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Snake in the Grass: Adapting Sex and Sexuality from Journalistic Truth to the Silver Screen

Patrick R. Johnson

Quite often, the person we see on screen is far from the company we keep. The stars that play some of the most fantastic roles seem more out of reach than the stars we see at night. And the roles they play take us to some of the most mystical worlds. Yet sometimes the characters on screen are meant to be someone just like us. Those stories, the ones meant to embody the everyday person, aren't always masterfully crafted from the folds of the writer's brain. Rather, these stories emerge from real people—some of which may live down the street from us. And these stories, often labeled as "based on a true story" both in their publicity and credits, are meant to tell an honest story. These biopics are cinema history that have lasted since the advent of the moving image.

While some scholars believe that biopics, and their sister genre: docufictions, aren't meant to be held at the same level of truth telling as say a documentary (Hutcheon 2006), others see the films being places to share a part of someone's story with a greater audience and thus the story becomes more important than the truth (Fischer 2016); however, the truth matters to the audience despite the value of it to the creator of the work. According to Valsesia, Diehl and Nunes (2017), even though entertainment producers focus on creating works based on a true story, oftentimes audiences are unfamiliar with how much of the work is grounded in reality or journalistic truth.

The goal of this study is to interrogate the role of truth telling in a cultural product like a biopic, particularly in its adaptation from journalistic accounts. Despite the vastness of the goal, the implication is that this work begins a conversation about the ethical implications of storytelling in fictionalized works that are based on journalistic narratives. This paper uses a case study approach to discuss issues of sexuality explored in James Franco and Justin Kelly's *King Cobra.* I address the line that exists between fact and fiction when a creator bends the foundational truth of a story to

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maximize the pleasure of his audience. To do this, I ask: How is sexuality appropriated to adapt the narrative of a true crime journalistic account to a biographical film?

The Snake in the Grass: Analyzing the Case of the Cobra King

This analysis focuses on the story featured in James Franco and Justin Kelly's film *King Cobra*—an adaptation of a true crime account of the murder of a gay adult entertainment producer Bryan Kocis. *King Cobra* was initially released at the Tribeca Film Festival in April 2016 and then to mass audiences in October. It tells the story of Kocis, gay porn star Brent Corrigan (real name Sean Lockhart), and adult entertainment entrepreneurs and lovers Joseph Kerekes and Harlow Cuadra. Kocis, his company—Cobra Video, and the company's first star—Corrigan, are central to the plot, which ultimately leads to Kocis' death at the hands of now convicted murderers Kerekes and Cuadra. The film; Kelly, the film's writer and director; and Franco attempt to confront sexuality head on in the film as they construct a narrative of what happens when jealousy, economics, and ownership overtake personal well-being and success. The duo of Kelly and Franco took creative liberties throughout the film, thus positioning pleasure above the truth. Yet Kelly isn't the one that the creative exhibitionism is attributed to; rather, Franco is seen as the one who pushed sexual boundaries and encouraged enhancements to the script Kelly wrote (Donnelly, 2016) and thus shifted the story from its journalistic narrative to its presentation on the silver screen.

The emphasis on gay sexuality in *King Cobra* provides opportunity for analysis regarding the film's capability to tell the truth about one's sexuality or a collective group's sexuality. *King Cobra* is centered around "the most recognizable gay porn star in the world" (Zach 2016). Even though the film's distribution and critical acclaim is not as vast or successful compared to other biopics about gay stars, its desire to tell the story of an industry with an emphasis on its most recognizable star and an incident that occurred within it that led to journalistic coverage positions the film as a relevant text for study. The film's structure and the opportunity to examine texts that both led to and resulted from its production makes *King Cobra* an ideal case for interrogating a creator's intent, truth telling, and the impact of adaptation decisions on both the production of the cultural product and its critic and audience reception.

