

**JUST ANOTHER FAN OF YOURS: RENEGOTIATING JUDY GARLAND'S STAR  
STATUS AND CONTEMPORARY FANDOM**

by

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## **Abstract**

In popular culture, Judy Garland is most commonly known for her role as Dorothy Gale in *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming 1939). She is also concurrently associated with the tragedies of her life, untimely death, and her status as a gay icon. These two labels, “tragic” and “gay icon,” have described Garland’s star status for nearly fifty years in newspaper articles, tertiary texts, and scholarly research. While they are grounded in reputable studies and historical evidence, the labels are seemingly no longer applicable upon observing the types of fans Garland continues to attract posthumously. This thesis aims to uncover the multi-faceted, multi-generational fandom of Garland through an audience reception study of her present fans. Through an exploration of their devoutness, I have discovered key terms involving emotional depth, authentic feelings, and empathy that supplement the publications on Garland from scholars such as Richard Dyer, Janet Staiger, Steven Cohan, and Ann Pellegrini. Ultimately, through the analysis of Garland’s star status and contemporary fandom, this thesis will prove that stars of bygone eras that remain fixtures in popular culture (and by means of a cult following) function as texts that are worthy of analysis as time and culture progresses.

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Hilary Hulsey. The audience reception study in this thesis was approved by the Behavioural Research & Ethics Board. UBC BREB Number: H15-03045

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## Acknowledgements

In 2009, I spent an embarrassing amount of energy learning the lyrics to a fourteen-minute medley called “Born in a Trunk” from the 1954 musical *A Star is Born*. I wanted to learn that particular song because it was a compelling story and Judy sang it so captivatingly. It begins, “Thank you, thank you very much. I can’t express it any other way. For with this awful trembling in my heart, I just can’t find another thing to say. I’m happy that you liked the show, I’m grateful you liked me...” At this point in the song, Judy’s voice swells with the line, “But if you knew of all the years of hopes and dreams and tears, you’d know it didn’t happen overnight.” To the following people, I wish to express the same sentiment as you supported my hopes and dreams to the very end of this writing process.

First, to my advisor, Ernest Mathijs, for encouraging me to do this project, even when others felt it had no relevance in academic study. I will forever think of you when Tootie kills the Braukoff’s on Halloween night in *Meet Me in St. Louis*. And, of course, I extend gratitude to my second reader, Brian McIlroy, for patiently awaiting my final draft and generally possessing a cheery disposition every time I encountered him at UBC. To the Faculty & Staff of the Dept. of Theatre and Film and my fellow peers—specifically Paula Schneider, Molly Lewis, Amanda Greer, and Matthew Gartner—thank you for enduring my rants and extremely cynical moments, I am grateful I had all of you along for this enlightening (and occasionally disconcerting) ride.

To my parents, Carl and Lisa, who have shown support in my endeavours since I was learning how to walk, your unconditional love has seen me through some truly difficult times in this process. Without you, I would not know Judy, Bette, Cary, Gregory, or any of the wonderful films that shaped my childhood and teenage years. To my sister, Katie, you were a sounding board that I knew I could always count on when my ideas were muddled or incomplete—many

of my best concepts for this project developed after our conversations. And, to my grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and anyone else who listened to me blather on about Judy Garland over the years, I offer both my gratitude and apologies—those conversations did amount to something, I promise.

Finally, there are two exceptional individuals I must thank: McKay and Hazel. McKay, your out-pouring of love and encouragement kept me afloat. Countless hours spent on FaceTime, trips to faraway mountains to devote time to writing, and the fact that you never once questioned my ability to complete this (at least not verbally) means more to me than you can know. Without you, this publication would have never come to fruition and I am forever grateful that I met you. And Hazel, thank you for repeatedly flipping through my Judy Garland books and for watching *The Wizard of Oz* countless times with me this summer. Your frighteningly intelligent perceptions on “the hollow man made out of tin” and the Wicked Witch of the West kept me on my toes. You can rest assured you may be the only three-year-old aware that Judy Garland had a career outside of “Dorofy.” I love you both.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother and best friend, Reta.

## Introduction

It is rare to find someone who is completely unaware of Judy Garland. In conversation, when asked about my thesis, I tend to respond to their inquiry with another question, “Do you *know* who Judy Garland is?” Oftentimes, I am met with a scoff and a response of disbelief, “Who doesn’t know Judy Garland?” Or if there is hesitation, I have the trigger comeback, “She’s Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*.” Then something clicks. From my observations over the past two years, usually when I’m on an airplane and small-talk is an expectation, the conversation either spirals off into one of two directions. The first involves a woebegone admirer who laments, “It’s a shame what happened to her.” And the second concerns her significance in the gay community, “Did you know the rainbow flag is designed that way *because* of her?” Inaccuracies and myths aside, these two labels, one of victimization and one of iconicity, seem to frame the present cultural awareness of her legacy. As a fan-scholar of Garland, I am torn in multiple directions of wanting to prattle on about her achievements, while also attempting to find the place of serenity and logic where I can hold back and allow the commentator to tell me more about what they think of her. It is in this space where I found the heart of my thesis topic.

