.

[this recommendations video] has a mixture of genres. I usually talk about fantasy, you know how I am, but I do actually have a lot of Young Adult and contemporary novels too, so I hope everyone will find something to their taste

The video is very structured with clear speech and minimal rambling, making it easy to follow and would be accessible for most English-speaking people, including for non-native speakers as the speech is clear and at a steady pace throughout the video. The video itself is divided into three book genres where she presents three books for each genre. This structure makes it very easy for viewers to find what they specifically are looking for or get recommended new books without being bombarded with an overwhelming number of books, and the video creator states in the video that she has gone for that approach in the hopes that there will be at least one book for every type of person. The book presentations follow a similar pattern each time; a short summary of the book followed by a statement of why she herself liked it, hyping up a plot twist or ending without giving it away, or praising the author or the writing style of the book. This way of presenting books is very fitting in terms of literature mediation due to the accessible nature of the video.

At the end of the video the video creator once again mentions lesbian visibility week, explaining why the week is important as well as stating that she finds it important for non-lesbians to read lesbian literature, promoting *impersonal* reading experiences.

It is really important to be an ally to lesbian people, and everyone ought to read lesbian books, not just for lesbian visibility week but for any week of the year! It is important to read about all elements of diversity.

Video 5:

In the opening of this video the creator starts off right away explaining the motivation behind making the video, explaining that in her experience it is difficult to find quality lesbian literature, and that a lot of literature claiming to contain lesbian elements often do not do so in the same extent they would straight elements. This highlights the invisibility of a lesbian existence within literature in line with that expressed by Adrienne Rich (2003, 13). This is why the creator has taken it into her own hands and made a video mediating lesbian literature that promises some sort of quality.

In this video we will talk about lesbian books that are actually good. The inspiration for this video came about because, you know when you desperately crave a lesbian love story so you read whatever you can get your hands on that will even just hint towards lesbian love in the book, and you suffer through the most heinous stories just to get a drop of lesbian love to quench your thirst. Well today I will share with you actually good books with lesbian romance in them. I hope you will like these books too.

She has categorised the video in to book genres without having a set number of books for each genre, some genres featuring one book recommendation and others three. The video itself is very casual with the creator giving the impression that she does not follow a script, at times having to recollect the plot of the book from memory. Even so the video is easy to follow and does not feature a lot of rambling, and the casual nature can instead offer a less intimidating approach to reading, removing the strict school- or library connotations of reading stimulating activities.

When presenting the books, the video creator does a short summary of the plot followed by a statement of either what she liked about the book, or who she believes would like the book. There is an effort to recommend lesbian literature for every type of reader, including for those who's taste differs from the creators own. She recommended one book that she herself did not care for it too much, but she believes others might and explains why.

Georgia Peaches and Other Forbidden Fruit by Jay Robyn Brown. It's not my personal favourite lesbian book I've read, however I've put it on this list for a reason. It is a good book for those of you who are looking for queer books that deal with religion, especially from a lesbian perspective. It's about a girl who's father is a pastor, or a radio evangelist, and they move from a big town where she feels very accepted, out to a small town where she has to hide her sexuality to protect herself. It is an important book for some queer people, and therefore I recommend it here.

This statement shows a great understanding about the importance of *subjective relevance* when mediating literature, as stated by Andersson (2015, 19), and the importance of the comforting possibilities of *personal instrumental reading* as an aspect of reading for leisure.

An audience designation is also declared for some of the books, one of them being middle grade, the youngest age grade of any book from all the videos analysed. This offers the viewers a chance to find books for themselves or others based on age group or reading level. Statements about length of some books were also made if the book in question was remarkably long, so that readers will be able to choose one that fits their reading preference best. The video is wrapped up by asking the viewers to let the creator know in the comments if they got inspired to pick up any of the books she recommended, hinting towards a desire for community with the audience. Aside from that, little effort was made within the video to connect, with no mentions of other social media or direct questions to the viewers.