With that in mind, this paper uses a critical/cultural framework with particular emphasis on prudential hedonism. I also use a case study approach to read and analyze *King Cobra* and nonfiction texts related to it. A case study is particularly apropos because it allows holistic and in-depth probing

of not just the film, but the texts that informed it and emerged from it (Christian 2011). The texts used for analysis included both texts the film is adapted from—a 2007 *Rolling Stone* article by Peter Wilkinson and the 2015 book *Cobra Killer* by Andrew Stoner and Peter Conway; journalistic accounts of the case and about the film; and reviews from critics and registered users of IMDB and MetaCritic.

The film, original journalistic texts, and reviews were read four times using a constant comparative approach (Maykut and Moorhouse 2001) to identify themes and compare ideas with each viewing. The first reading emphasized familiarity with the narratives. The second addressed and identified various similarities and differences among the narratives. The third focused on thematic ideas and a closer reading of the texts for discursive constructions of the themes. The fourth and final reading further reinforced the themes, removing one of the original themes from the study due to it addressing possible future research about James Franco in particular. The purpose of extending beyond an analysis of only the film is to situate it as part of a greater cultural conversation, one that sees the variety of media texts that are a part of the story as intertwined. The methodology performed here is an opportunity to engage in a discussion that asks media studies and film scholars to look beyond an individual medium and approaching analysis in a way that positions media in conversation with one another—text, producer, audience—and thus establishing a greater cultural narrative of which the truth can be understood.

What follows is an explication of two core themes: fluffing audiences and beheading relationships. The themes make contributions to a greater understanding about the appropriation of sexuality in an adapted work. Each theme is discussed using the multiple layers of texts to understand how reality, fiction, and reception interact. This exploration concludes by situating the analysis in a larger conversation about how issues of sexuality are explored and adapted in films developed from true stories. Subsequently, I address the role ethics plays in the portrayal and production of themes of sexuality.

Fluffing Audiences: Compromising Truth for Sexy for the Sake of Entertainment

The murder of Bryan Kocis made national news. The news became *King Cobra*. However, when the news cycle moved on, it left behind his family, Lockhart, and his murderers. And the film left little for any of them to move on from. Both Lockhart (Tan 2016) and Kocis' family (Halpin 2016) condemned the film adaptation for overdramatizing, extending, and exploiting the truth story for the purpose of audience pleasure. Lockhart

wrote on Twitter, "It's [*King Cobra* is] made. And it's not about me. It's Hollywood's attempt at bastardizing my early years in porn, one man's murder, blah blah @JamesPMBerry" (April 17, 2016). He would participate in several interviews with the gay press. In one, he shares he was offered a role in the film but declined it because "they were not trying to make a movie that would serve gay men, the gay adult industry, or any justice with what happened to Bryan, or what I lived through with Grant [Roy]" (Zack 2016). Lockhart even notes that "When the content and screenplay are so far off base, it doesn't matter what A-listers are attached to it" (Tan 2016). Lockhart claims the narrative was altered to emphasize the parts of the story that were exciting. Adjustments to the original narrative were made to enhance the sexiness of the story's sexuality for the sake of entertainment—thus privileging the happiness of an audience through pleasure and minimizing the pain of the original narratives

Bodily pleasure is positioned at the forefront of the film. Significant use of close-ups of Lockhart and Cuadro provide opportunity to use sex as a means of developing a pleasurable experience for the audience, or as one reviewer suggests: "the stylised cinematography with its neon glow and filtered shots grabs attention. We feel as if we're in an actual porno most times, not from the actual bare skin onscreen but the visual style" (Newell 2017). The introduction of Sean, who would be known thereafter as Brent, is done using a gay pornography trope—the couch confessional. The camera first focuses on both his face and his lips. The camera then follows his hand from his mouth to his pants. It then spotlights him masturbating. After his first scene, Brent is hooked. Later, a montage of Brent's sexual encounters continues to emphasize his face, his bare butt, his necklace that reads Brent in script, and his face again during his "money shot." Reviewers saw these moments as "a cut above most homoerotic masturbatory screen fantasies" (Reed 2016), "exaggerated emptiness of every porn movie's 'dramatic' scenes" (Abele 2016), and aspiring "to be a low-budget, all-make answer to 'Boogie Nights'" (Holden 2016). The detail the camera exposes in *King Cobra* doesn't emerge from either text the film is adapted from.

