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SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTING AN AIDS DYSTOPIA: REPRESENTING URBAN SPACES AND PLACES IN AMERICAN MOVIES ABOUT HIV/AIDS

Abstract:

With regard to American movies about HIV/AIDS, what has long been clear is that the vast majority of all such offerings created and released during the first two decades of the AIDS pandemic feature one or more U.S. cities as a noteworthy component of their narratives. What has been less clear over time, however, is the ideological messages that the regular inclusion of these urban places communicate to the viewers of such works. This presentation endeavors to expand the scholarly attention paid to this topic. From the earliest days of motion pictures to the present, typical representations of urban places have focused alternately on both their attractive and repulsive attributes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, common representations of urban spaces and places in AIDS movies have followed the same pattern, with cities simultaneously being socially constructed as welcoming spaces for gay men (and otherwise queer individuals) and, as a direct result, as places of AIDS dystopia. Accordingly, this presentation explores the social construction of urban spaces and places as an AIDS dystopia in representative AIDS movies made and released in the United States during the decade of the 1990s. It demonstrates how the typical message communicated in such offerings is that while urban gay ghettos serve as supportive spaces for their queer residents, those who live in them are at constant risk of attack from disapproving outsiders as well as the ravages of HIV/AIDS.

Keywords:

cities, dystopia, film, gay men, HIV/AIDS, ideology, media, representation, social constructionism

JEL Classification: I10, L82, N90