4.2 Comment Section Analysis and Discussion

The most common themes found throughout all five comment sections were **literature stimulation, commenters book recommendations, asking for recommendations, proud (lesbian) commenter, digital closet, lesbian identity** and **lesbian visibility**. Some comments were filed under more than one theme.

Under **literature stimulation** I themed comments that shared how the video had successfully motivated them to read one or more books. This type of comment appeared under each video's comment section, showing how BookTube is a successful tool in mediating lesbian literature and stimulating a lesbian reading desire. Many of these comments could also be themed under **commenters book recommendations** as many would share their own suggestions within the same comment.

Other comment themes that were often seen together were **proud (lesbian) commenter, lesbian identity** and **lesbian visibility**. The last two ones could also often be categorised along with **digital closet**.

Within the theme of **digital closet** comments such as asking for tips on how to read the recommended books without family finding out were frequent. Other comments under this theme were ones expressing a sadness regarding lesbian identity and lesbian literature not being more accepted among their peers. Comments like this show the importance of a digital closet, giving people space to express themselves, and it shows why communities such as BookTube can be of importance to people belonging to marginalised groups.

Video 1 comment section:

There were recurring themes within the first videos comment section, with all but four comments falling into themes of *literature stimulation*, *commenters own book recommendations*, *comments asking for more recommendations*, reflections about videos statement regarding the word *lesbian*, *lesbian identity strengthening*, *digital closet*, and *commenter questioning sexuality*. The four unrelated comments consisted of one negative comment not directed towards lesbians or books, one comment about the video creator's appearance, one comment flirting with the video creator, and one comment just stating confusion without context.

For many of the comments more than one theme could be identified. As this video made a clear statement about the term *lesbian* it is not surprising that many of the comments were about that statement specifically with a lot of commenters reflecting over their own relationship with the term, many expressing how the stigma surrounding the word affected their own identity. One commenter expressed how they actively used to avoid calling themselves *lesbian* and instead used the word *gay* because the negative connotations made towards lesbians within media, and another said they hope books can help remove the stigma surrounding the word. Many of the comments talking about the statement made also related to the literature mediation and reading stimulation aspects of the video. One commenter talked about how grateful they were towards the statement as well as the recommendations, as they had trouble finding lesbian media that is explicitly lesbian, explaining that when they search for it, they would often come across porn. This sentiment of lesbian literature being invisible was echoed by multiple commenters. One was thankful for the channel being so dedicated to lesbian literature mediation as it gave them a one-stop-shop to look towards. The need for subjective relevance in reading was shown throughout the comments, both with the examples previously mentioned but also by some commenters showing gratitude to finding books they themselves can relate to, expressing this have ignited a reading desire. Some comments were simple variations of “thank you for the recommendations”.

Some comments were left by closeted people. One commenter made thanks to the book recommendations as a closeted lesbian, saying she is adding them to the list of lesbian books she has already consumed. Another commenter made her own recommendations, stating that the book did not show any signs of lesbian or other queer themes on the cover or the blurb, making it safe for closeted lesbians such as herself.

One commenter stated that they had found themselves in a reading slump and was inspired to pick up reading again after having watched the video. They then proceeded to give their own recommendation of a lesbian novel.

Video 2 comment section:

The comment section of video 2 gave great insight into the importance of subjective relevance within reading stimulation as well as community for reading stimulation, and how reading identity/community does not have to be separate from general identity/community, in this case meaning lesbian identity/community. Multiple commenters left comments expressing the importance of the video, and the meaning it held for them.

I'm a teenager and I really needed this video. My school say they respect everyone, but they make no effort. They don't mention any visibility days or months. Some people are homophobic and they want to avoid arguments. [...] I appreciate what you are doing with this video, and I wish schools would take marginalised groups into perspective, and destigmatise so people would not have to hide in the closed to fear and shame, but come out and feel proud. Thank you for making a video like this.