While Brent's first experience with Cobra in real life wasn't a couch confessional as the movie implies, his rise to stardom following his first appearance in the gay adult entertainment industry was capitalized on in the film. His fame is something audiences can identify with and aspire toward. His fame supplants the pain of his story being "bastardized" to being something pleasurable for the audience. This is clear in the film as Brent's stardom and downfall would catch fire on the internet. Editing significantly large textual overlays of "scandal," "blame," and "underage" in scenes following Brent's admission of being underage while filming porn

capitalize, as one reviewer put it, on journalistic sensationalist adages "sex sells" and "if it bleeds, it leads" (Cook 2016). Brent's revelation and going to the police is written in the film as though it is Kocis' first soiree with the law, when in fact he'd already come against child pornography and abuse charges in his past (Stoner and Conway 2015). That, in fact, was when Kocis' family learned about both his secret career and his sexuality (Wilkinson 2007). In the film, Kocis' outing comes with tawdry headlines, which "exaggerate the strangeness of the case, losing tonal balance and interest in the human particulars along the way" (Orndorf 2016), and makes the outing a climax of the story, rather than the death of Kocis as Stoner, Conway, and Wilkinson all write in their journalistic accounts.

The story of *Cobra King* and the *Rolling Stone* article the film is adapted from focus primarily on Bryan Kocis and his two murderers, but the adaptation makes Brent the star. It strips the plain, middle-aged face of Kocis—both figuratively in the loss of his name (changing it to simply Stephen) and literally in the use of Christian Slater, an 80 s heartthrob—from the narrative and puts his shiny new twink as the film's true North. The shift from Kocis to Lockhart is done visually as Brent is often seen wearing only underwear and domesticated. The use of bareness of skin mimics the pornographic qualities the film is attempting to adopt. It is also done by giving Brent the final words in the film, now as a porn producer himself; he first asks his make-up artist to "touch up my ass" and then, looking right at the camera, he says, "alright, let's fuck." The move reflects that "the overemphasis on sex robs the characters of developing personality and telling a story" (Lopez 2016). The fade to credits leaves the audience engaged in Brent's world, nearly forgetting that the story is about the murder of Bryan Kocis.

One of the most critical shifts from the original narratives is the desire to utilize pleasure in lieu of mundane elements. While one can accept that the film's compression of time from nearly five years to one is done for the sake of budget, the shortening of Cuadro and Kerekes' lengthy relationship with each other for the sake of sex and comedy prove detrimental. While the two represent a dark element of the gay adult entertainment industry, neither describe their experiences as anything more than pornographic. Stoner and Conway (2015) describe the two as domestic and their backstories enriched by pain. The film minimizes the pain except for Cuadro's admittance of his sexual assault as a child at the hands of his stepfather. This is an accurate adaptation; however, its positioning in the narrative allows for it to become a response to his serving other's pleasure as an escort. That, according to Stoner and Conway (2015), is not the case. Cuadro and Kerekes develop their sex work empire absent of Cuadro's sexual assault.

The couple's relationship is seen on screen as expletive-laden dialogue bookended by explicit sexual behaviors. In only one case, the rules to Cuadro's job as an escort are the same as the journalistic account (Stoner and Conway 2015), but the visual being emphasized on screen concludes with Cuadro apologetically giving oral sex to Kerekes. These sexual encounters become a central focus to the narrative developed on film about the couple, including the sexual connection to the murder of Kocis. Both Stoner and Conway (2015) and Wilkinson (2007) write that Cuadro and Kerekes murder Kocis solely for business purposes. The film instead emphasizes a sexual nature to the murder by stressing Cuadro's visit to the home, his own version of a couch confessional, and then a close-up of his orgasmic face as he stands over Kocis's dead body.