As a fan, I possess a very different outlook on Garland. Since this is a scholarly publication, I feel it is necessary to reveal in the Introduction my own subjectivity to this topic in order to assuage any concerns with my ability to have objectivity in my analysis.<sup>1</sup> I discovered Judy Garland when I was sixteen-years-old. After watching a Thanksgiving screening of *Meet Me in St. Louis* on Turner Classic Movies, I was enamoured with Garland’s singing style and amused by the fact that I had never considered her career outside of *The Wizard of Oz*, a film I

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<sup>1</sup> Though scholars like Matt Hills have discussed, in-depth, the academic scholar or “fan-scholar” and have shown the validity in approaching a fan culture in this method.



regarded as a personal favourite. A month later, I joined The Judy Garland Message Board, an online forum devoted to discussion of all things Garland. Then I watched her films, all thirty-two of them. I read biographies and even burned a copy of David Shipman's *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend* in a campfire because I found its contents distasteful. To say I was fully submerged in her fandom would be an understatement. Before making her the central focus of my thesis, she was the central focus in many of my conversations with friends, family, and fellow fans—ultimately, Garland was a central focus of my life.

And it was during this time period that I learned about the public opinion of Garland. I resented anyone who brought up her drug and alcohol addiction, because, as I mentioned previously, that is a point of denouncement for some. I could not express *why* this bothered me, apart from my belief that people were missing out on truly great films by dismissing Garland over, what I understood to be, misconceptions about her life. The remarks about her prevalence in the LGBTQ+ community were not something I paid attention to, apart from trying to understand this little thing called “camp” and why this community was closely associated with the concept. Nevertheless, when the stereotypes or labels were brought up in conversation, I felt as though neither of these factors held any significance in my own appreciation of her.

Four years later, when my obsession with Garland had subdued significantly, I was taking a Gender and Film Theory course in university and we were given the chance to write on any subject, as long as it related to gender. I had encountered star studies scholar Richard Dyer's “Judy Garland and Gay Men” article and felt there were some nuances to her fandom, based on my own experiences, that had been left unexplored (which will receive attention throughout my thesis). During the process of writing this essay as a respectful counter to Dyer's research, I discovered Ann Pellegrini's brief article, “Unnatural Affinities: Me and Judy at the Lesbian

Bar,” which gave cadence to not only other fans of Garland under the queer umbrella, but, in my opinion, described so clearly a process that takes place when someone is seeking identity in fandom. Though Dyer receives much of the attention in my thesis, Pellegrini was the true instigator of my need to reveal not only the Judy Garland that her fans adore, but the nature of the fans themselves.

When I shared my ambitions to carry over my short undergraduate essay on Garland into a Master’s thesis, *many* of my advisors and personal mentors cautioned me (apart from my current advisor, Ernest Mathijs). They encouraged me to find someone who had not been overly researched, overly discussed, and who settled in the sweet spot of a “gap” in scholarly discourse. Despite these warnings, I knew there *was* a gap in the discourse on Garland. At this point, I would like to reiterate: *as a fan I have a very different outlook on Garland*. It is because of my fandom that I uncovered some of the questions that were not being asked. This gap, I felt, existed because of the passage of time. While several articles *had* been written on Garland—the most recent being Pellegrini’s in 2007—I felt they were all attempting to prove, in some form or fashion, why the aforementioned stereotypes of tragedy and affinities of the LGBTQ+ communities existed. I wondered why these were the only lenses through which we analyzed Garland when I knew that they did not begin to describe how I felt.

I realize, at this stage in my introduction, it sounds as though I chose this topic as a means to do a healthy dose of soul searching. This is where I must interject that a scholar’s curiosity and research can be fuelled by hatred of a subject just as much as it can be with a passion project. I adore Judy Garland and will openly admit that I take it personally when someone judges her for whatever reason they deem necessary. That is the reason I chose to perform an audience reception study in order to remove my own biases and involve the entire fandom. Rather than

performing my own textual analysis of her characters onscreen alongside my own contextual deductions of her life choices, I desired to bring attention to a larger populace that loved Garland for reasons similar or dissimilar to my own. That in itself was a driving force behind this project: to give a voice to her fans. Furthermore, I wanted there to be the chance for someone to prove my hypothesis wrong. If anything, my closeness to Garland only assisted in my research when I was seeking out the appropriate place to conduct the reception study. After the survey was released into the void of cyberspace, my hypothesis was completely at the beck-and-call of her other fans and their responses.

Herein lies the moment when I relay my hypothesis (or hypotheses) on Garland and her fandom, cultural relevance, and star status. At the outset of my reception study I held the following beliefs and they were the driving force behind all of the questions asked in my audience reception survey: 1.) Judy Garland's fan base has a make-up of all ages, sexualities, and gender identities and is no longer saturated with a population of devoted gay men.<sup>2</sup> 2.) Judy Garland is *only* a tragic figure and gay icon because we continue to teach and write about her with these labels in mind, and, therefore, we omit the possibility of a fandom *changing* with the passage of time. The assumption that a fan base will remain set in stone—and, therefore, a star's overall trajectory—once it has been analyzed is an irresponsible practice in star and fan studies. If a star continues to have a thriving fan base, it is important to keep a finger on the pulse of the fandom as years pass. To prove these assertions, my thesis will be laid out in four chapters.

## Chapter One

Chapter One consists of a review on the literature available on Judy Garland. This chapter, to my understanding, is typically devoted to scholarly literature and analysis. But, as this thesis

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<sup>2</sup> I would have liked to include race and class in this study, as Richard Dyer notes he only studied typically middle-class white homosexual males, but for the size of this project I had to narrow my scope.

has adopted an approach that reaches out to her audience, it was important for me to include the types of materials fans would encounter. As such, the chapter begins with a biographical overview on Garland with the assistance of her personal historian, John Fricke, and the well-received biographer, Gerold Frank. As it was impossible to include every magazine and newspaper clipping written on Garland since her rise to fame, I felt these two authors, as they are revered by the Garland community, would serve as authoritative sources on her career and status as a star. And, in a similar fashion, my conclusion includes a fan-related publication by Joan Beck Coulson to point out specific gaps in the research on her fandom.