There were 23 likes on this comment on the day of this analysis, meaning 23 people had seen it and stood in solidarity with this teenager. This hints towards the importance of a community for people who do not follow the norm, and the comfort it offers people. Other comments highlight the importance of seeing yourself represented in literature for when a wider community is not within arms length, showing how *subjective relevance* is an important factor in reading motivation, and why reading stimulating activities should target groups such as lesbian readers.

For some reason I am only interested in media that have lesbian characters... Not always, but usually when I am looking for something to watch or read I ask "does this have any lesbian elements in it?". I think I will read some of these books recommended! But I don't know how to get a hold of them without my parents seeing. They are not outright homophobic, but there have been some incidents in the past so I'm not really comfortable around them regarding this

Other commenters expressed a need to connect with a greater queer community through reading. Comments such as "Are there any classic lesbian novels that are staples and most people within the queer community have read? Please anyone answer." were found. Unfortunately, during the time of the analysis no response had been given to this commenters request.

The comment section also showed that the video has had a great reading stimulating effect, with multiple commenters proclaiming that they had picked up one or more of the books being recommended. A few commenters expressed that they had found themselves in a reading slump for quite some time, but this video had sparked some motivation within them, for example this following comment, which had two likes on the day of the analysis:

I haven't been in to reading for a while now, which have made me quite sad. [...] but my desire for books is starting to come back a little, and now I'm hoping it will come back even more! Super excited to read some of the books you recommended!

Another commenter gave thanks for the graphic novels specifically, showing the importance of mediating alternative types of literature. Three people had liked that comment.

Aside from the literature mediation and reading stimulating effects the video had on the commenters themselves, there were multiple commenters giving their own recommendations of lesbian books they have enjoyed reading, answering the video creators request of leaving their own reading suggestions.

Video 3 comment section:

The most common theme identified for the comment section of video three was *commenters own recommendations* as well as *reading stimulation*. One commenter even left a comment praising the literature mediation method used within the video.

Never seen one of your videos before but I absolutely will watch more. You recommend all the books in such an intriguing way and I love the way you summarise them. I've never heard of some of these books. Thank you so much. Wonderful content, I subscribe for sure!

Other comments were also left regarding the literature mediation aspects of the video. Some commenters made thanks to specific genres being recommended, such as one commenter appreciating the adult contemporary books, showing that there is a need for such books but with those books not being readily available or visible in everyday book situations. Another commenter gave thanks to the video creator for her literature mediating work, saying that it had opened an entire new genre for them that they had previously thought they disliked.

I want to thank you so much. I used to think romance novels were not my thing, but I now realise it's just heterosexual romance novels that aren't my thing. One of your videos changed that for me when I was introduced to lesbian romance, after I read one of your recommendations and cried! Now I read so many lesbian romance novels and I love it.

This comment had three likes on it. Comments like that one shows the importance of literature mediation for both self-fulfilling purposes as well as for reading stimulating purposes, in other words it shows that a desire to read is indeed sparked through *subjective relevance* and *personal reading* experiences (Furhammar1997, 140).

Lesbian invisibility was another common theme, one that was often identified along with *literature mediation*. Many commenters expressed that lesbian books, or lesbian characters within books, were often ignored or hidden, or did not feature at all, something that had a negative impact on all the commenters remarking on this, mimicking the negative impact Adrienne Rich describes in her essay (2003), as well as the sentiments shared by Paulette

Rothbauer's study participants in her study (2004). Even so, many commenters showed appreciation for the video in a humorous manner even when remarking on this issue, for example one commenter saying "Not me being lesbian and dropping everything to watch this video. I'm deprived of lesbian books". Some commenters find lesbian invisibility to exist even within lesbian circles, and one commenter specifically seem to have found this be the case with this video as well.