Reviewers see the lack of mundane elements as detrimental to the greater truth of what appeared on screen. One reviewer writes that "perhaps more time could have been devoted to the actual investigation if Kelly didn't insist on shoehorning in/lingering on the video shoots, none any more salacious than your average late-night cable fare, all of which become increasingly repetitive" and "… in service of a fairy trite narrative" (Haar 2016). While another saw these moments as simply an attempt "to delve into something real, the reality is those watching porn aren't watching for the acting" (Lopez 2016). As Lopez (2016) alludes, the film equates to pornography—a cinema of attraction—and the pleasure of sex is positioned far above the actual painful narrative of Kocis' story.

Beheading Relationships: Removing Trust and Limiting Audience Capabilities to Understand the Truth

King Cobra plays with the role of trust in its performative relationships, thus pushing the concept of relational care to the side. The pleasurable experiences of relationships are highlighted, and the painful ones are relegated to short scenes, deleted entirely from the adaptation, or fabricated to advance the exaggeration of the nearly pornographic experience the film provides. This can be seen in several ways. First, one of the most important relationships in Lockhart's life outlined in the journalistic accounts, Grant Roy, is completely left out of the film. In lieu of that relationship, the film introduces Brent to Mikey—a fictional relationship rooted in sex. The filmic relationship between Brent and Bryan is also castrated from the truth of Stoner and Conway's (2015) text. Beyond sexual relationships, trust is easily cast aside when it comes to both Kocis and Lockhart's friends and families—something reviewers are incredible critical of. The only exception to this is the relationship between Cuadro and Kerekes. Their relationship

is exaggerated, but the trust the two have with each other did not waiver between any journalistic account and the adaptation.

In interviews, Lockhart notes Roy as the true hero to the story of bringing Kocis' killers to justice (Tan 2016). Roy is an integral part to not only the case, but also to Lockhart's life. They were in an intimate and lasting relationship (Stoner and Conway 2015). *King Cobra* eliminates Roy entirely and situates Kocis as a surrogate. What this does is eliminate Lockhart and Roy's trust-driven relationship. The adaptation positions Kocis as the dominant figure in Brent's business world. Their relationship is controlling and obsessive, which is a film exaggeration of how Lockhart describes his relationship with Kocis in the journalistic accounts. Lockhart says that trust is necessary in the industry to feel protected and supported (Stoner and Conway 2015). The removal of trust between the two ended in two changes from the journalistic narrative: (1) Brent is portrayed as self-obsessed and aloof and (2) Kocis is seen as pedophilic and his relationship to Brent as Master/Slave-like.

In the film, Brent disregards the trust the real Lockhart says is required (Stoner and Conway 2015) and instead becomes hyper-focused on himself, his looks, and his success in filming. He asks for more and more while on shopping trips with Kocis, begs for more money and cars, and stares at himself on the internet both in videos and in the comments about his videos. Brent's obsession is questioned by Kocis consistently, who ironically is obsessed with Brent as much as Brent is obsessed with himself. While Brent becomes visually obsessed with himself and his work, Kocis becomes mentally and physically possessive of Brent. In one scene where Brent turns the camera onto Kocis, Kocis says, "people think I'm a dirty old man for liking boys like you … please make me feel wanted." This leads to the two having sex and a transition in their relationship. Brent is no longer just a means of making money, but also becomes a pleasure-providing prisoner. Manipulation becomes critical in their relationship, which eventually causes Brent to backlash: "I'm not your fucking property." Brent's visual movements, such as swiftly turning his head and stomping away until he gets what he wants, are attempts to oppose Kocis. As Kocis gets angrier, he forces Brent to have sex with him again. This time Brent's visual cues and movements are different. He is not in opposition; he is in fear. His face is clearly in pain and unengaged, signaling a sexual assault. That assault is never mentioned in either Stoner and Conway (2015) or Wilkinson's (2007) journalistic narratives; however, it didn't go unnoticed by the audience. One reviewer claims the characters' relationship to be a "poisonous cycle of jealousy, abusive relationships and exploitation" (Bond 2016), while another explains that "When Stephen isn't all moony and mopey over Sean, he treats him like an investment property that he will stop at nothing