Following the introduction to Garland, the chapter is divided into sections—stardom and fandom with queerness as a subsection—as these are the overarching themes in the representation of Garland in the available literature. The stardom section provides a working definition of stars, star images, and stardom, in addition to a brief description on why Garland fits or does not fit into these parameters. The fandom section attempts to define fan communities, but it is also an ambiguous term as much of the scholarly research available on fandom focuses on contemporary television. Therefore, I had to work around the publications of scholars such as John Fiske and Henry Jenkins in order to develop a definition of fandom that could potentially describe Garland’s devotees. Conclusively, the queerness section is a reconsideration of the works of Richard Dyer, Janet Staiger, Ann Pellegrini, and Steven Cohan that each aimed to reveal the meaning behind and reasoning for “the gay thing.”

## Chapter Two

Since I have chosen to include an audience reception study in my thesis, it was pertinent for me to provide an evaluation of my methodology. Unlike the other chapters, this chapter does not have clear-cut sections, but rather follows the chronological steps taken to ensure I was

approaching the reception study with well-founded methods. To begin, I discuss some of my preliminary thoughts that involve Richard Dyer's "Judy Garland and Gay Men" essay and how his methods function as a footing for my own survey. It was relevant, in this chapter more so than in the previous chapter, to reveal some of the reasons why I felt Dyer's study needed expansion or clarification. Therefore, there is a lengthy digression into the changes in technology and the socio-cultural climates in America (and, to some extent, globally), and why these changes alter how fans interact with one another and how they engage in materials relating to Garland.

In addition to Dyer's study, I also dive into a discussion of Martin Barker's article "Assessing 'The Quality in Qualitative Research'," as a means to justify the qualitative approach I wanted to take when evaluating the results of my audience reception study. Though I wound up including a few mentions of quantitative statistics, much of my evaluation in the conclusion of this thesis relies on qualitative patterns. His research alongside David Silverman's *Doing Qualitative Research* argue for an ethnographic approach that involves perspective seeking and emotionalist models that aim to extract responses from either marginalized or unspoken groups. As it was my intention to engage with *all* of Garland's fans (or, at least open the survey to include every demographic), their research makes a reputable case for this approach.

And finally, this chapter discusses the number of steps taken within the Garland community itself in order to gain the trust of the participants. With this specific community, there was reason for me to believe that the fans would be hesitant in responding to my survey without having some sort of warrant for this research. I outline some of the measures I had to take, including the approval process from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board, to ensure their overall comfort with the survey and their confidentiality. This portion of the chapter also

discusses some of the difficulties I faced when creating the survey and how conducting a pilot survey with a group of students allowed me to find solutions for the final product.

### Chapter Three

The contents of chapter three are, in my opinion, the “meat” of this thesis: the audience reception study and its results. It was my goal to receive between thirty and forty responses and I met this requirement with thirty-three responses in total. This chapter functions as an overview of the fans’ responses to each question (save for the last one, which I chose to omit for privacy reasons). The questions that were provided in the second chapter are placed into sections wherein I make note of overarching patterns, but leave room for a broader discussion of their responses in the conclusion of this thesis.

### Chapter Four

Chapter Four marks the conclusion of my audience reception study on Garland’s fandom. In this chapter, I make connections back to some of the theories and historical elements addressed in previous chapters. There is also a portion that points to the perpetuation of Garland’s star status as victim and gay icon. From these connections and sources, it is clear the past scholarly studies on Garland have credibility, and this study does not disprove the information available. Instead, this chapter, in particular, reveals my reception study supplements and furthers the analysis on Garland. And, finally, it concludes with a call for a revised way of looking at Garland’s legacy and other stars whose legacies have posthumous longevity with devoted fans.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

As a star with various methodological approaches applicable to her career and posthumous legacy, it would appear no stone has been left unturned in regards to resources available on Judy Garland. Her status as a cult star and gay icon has generated numerous publications on her persona, performance style, and significance in pop cultural history. In this chapter, I will detail the literature available on Garland in connection to theories on stardom, fandom, and queerness. This overview of continuous relevance in biographical and scholarly publications will further support my postulation that the exploration on Garland is far from complete as undiscovered information becomes available and fans emerge from newer generations.

Though newspaper and magazine articles circulated throughout her lifetime, the bulk of biographical literature on Judy Garland was published following her death in June of 1969. Like many of her contemporaries, Garland's image was left in the hands of relatives, former co-workers, biographers, historians, and fans who encountered her. Further details of her personal and private life—factual or not—became public knowledge beginning with Mel Torme's tell-all book *The Other Side of the Rainbow with Judy Garland on the Dawn Patrol* (1970), which focuses on Torme's experiences as a composer and musical advisor on *The Judy Garland Show*. As there are over thirty biographical works on her life available (with many focused on salacious details in lieu of authentic information), I devoted my research to the publications regarded as a point of reference by her fans.<sup>3</sup> Of the biographies available, two authors were mentioned almost unanimously as authorities on Garland's life: Gerold Frank and John Fricke.

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<sup>3</sup> I gleaned this knowledge from fan opinions Facebook groups such as The Judy Garland Experience, as well as the Judy Garland Message Board archives.