Great recommendations! I did notice a lack of the word "lesbian" when recommending books, but you consistently used the words "sapphic". [...] Many books recommended have had lesbian main characters and lesbian relationships. [...] There is a huge stigma around the word "lesbian" so it would have been positive if you were to use the word. "lesbian" is not a bad word and can apply to a lesbian relationship between a lesbian and bisexual, even

Other themes that were identified consisted of unrelated comments talking about the video creators appearance, general supportive comments with simple remarks such as "nice video". The last major theme identified was "shared books excitement (have read)" where commenters shared excitement about one or more of the books recommended in the video that they themselves had read. Many shared what it was that they liked about the book, or scolded that other people should indeed read them

Video 4 comment section:

This comment section had a significant amount fewer comments than any of the other four videos. Being only 24 comments, 80 less comments than the previous videos comments section, meant there were far fewer themes to identify.

The most common theme was *thankful for recommendations* with comments simply giving thanks to the video and the book recommendations given. Among these there were a few comments expressing they were going to add some books to their *To Be Read* list, or that they were already on their way to buy some of the books. There were a few comments giving their own recommendations, and one commenter was excited about the video creators *To Be Read* list they shared at the end of the video.

A couple of commenters left comments about being closeted, both asking for advice on how they could get a hold of the books without their family noticing. One of them expressed thanks for the books, saying they will be bringing them comfort in the closet. Both were themed under *digital closet*.

One comment was left from another BookTube creator, giving thanks for the stance taken by the video creator on lesbian visibility day, and saying that some of the books recommended in the video were actually her own favourites as well. This hints towards a

greater lesbian book community across BookTube, and not isolated communities within just the video or BookTube channel in question.

On the theme of *lesbian visibility* one other commenter shared that they had found the video because of lesbian visibility day, expressing gratitude towards the day and the video created in honour of it.

Worth noting is that this video is the one not made by a lesbian creator but rather a lesbian ally. Though the video did not differ from the other four videos in run time or number of books recommended, nor was it made by a less popular channel, it did have less engagement within the comment section than the other videos, and the engagement consist mainly of gratitude. This shows to the importance of allies as well as showing the importance of a community of lesbians as evidenced by the number of positive engagements on the other videos and comment sections analysed in this study.

Video 5 comment section:

One theme that kept coming up within this comment section was the *literature mediating* and *reading stimulating* effect of the video. One commenter said the video had been helpful for them to be able to buy lesbian books, while another said that they had not even know lesbian books existed prior to watching and instead they had just avoided reading romance novels all together. That comment had a total of 45 likes at the time of analysis. This is an example of why *subjective relevance* is important in order to reach the reading stimulating goal of mediating literature of different genres (Andersson, 2015, 11), and that in order to do so other themes than just the genre itself need to be expressed in order to spark a reading desire.

Many commenters expressed how the video had expanded their own *To Be Read* list, one commenter sharing how she will ask for the books as gifts. “I’m [in my early teens] and I just got my first lesbian book! I will wish for some of these recommendations next time I will receive gifts!”. Another commenter, a tween, also said she will be asking for some of these books for her birthday, and she shared her excitement about receiving a lesbian pride flag.

Many commenters left their *own recommendations* in the comment section, one even gave a tip on where the book they recommended was available online. Alternative literature was also recommended, with one commenter leaving recommendations for graphic novels.

One theme that kept coming up was *lesbian invisibility*. One commenter put into words their frustration regarding this, and their relief that lesbian literature has started to show up more.

Unfortunately great lesbian novels have just recently started being published. Just five years ago I could not find anything but trashy romance. I'm glad there is now starting to appear a good amount of multiple genres

This comment had one like on it at the time of analysis, hinting that one other commenter agreed with this. Another commenter brought up a critique to their local library and the fact that they not only lacked lesbian books, but they only had a total of two books with queer themes in them. Many commenters expressed general gratitude towards the video, and one commenter specifically felt appreciative over the diversity within the recommendations, showing a need for more visibility within books in general. There was a theme of *impersonal reading* experiences within some commenters. One commenter was a self-proclaimed straight woman with a preference for lesbian literature.