to protect" (Holden 2016). The violation of trust between the two is a central plot point leading to Brent turning in Kocis and then Kocis' death.

Elements of friendship are also incorrectly adapted in this film. In fact, Kocis's real life friends, such as his neighbors and Robert Wagner, are completely removed from the film. Instead, Kocis is written as isolated. The only visible neighbor calls Kocis a pedophile and tries to get Brent to leave Kocis' home. The only friend Brent makes is Mikey, a scene partner. Mikey and Brent's relationship is defined following their poolside shoot. They first play video games together, as young adult males stereotypically do, and then they have sex. This timeline first positions Brent as having a seemingly normal friendship, but then situates the audience in a place of disruption. The innocence of playing a video game shifts to sex—the mundane to the explicit. While they share an embrace post-coitus, Mikey tells Brent he wants to take him away from Kocis and the business. Brent refuses Mikey's proposition because, as he shares, Kocis "treats me right." None of this happens in either journalistic text; however, in the film's variation of truth, a way of helping Brent to violate Kocis's trust is nested in Brent's brief friendship with Mikey. This friendship leads to Kocis forcing Brent to tell him that "you [Kocis] fucked me [Brent] better than he [Mikey] did." The master/slave trope between Kocis and Brent is rooted in verbal, mental, and physical punishment. He then further extends their abusive relationship by making Brent clean the toilets to "keep things nice and clean." This, as Newell (2017) writes, shows how "Stephen's obsession with Lockhart turns their relationship into one of pimp and prostitute, too. Like a pimp, Stephen wants total control over Brent, so much so he makes the whole thing into a personal and legal battle."

The most unique relationships developed in the film that differ from the journalistic accounts are the familial ones, and these relationships are also what critics and audience members are most critical of. According to Stoner and Conway (2015), Lockhart's relationship with his family was strained, including with his mom. Stoner and Conway (2015) also position Kocis', Kerekes', and Cuadros' families as incredibly important to their lives. The film changes these relationships significantly. Lockhart's mother is more like a sister. Kocis' sister is the only person to provide context to Kocis outside of his villainy, but she is seen as unknowing of his lifestyle. Cuadros' family is only mentioned in the context of his sexual abuse, whereas his mother is seen as a reemergent component to his life in Stoner and Conway's (2015) writing. Kerekes' family is central to his story and upbringing but are absent in the film narrative completely.

The use of Molly Ringwald and Alicia Silverstone as Kocis' sister and Brent's mother respectively is seen as an opportunity to capitalize on established actors (Putman 2017). Critics believe both actresses are not only a

production misstep, but also failures to provide depth to the relationships of the characters in the film: "Molly Ringwald and Alicia Silverstone are ill-used as the unsuspecting women in Stephen's and Sean's lives" (Abele 2016) Another critic feels that "Alicia Silverstone, as Sean's clueless mother, and Molly Ringwald, as Stephen's sister, are miscast in minor roles that contribute nothing to the creepy story of lost souls on the highway to self-destruction" (Reed 2016). In all instances, the significant shifts in family relationships alter the overarching truth the journalistic accounts attempt to share. This extends to all relationships presented in the film adaptation. What many argue are mundane elements of a relationship, are the pieces stripped away from the journalistic accounts in the adaptation of the story to film. The pleasurable elements of sex and the tropes associated with the gay pornography industry are emphasized.