Gerold Frank's *Judy* (1975) is one of the earliest examples of biographical works that involved hundreds of interviews creating an accumulative overview of the "real" Judy Garland. Frank interviewed former neighbours, doctors, friends, husbands, children, directors, and fellow actors to produce a thorough account. At over 600 pages, fans boast that it is dense yet revealing of "Judy the human being." Frank's writing voice is candid and accessible, but there are definite moments of subjectivity as he tends to belong to "the triumphant camp" that frames the tragic circumstances in Garland's life in a lighthearted manner. This is not to suggest he omits the tragic parts of her life, but rather to point out a tendency to palliate those instances. In any case of tragedy, Frank carefully uses quotation marks to refer to these events as a means to either mitigate or dispel them.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, sources note that Frank had to agree to terms determined by family members and friends before they would agree to do an interview.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, certain aspects of Garland's life were omitted and others seemingly stretched to shine a brighter light on interviewees. Nonetheless, Frank's publication continues to be an authoritative tome and has been referenced numerous times in successive works.

Oz and Garland historian, John Fricke, has published several biographical, historical, and anecdotal works on her life including *Judy Garland: World's Greatest Entertainer* (1997), *Judy Garland: A Portrait in Art & Anecdote* (2003), and most recently *Judy: A Legendary Film Career* (2011).<sup>6</sup> He personally belongs to the camp of fans who stray from focusing on the her "personal travail" ("World's Greatest Entertainer" 7). As such, Fricke's publications possess a spirited emphasis on her successes, thus producing a thoroughly researched foundation on her

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<sup>4</sup> In the case of Judy Garland's rumoured suicide attempt, Frank refers to the incident repeatedly with quotation marks (e.g., "suicide attempt").

<sup>5</sup> For example, Liza Minnelli, Garland's oldest daughter, would only give an interview if details of Frank Gumm's (Garland's father) ambiguous sexuality be left out of the book entirely.

<sup>6</sup> At 24, Fricke edited Gerold Frank's manuscript for *Judy* noting any inaccuracies. He also provided hundreds of images to Frank to use in the final product.



career. It is necessary to point out the worldview of an historian/biographer (and self-proclaimed fan) so predominantly recognized within the Garland and Classical Hollywood community as his approach has notable influence in present discourse.<sup>7</sup> In *Judy Garland: World's Greatest Entertainer*, he states, "It is hoped that, whether new fan or veteran admirer, the reader will feel that this book can best be summarized as: "*This* is what she was all about. This is what she *did*" [original emphasis] (9). According to Fricke, what Garland "*did*" was work "forty-five of her forty-seven years," as if to say her life, though its brevity is widely considered short, was defined and permanently tied to her profession (8). This philosophy is expressed across his *oeuvre* and, therefore, his publications give the impression that they are not only authoritative on the subject matter, but also outwardly authentic. For the remainder of this thesis, any unique biographical information will be primarily drawn from these two authors, unless otherwise stated.

## 1.1 From Gumm to Garland

At this point, I feel it is important to give a brief outline of Garland's career. Although this strays from reviewing the literature available on Garland, this section is necessary to provide an historical context to support the following categories of stardom, fandom, and queerness. So, in a fashion similar to Glinda the Good Witch, as she lightheartedly reminds Dorothy at the genesis of her journey on the Yellow Brick Road, "It's always best to start at the beginning," I, too, shall start at beginning of Garland's career and highlight the significant moments leading to her status as a star.

Before she adopted her screen name in Hollywood, Garland was born Frances Ethel Gumm of Grand Rapids, Minnesota in 1922. From ages two-and-a-half to thirteen, she sang on vaudeville circuits with her older sisters, Jimmie and Suzy, in their group "The Gumm Sisters."

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<sup>7</sup> Although Frank's biography continues to be a mainstay among fans, his own personality and presence is not as pronounced as Fricke's in the present fan community.

As they travelled from the Midwest to California, the intention of her mother Ethel was to make her child with an unusually powerful voice into a star. By 1935, Garland signed her first contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) and thus her predetermined vocation as an actress, singer, and dancer was interpolated into the studio that claimed to have “more stars than there are in Heaven.” Her popularity rose slowly within the MGM constellation until it found a place of permanence when producer Arthur Freed acquired the rights to L. Frank Baum’s novel, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

*The Wizard of Oz* was, undeniably, the magnum opus of her career that led to the type of stardom MGM sought for their studio. Following her success with *Oz*, the studio began developing star vehicles for her and transformed her overall image (a definition that will receive further attention in the “Stardom” section of this chapter). She was adopted into “The Freed Unit”—a section of MGM with a pool of composers, musicians, and entertainers featured most prominently in the studio’s musicals between 1940 and 1950—and was its “cynosure” (“Judy: A Legendary Film Career”). Her name became synonymous with other well-established stars like Ginger Rogers, Clark Gable, and Fred Astaire [her co-star in *Easter Parade* (Walters 1948)] in the upper echelon of MGM. By the time Garland starred in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Minnelli 1944), her level of stardom and significance to MGM was well-established.