Many commenters asked for *further recommendations*. These comments usually consist of specific recommendations, for example one commenter wanting more lesbian romance with an audience designation other than young adult novels. These comments show a desire and motivation for people to read, as well as demonstrates the importance of subjective relevance and personal experiential and instrumental reading within reading stimulation.

5. Conclusion

This is the last chapter of the thesis where I wrap up my findings and correlates everything back to each research questions.

- How do BookTube creators utilise YouTube as a platform for lesbian literature mediation and how can the video be understood as reading stimulation?

If we were to reduce the first research question in to a simple yes or no question, “can BookTube be understood as a tool for reading stimulation?” it is in my belief that yes, it can. For the question of *how* it can be seen through each of the videos analysed for this study that they had a clear goal of making different type of lesbian literature visible to the masses, mediating books with multiple genres and reader designations, with most videos even stating out right that they hoped there would be at least one book for each person. This successfully fulfils the goals of what a reading stimulating activity is meant to strive for according to Andersson (2015, 12). All five videos followed a similar method of presenting a book, however all of them giving the presentations their own personal flare, meaning viewers can find not only a video structured in a way that suits them the most, but will be presented different lesbian books to find one that will be to their taste.

Three out of five videos were created in honour of lesbian visibility week or day, taking the opportunity to make lesbian literature visible. Four out of five videos started off with an explanation of why they found it necessary to mediate lesbian literature, with answers varying between stating that lesbian literature had helped them find their own identity, wanting to be an ally to lesbians, or that they themselves had experienced a lack of (quality) visible lesbian literature.

- What response do the commenters leave, what insight can the comment section give regarding the (lesbian) reading stimulation aspect of the video

Many commenters reported that the video had inspired a reading desire for them, often based on *subjective relevance*. Themes connected to *lesbian identities* were frequent. Every video had at least one comment from someone closeted using the comment section as a *digital closet*. Closeted and non-closeted individuals alike expressed a gratitude towards finding literature featuring lesbians. Some comments expressed how the videos had opened their eyes towards entire genres they had previously avoided due to heteronormativity, others expressed they were utterly unaware of lesbian literature all together, and others stated the

videos had helped them get through reading droughts. All this showing the importance of mediating lesbian literature for the sake of lesbian reading stimulation.

In conclusion, the response from the commenters showed the videos to be successful within lesbian literature mediation, and that the videos had a reading stimulating effect on them. Furthermore, they show the importance of a lesbian reading community for both the reading desire within lesbian readers as well as for the identity strengthening of the commenters. This brings us to the third research question:

- What opportunities can BookTube offer in strengthening the lesbian reading identity as well as creating a lesbian reading community? What effects can this have on the individuals personal and reading identity?

The importance of social interaction, as stated by Gambrell (2011, 175), in creating a reading identity and community is demonstrated within these videos and their comment section. The video creators sharing books for the audience to read, and the commenters giving book recommendations back, trying to get one another to engage in reading. This goes further with the shared excitement over a book that both the commenters and the video creator have read. The connection between reading identity and lesbian identity was demonstrated multiple times throughout the videos and comments. Most notably within video 1 when the video creator credited one of the books to being part of her own self acceptance and coming out process, demonstrating how her identity as a reader have an integral part in her identity as a person and a lesbian. The connection is also demonstrated within the comment sections of all videos, for example when closeted commenters spoke on the comfort the books bring them in an otherwise not accepting environment. It was found that the comment section of video 4, the person explicitly not a lesbian, had the least engagement, albeit very positive engagement. This shows the importance of allies within the lesbian continuum and reading community, however it also hints towards the importance of lesbian reading communities having lesbians in its centre, as most of the engagement were being done in the comment sections of the videos created by lesbians.

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