True Crimes of Power

The argument I attempt to make in this article intends to supersede the current case: that adaptations of journalistic works need deep consideration of ethical duties. Yet, the case offers an additional layer of concern: issues of sexuality must be treated with additional finesse. The ethical adaptation of a journalistic work is pressing given the use of pornography as both the background context and driving force of the narrative. With a history of anti-pornography scholars like Attwood, Dines, Dworkin, and MacKinnon claiming pornography to be a bad thing, the intent of this paper is to build upon the belief that gay pornography has emancipatory capabilities. John Mercer introduced the 2017 special issue of *Porn Studies* about gay pornography by writing "Porn matters as a cultural phenomenon, and it especially matters to gay men" (Mercer 2017, 127). The shifts provide for intense reflection on the place of gay pornography in the gay community and its culture.

> "But the very currency of porn in gay culture, which has its roots in a relationship with sexually explicit imagery very different from the one we currently inhabit, may mean that gay men have been precisely best placed to resist the exploitation of immaterial sex, and have instead fostered subcultural conditions for using their cultural heritage and erotic investment in porn to manifest a 'comradeship of cock,' in which social relations flourish in the face of neoliberal alienation." (Maddison 2017, p. 147)

For the gay community, gay pornography was different, something Waugh (1985/1995) articulates in his seminal essay. He shares that although there are similarities between gay and straight men and their experiences with and of pornography, particularly the masturbatory function, the importance of gay pornography and what it stands for is a

necessary distinction. For him, "to clearly distinguish between gay men's pornography and straight men's pornography was to argue that all of those horrible things arch-pornbaiters Andrea Dworkin and Kathleen Barry were saying about pornography did not apply to my brothers and me" (Waugh 2017, p. 132). Seeing gay pornography as an important reflection of the gay community means the adoption of its tropes in a manipulative manner to sensationalize a true crime story call into the question the unethical means of which Kelly and Franco adapted the journalistic texts.

King Cobra is not meant to be a primer to the gay pornography industry, and nor is it gay pornography itself. Franco, Kelly, and their production team also chose to limit the release of the film, sticking specifically to the United States and film festivals. Despite this, the film provides an opportunity to step outside of the case study and to challenge future filmmakers to think critically about how they choose to adapt journalistic works on film. Rather, it is a Hollywood adaptation that capitalizes on gay pornography's liberatory potential and the foundational truth of a crime. The film is not a guide of what to do, but rather is a guide of what not to do when engaging in ethical production of journalistic works, especially works that emphasize sexuality as a core component. Portrayals of sexuality in narrative has the capability to position groups and identities in power and pleasure (Foucault 1990). This power is then conveyed through the medium of film and seen as a mirrored way of life—it has "the sheer power … to shape consciousness" (Rich 2013, p. 242). Rich believes the new queer cinema esthetics and politics are about unapologetic pleasure. This includes true crime films. Exploring one's sexual need and doing so without repression relies on a commitment to truth. *King Cobra* explores issues of sex and sexuality through the lens of the gay pornography industry. Franco and Kelly's adaptation borrows new queer cinema's unapologetic pleasure while manipulating the foundational facts of the story. What is the truth and what is the truth about sexuality is not only revealed by this particular case study, but also can be understood by generalizing to a broader set of biopic and docufiction films that center their narrative around the very concept.

By closely examining the case of the Cobra King, one can think more critically about the implications of adapting sexuality to film regarding how a film can define a truth about an industry and how a film can write a new story that has the possibility to strip the truth from the original. It also has the potential to silence the people the characters are based on. *King Cobra* utilizes pleasurable experiences in lieu of the facts presented in Wilkinson (2007) and Stoner and Conway's (2015) journalistic narratives. The real Lockhart says the filmic story has "contempt for queer culture" and that it mocks pornography. Critics describe the film's contents as "titillating" and