Fricke structures Garland’s career like a pyramid with *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming 1939) at the top, as he believes it is “the best-loved, best-known, and most widely seen motion picture of all time” (“Judy: A Legendary Film Career” 9). Correspondingly, Frank notes that, “for generations to come Judy Garland would be Dorothy, and Dorothy would be Judy Garland; and *The Wizard of Oz* would become an annual feature on television to enchant millions of children and adults all over the world” (n.p.). In the leading role as Dorothy Gale, she earned immortality

in the entertainment industry as newer generations continue to familiarize themselves with the story in a variety of rereleases and audio-visual formats. The second level of Fricke's pyramid nominates three films—*Meet Me in St. Louis*, *Easter Parade*, and *A Star is Born* (Cukor 1954)—as well-known classics with Garland as the star of the picture. They are not quite on the same level as *Oz* in terms of their celebrity, but they are significant bookmarks in her career and continue to receive attention through repeated showings in theatres, and on television during the holidays (a marked indicator of films that possess a cult following). And finally, the foundation of the pyramid consists of “happily memorable, if slightly lesser, screen achievements” such as *The Harvey Girls* (Sidney 1946) and *In the Good Old Summertime* (Leonard 1949), “exhilarating costarring vehicles for Judy and Mickey Rooney,” and “the all-star extravaganzas” where Garland performed a handful of musical numbers (“Judy: A Legendary Film Career” 9). Although his language is generous in terms of shining a spotlight on Garland even in her lesser roles, Fricke's assessment of her career is justified due to his attention to the films' continued popularity among audiences.

Garland's claim to fame is owed to MGM, but she remained a star due to her ability to transform her “act,” so to speak, to survive. After her contract ended with MGM in 1950 due to a myriad of health and financial reasons, Garland sought after other avenues to perform. Beginning in 1951, she impressed audiences with repeat performances at the London Palladium and revived vaudeville at The Palace in New York City with a 19-week run. In 1954, she made a monumental return to the silver screen by co-producing the musical remake of *A Star is Born* with her husband, Sid Luft, in conjunction with Warner Bros. Studios. In the film, Garland portrayed a self-reflexive caricature of herself, Esther Blodgett/Vicky Lester, that rapidly found stardom at a well-known studio but struggled with the politics of the industry and her husband's

progressively fading career. *A Star is Born* earned her an Academy Award nomination by reintroducing a seasoned actress to the public, one with a torch-singing capabilities and talent that carried the entire film to her last utterance of the iconic line, “Hello everyone, this is Mrs. Norman Maine.” Many would mark this particular film as Garland’s onscreen rebirth—a star is reborn—even though she did not appear another motion picture until *Judgment at Nuremberg* (Kramer 1961), which earned her yet another Academy Award nomination.

There are two other major points in Garland’s career that must be discussed before outlining classical Hollywood stardom and its implications today. Both instances classify her as a star with an ongoing presence throughout her career: *Judy at Carnegie Hall* and *The Judy Garland Show*. Deemed “the greatest night in show business history,” Garland performed at Carnegie Hall on April 23, 1961 to a crowd of devoted fans and well-known audience members such as Henry Fonda, Lauren Bacall, Julie Andrews, Rock Hudson, and Mike Nichols (among many others). *The New York Times* reviewer Lewis Funke remarked in his article the next morning that her performance and the audience reception was akin to a religious experience:

From the moment Miss Garland came on the stage, a stage, incidentally, on which have trod before her the immortals of music, the cultists were beside themselves. What Rev. Billy Graham would have given for such a welcome from the faithful! They were on their feet before the goddess grabbed the microphone, and by the time she had bestowed the first of those warm smiles, they were applauding and screaming "Bravo!" Miss Garland could have probably ended the concert right there and they would still be cheering. The fact is that at least a half dozen times more during the evening the standing ovation, plus the screaming, took place.

*Judy at Carnegie Hall*, the live recording of this performance, spent 13 weeks in the

number one slot on the billboard chart and went on to earn Garland a Grammy Award for Album of the Year. Quite remarkably, and this may be a testament to her continued popularity with a devoted fan base, the album has never gone out of print.

*The Judy Garland Show* (1963-1964), to many, appears to be a flop as it only ran two years out of the four-year contract. But, actually, the sheer existence of this show means that Garland was among the cream of the crop from her generation of stars. She invited other famous stars from her past and hopeful stars, like Barbra Streisand, to share the stage with her and perform for her audiences. The show was a success among critics despite its hardships and brevity. However, I am including this particular achievement in Garland's life as it currently airing on the public television station getTV. This is yet another example of her career's continuation years after her death.

## **1.2 Stardom: The World's Greatest Entertainer**

What defines a star is an ambiguous and complex discussion unto itself. In scholarly research on Garland, there is not a consensus on the definition of her status as a star, nor is there a clear-cut methodological approach. Therefore, I will outline the most applicable methodological approaches that have appeared in the literature available on Garland in order to reach a comprehensive understanding on stardom, in general, and stardom in relation to her career. For the latter half, the approaches can be split into several categories based on purely textual analysis of her film characters; analysis on her performances (including singing style and body language); and Garland's posthumous legacy as a cult star.

At a base level, *a star* is an actor whose existence is elevated to a level of celebrity and easily recognizable in the public eye. On a deeper level, Richard Dyer asserts in his work *Stars*

that stars are signifiers and identification figures (22). They embody who audiences admire and what they would like to become, which places actors and actresses on a pedestal designed for hero-worship. According to Janet Staiger in her article “Seeing Stars,” the element that differentiates a star from a “picture personality” (a term used to describe a tactic in the silent era to promote actors, but could also be described as a *persona*) is an “articulation of the paradigm professional life/private life” where “the question of the player’s existence outside his/her work in films entered discourse” (26). In other words, *stardom* is achieved when the personal life of an actor or actress becomes a concern or a point of interest to the public. Ultimately, stardom is an all-encompassing term involving the lifestyle, benefits, and (occasionally) consequences of achieving star status.