"half-way between porn and actual drama," as well as favoring "explicit images" and "raunchy dialogue" (Holden 2016). Reed (2016) sees the film's content as "campy satire" and Haar (2016) claims it "does an admirable job of portraying gay individuals as just as shallow and myopic as anyone else." Given the grit of a true crime story, the sacrifice of the pain of the story for the pleasure of its beauty and sex further reinforces the hedonistic values used to convey the sexuality of the true story on film. But, unfortunately, the pleasure-seeking the creators of the film engage in is received poorly: "*King Cobra* takes an interesting true crime and covers it in exploitative sex, pedophilic overtures and acting that would make a high school drama teacher cringe" (Lopez 2016). In another instance, a critic felt all that mattered is the entertainment. The real people are disregarded. "These characters are real people, if not dramatized for the sake of entertainment," Newell (2017) writes. In the end, what is missing, and what is clear in the decision-making, is a need to maintain a relationship with the truth and the people the story is about.

King Cobra is seen as a "fictionalization is far less compelling than the source material that inspired it" (Snider 2016). This statement allows for a more thorough opportunity to posit the need for developing narratives straight from the experiences they are being drawn from. This can be done using care-based ethical approaches and recognizing that ethical behaviors are dependent on the quality of the relationship. In the case of the Franco and Kelly, their choice to situate the sexier content ahead of trust and truth, or, as one reviewer writes, favor "cheap … exploitation" (Noh 2016), inhibits relationships between not only the filmmakers and people the story is about, but also the relationships between the audience and the truth. Exploitation implies that the people being favored in the relationship are not those whose stories are being adapted, but rather those who are buying the narrative of which to maximize their happiness. Even though Lockhart was offered a role and denied it, both Lockhart and the Kocis family openly spoke about their disdain for the adaptation (Tan 2016; Haplin 2016). The film itself "lacks proper context, and by consequence muddles its own sense of morality" (Crump 2016). The truth is left out of this capitalistic equation. And that morality calls into question how filmmakers prioritize the pleasure of audience over the pain of the truth revealed in a journalistic narrative.

The implications of this paper emphasize that when filmmakers prioritize pleasure over truth it can cause harm to the subjects of the film and their families. The prioritizing of pleasure-enhancing storylines over the mundane truth of the *real* Kocis story meant decisions were made in the creation of the film that disregarded the value of human experience; the experience that was financially being capitalized upon. This increases the

distance of power that Foucault (1990) claimed a discussion of sexuality and one's pleasure provides. As elements of "titillation," "exaggeration," and "exploitation," all common terms shared by reviewers, were highlighted, the subjects of the story and the filmmakers who produced the work find themselves at polar ends of power. The sexuality of the characters is used in the film to engage with a pornography-like experience at the detriment of the true crime that occurred. By doing this, and as a result positioning a minority voice—homosexuality—at a margin, the filmmakers in effect show that the silencing of one's sexual identity can be done by exaggerating it in dramatic ways.

If the filmmakers chose an alternative means, one that didn't emphasize economic output—positive finances being a pleasurable experience, over the relationship to the truth, then an abuse of power wouldn't be present. The example of *King Cobra* provides a grounding to argue for filmmakers who are adapting stories, particularly as they relate to minority identities, to engage in an ethic of care; this ethic emphasizing the importance of developing, maintaining, and supporting relationships (Noddings 1986). The attempts to position pleasure as a greater good, thus minimizing capabilities of pain for a larger audience, in effect privileges one narrative over another.

The hope is that this work encourages future research to examine film adaptations from journalistic accounts more critically to understand how producers of the works they produce position values of prudential hedonism over focusing on narrative relationships with who the story is about. The approach used in this paper, while both novel and unique, offers an opportunity to examine a variety of media texts centered around a singular case in a critical/cultural manner. Future research examining adaptations of true stories from journalistic accounts could benefit from this approach to examining text, producer, and audience. The method itself could be improved with more elements associated with the direct production of the films, such as interviews with the producers themselves.

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