For the Classical Hollywood era or “studio era”, the *star image* relates more to the studio designed persona than the genuine personality of the individual, and audiences were compelled to believe these constructed images were truthful. Dyer asserts that stars are born out of an ideological need during the studio era, he claims, “The roles and/or the performance of the star in a film were taken as revealing the personality of the star” (“Stars” 20). Audiences who were familiar with the type of roles major actors played felt they had an idea of the type of person they were in their day-to-day lives. The star image then is the “assumed backdrop for the specific personality of the star and the details and events her/his life” (“Stars” 35). Baron and Carnicke further this notion in stating, “Performances by Hollywood stars in particular are prized not for the craftsmanship but for the glimpses they offer of the idealized person behind the performance” (90). Therefore, actors were cherished by fans if they presumably upheld their ideology-fuelled images to the public. However, there are certain stars that Dyer believes are exceptional in that they “embody an alternative or oppositional ideological position” (“Stars” 34). Enter Garland.

As Garland was a product of this era, it is historically sound to use these definitions of star and star image in the discussion of her career, however, as she was not the typical definition of “beauty” in this era, she could easily fall into the category of an alternative to the mainstream ideology of the time period. Garland was expected to uphold a star image in her personal life as it was developed by MGM. Part of Garland’s “makeover” into the loveable and innocent star they wanted the public to adore involved altering her appearance with nose discs, false teeth, and medication to encourage weight loss to embody the unassuming girl-next-door image. Therefore, Garland was pushed to embody an image that she did not already naturally possess. Additionally, Garland was subject to (along with the other MGM actors) pills to aid sleep on the demanding film schedules. These details of Garland’s personal life became more and more apparent to the public over time as gossip columnists took advantage of any information that diverged from her star image. The requirements by the studio took a toll on Garland by the end of the 1940s. She suffered from nervous breakdowns and the newspapers reported suicide attempts. These events, genuine or rumoured, spawned the ambivalent and unusual reaction to Garland’s ideological star image in comparison to her personal life. These instances also arguably inspire the audience’s affinity for a person battered by a multimillion dollar industry.

That Garland did not embody the idealized female glamour of this particular era is an area that Adrienne L. McLean explored in her essay "Feeling and the Filmed Body: Judy Garland and the Kinesics of Suffering." For McLean, Garland’s star image or “authenticity” is perceived primarily through textual analysis, with only contextual elements applied to situate Garland within the studio era. Therefore, she tosses the analysis involving the paradigm of the historical star and her private life out entirely. She claims, “Had no one known, in other words, about [Garland’s] abused childhood, suicide attempts, bouts of depression, battles with drugs and

alcohol, etc., I believe that Garland's star image would probably still have been labeled neurotic by 1954" (McLean 4). By studying Garland's own bodily movements—from suffering to anger to happiness—with “effort-shape analysis,” she determines that Garland's body failed to achieve “an ‘aesthetic’ ideal” of what studios wanted (6). And compared to her contemporaries, Garland's “neuroses,” as McLean deems it, is apparent in her films as she cannot keep up with the polished images of in the studio era (7). Therefore, Garland's star image, according to her analysis, is perceived as neurotic (and presumably “tragic”) because of what her body type, singing voice, and performances signify onscreen.

Martin Shingler, a film scholar closely associated with star studies (particularly in relation to Bette Davis' career) notes in his recent work *Star Studies: A Critical Guide* that other approaches have emerged that stray from analyzing the onscreen persona in conjunction with the actors' private life. He considers this the post-Dyerian approach where “more in-depth investigation into the part played by audiences in terms of how they engage with stars,” play a pivotal role in contemporary analysis (n.p.). Shingler believes the shift in research on stardom is twofold: firstly, the role of the audience member and how they interact with the star and secondly, a “more detailed examination of stardom as an industrial process” (n.p.). As a contrast to McLean's purely textual analysis of Garland, I will now provide an example of this post-Dyerian survey involving audiences that also makes an excellent argument for our understanding of Garland as a cult star.

In his article “The Star as Cult Icon: Judy Garland,” Wade Jennings describes Garland's stardom as a “paradigm of the cult star experience” (90). Based on his analysis of Garland's cult following, a number that increased after her death, Jennings believes that each fan “finds his or her own singular meaning in the star and the recorded performance” which draws them closer to



the cult star (93). Garland's closeness and "intimacy" with her audiences was considered to be "unparalleled, mysterious, and in many ways neurotic" (Jennings 90). And, interestingly, Jennings makes note of the reasons why he believes the audiences adored her in spite of her neuroses, "Judy was both victor and victim, survivor and crushed innocent. The audience could pity her [...] feel grateful to her for giving as much of herself, while at the same time being stunned by her performance, the emotional and physical resilience, the overwhelming personality in the small body" (96). From this article, it is suggested that Garland as a cult star is defined as much by her star status as she is by her closeness to her fan base. Yet, Jennings does not consult fan sources in the way that Dyer performed his audience reception study (perhaps because Dyer had already tackled her fan base from such a perspective). By reaching out to the fans, I would argue there could be a stronger discussion on her cult fandom.

The star-based publications on Garland seem to agree on one aspect: she was neurotic. McLean's approach was mostly textual analysis, while Jennings adopted an approach of observing her fandom and status as a cult star. Their methodologies differ, yet, they each consider neuroses to be a selling point to Garland. It is my belief that perhaps this relates to an historical way of looking at Garland, despite the fact that both articles were written after Dyer's 1981 publication.

### **1.3 Fandom & Queerness**

Defining fandom in relation to Garland's career is problematic because seminal works on fandom are primarily focused on contemporary media texts (television, etc.) and they seem less applicable to instances of Classical Hollywood fandom. Therefore, in this section, I will look at the works of Henry Jenkins and John Fiske to find an operational definition of fandom, but will look at other texts on Garland's fandom to qualify that definition. Furthermore, this section will

point to the gap in scholarly discourse as discussions of Garland in fan theories *always* connect her star persona to the notion of tragedy, as I briefly noted in the stardom section, or queerness.

In his work *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins provides several descriptions and overall behaviours of fans. Fandoms possess, “particular forms of cultural production, aesthetic traditions and practices” as specified by Jenkins (279). Though Jenkins is referring to fans of television series, their behaviours can easily carry over to obsessions with stars, and more specifically Garland. These practices create “strong parallels between their own lives” and the object of their affections and they “actively assert their mastery” over the texts (278). John Fiske expands upon this idea in his article “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” wherein he advances the definitions of fan knowledge, “But fan cultural knowledge” he states, “differs from official cultural knowledge in that it is used to enhance the fan’s power over, and participation in the original, industrial text” (n.p.). Fundamentally, fans possess a vast amount of knowledge on the subject and proceed to create their own traditions and practices around it, in order to produce a sense of seclusion into their own private world (Jenkins). This could be fan art, tributes, or festivals in celebration of the subject. Though I am hesitant to agree with Fiske’s slightly harsh analysis of fans lording over information, the need to know *everything* about the subject matter is key.

I want to call on Jennings’ article again as he does a thorough job in describing that of a *cult* fandom in conjunction with cult stardom, and more specifically Garland’s cult fans. He refers to the fans as “the initiated” and describes their behaviour as such:

The merest scrap of memorabilia becomes precious; anecdotes are preserved and retold, becoming part of the developing “legend,” a body of information and interpretation that becomes the credo of those in the group. Instead of being

a minor and segregated part of cult members' lives, the relationship to the star performer permeates those lives, helping to shape them in surprising numbers of ways.

For the cult star, such as Garland, her fans take on a position of near religiosity, which draws back to the origins of the word *cult*. In fact, it is not uncommon for her fans to adopt the denomination of “Judyism”—especially in relation to her queer audiences.

Garland's fandom is primarily coloured throughout as queer, therefore I must spotlight queerness in this section. Queerness, in this context, simply means that there are elements of a text that appeal to or connect on some level to being queer or non-normative. Of course, Dyer's study “Judy Garland and Gay Men,” is perhaps the most influential publication on Garland to date. After noting the ease in which Garland fit into the Gay Liberation Front Newsletter when he was on the editorial collective board, Dyer decided to answer the question of *why* and, furthermore, why gay men can relate to her (137). Much of his study involves placing her image in juxtaposition with features of gay culture. Early in his study, Dyer noticed a commonality in gay writings that pointed to her emotional quality. He remarks, “The kind of emotion Garland expressed is somewhat differently described in the gay writings, but on two points all agree—that it is always strong emotion, and that it is really felt by the star herself and shared with the audience” (“Gay Men” 145). These emotional qualities linked to a “gay sensibility” led him to categorizing the themes in films that had the potential to appeal to gay men: ordinariness, androgyny, and camp. By choosing certain songs, scenes, and performances, Dyer negotiates the potential for her films to have a queer reading.

In doing so, Dyer inspired other articles on Garland, queerness, and alternative readings of film stars. Janet Staiger's “The Logic of Alternative Readings: A Star is Born” analyzes

Garland's version of *A Star is Born* from three perspectives: preferred, dominant-culture, and alternative. In the alternative reading of the film, which calls upon Dyer's work and involves a queer reading, she notes that the external plot of Garland's life in connection to the textual one is the intersection where gay men appreciate the film ("Alternative Readings" 176). Her article concludes with the possibility for queer readings (i.e., "alternative readings") to confront the dominant or preferred readings in a manner that proves these readings are "hypothetical to a specific group" and not universal. Though her article argues more for methodological approach than Garland's significance in the LGBTQ+ community, her examples, nonetheless, reiterate the inescapable connections Garland seems to have with gay men.

Another example of an article that attempts to update Dyer's approach is Steven Cohan's "Judy on the Net: Judy Garland's Fandom and the 'Gay Thing' Revisited." When I was introduced to his article by my advisor, I felt as though I was talking to an old friend as our approaches to this topic are strikingly similar. For his research, Cohan utilized the internet and its wide-range of possibilities when it comes to a particularly healthy fandom like Garland's. After observing fan posts on sites like The Judy List and The Judy Garland Data Base, he came to several conclusions, not unlike my own hypotheses. He notes sensitivities in the fans to particular biographers who paint Garland in a negative light or draw attention to the 'gay thing' over other aspects of her life. And he makes deductions on the gender gap potentially closing as many of the posters on each website were women (131). As far as 'the gay thing,' however, Cohan falls back on queerness as a term that represents non-normative. He states, "...the Garland star text remains queer in the sense that it is still resistant to normalization, and as that diva snap suggests, the gay issue brings to the surface the inability of fans to identify with mainstream culture through their fascination with 'Judy'" (130).

And the final, most thought-provoking, in my opinion, example of queerness embodying Garland's fandom derives from Ann Pellegrini's "Unnatural Affinities: Me and Judy at the Lesbian Bar." Pellegrini's approach is a direct counter to Dyer's article and attempts to situate Garland within a new context: lesbianism. In response to Dyer's omission of the queer woman, a subject I will briefly discuss in the following chapter, Pellegrini responds, "At the impasse of desire and identification an authentically queer relation to Judy is barred to the lesbian; as the lesbian I can only reach Judy by passing through gay men" (129). She is not concerned with the omission of lesbians so much as she is questioning how identity is "narrativized and narrativized queer" (Pellegrini 129). By asking the question, "If Dyer is right and one of the things that made Judy so appropriate for gay men was her in-betweenness, why does her position in between not also make her the perfect girl for me?," Pellegrini displays the dangers in appointing permanent labels or readings to a particular star or situation, when there are many other factors to consider. In other words, Garland's star status and fandom may read as queer, but these identity seeking trajectories need not omit the potential for other factors to contribute to such a reading.

With these queer texts in consideration, it is clear that Garland's fandom does possess queerness and queer (or "alternative") readings. The attraction of gay men, lesbians, and those who do not fit into the normative of society seem to qualify this definition. However, the publications of Cohan and Pellegrini suggest there have been shifts in contemporary culture, not only with technology but with our understanding of identity. Does Garland's cult fandom consist of queer members or those outside of the normative? Yes. But, does this still describe a star's status as a gay icon? These are the questions that deserve further exploration.

From the examples of scholarly literature provided in this chapter, it would seem the topic of Garland has been emptied of all possibilities involving stardom, fandom, and especially

queerness. However, in my research, I uncovered a short book entitled, *Always for Judy: Witness to the Joy and Genius of Judy Garland* by a fan named Joan Beck Coulson, which was truly a treasure to find. She outlines the *numerous* times in which she encountered Garland, greeted her, and experienced many of her career triumphs on films sets and from the audience. It is non-academic literature from the perspective of a fan that not only appreciates Garland, but sees her merits outside of the tragedy, problems, and labels that she has repeatedly received. This particular account on Garland proves that there is much more to know about Garland from the perspective of fans—and not just gay fans—but people who encountered her or simply adore her. It appears in literature the the use stardom, fandom, and queerness are inseparable; however, there are traces, such as Coulson’s book, where that is not the case, so that warrants for further investigation.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

Without Richard Dyer's article "Judy Garland and Gay Men," this research project would lack a solid foundation. Though he pooled his information from many sources (newspaper and magazine articles, letters, and interviews), the conclusions Dyer reached, particularly from the Garland fan letters, and the process of matching audience responses to star theory were the basis for my decision to conduct an audience reception study. Dyer's observation on audiences as a "determining force in the creation of the stars" functioned as a time-honoured mantra throughout my research and I felt this notion could be furthered in relation to cult audiences. Audiences are also, and perhaps more importantly for stars of bygone eras, perpetrators of stardom. This is the case for Garland as the cultural awareness of her status as a star has not dwindled almost fifty years after her death. Furthermore, her legacy continues through contemporary audience members that are completely distanced and—as time passes—oftentimes divorced from the historical connotations that her name carries.

Thirty years after Dyer's groundbreaking publication, gay men continue to be attracted to Garland's magnetism as a performer. However, this is the proverbial "jumping off point" away from Dyer's conclusions and where I believed some of his assumptions, though they were grounded in the available knowledge at the time, have changed and need to be qualified. There have been several shifts in the socio-political and cultural climate both in America and on a global scale. My research project began with the hypothesis that there were two reasons for the potential adjustments to our comprehensive understanding of the makeup of Garland's contemporary fandom: firstly, the widespread technological advancements that have occurred since the 1980s; and secondly, politically charged movements for LGBTQ+ rights since Garland's death and, subsequently, Dyer's publication. These two categories shaped the

questions I wanted to pose in juxtaposition to the already existing theories and beliefs about Garland's prolonged popularity outlined in the previous chapter.

Online communities have connected fans all around the world at an exponential rate over the past two decades. As his book was published in 1981, Dyer did not have access to such a widespread database of fans. And although we were given an update on Garland's fandom in Steven Cohan's "Judy on the Net" article, through his extraction of data from a wider group of individuals on The Judy List and The Judy Garland Database, the manner in which fans interact now compared to his research in the late 1990s also differs. Sites like The Judy Garland Experience and even groups on Facebook (e.g., The Judy Garland Experience, The International Judy Garland Club) reach a wider demographic of fans in present day as access to the web becomes available to a larger group of people. As a Garland fan myself, I joined The Judy Garland Message Board (JGMB) in early 2009 to find common ground with other fans who were mesmerized by her talent. In my time of frequent activity with this particular forum, the majority of people I spoke to were women ranging from ages thirteen to those well into their sixties.<sup>8</sup> Their sexuality did not come up in conversation, unless they chose to make it expressly clear on the message board. From these early observations of the aforementioned online groups and websites, it was apparent that gay men occupied a percentage of her fandom—I would estimate roughly thirty or forty percent. While I did converse with male members of the board, they did not seem to make an issue of or discuss their sexuality unless they were speaking about their partner in the 'General Talk' section of the message board, which was set aside for discussion outside of Garland-related topics. Though my time on the JGMB was brief, I kept these members

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<sup>8</sup> At the time, I was seventeen years of age. I was only active on this message board from 2009-2011. Sadly, the message board closed this year due to the majority of online discussion transferring to Facebook groups (2016).



and their stories in the back of my mind as I read through Dyer's article for the first time in my second year of university. I was baffled and enlightened by his statistics and the accounts from fans as I felt they were not *entirely* descriptive of the fandom I had experienced due to these technological and cultural changes.

Understandably for the purpose of his study, Dyer eliminated or was unaware of several variables involving gender and sexual identity. His methodology focused on a pattern, one that I believe to be steeped in historicity, that centered around Garland's status as a gay icon in connection to homosexual men. Today, however, his pointedly intentional exclusion of women, including queer women, pinholes her fandom. Dyer believed queer women belonged, more accurately, to studies on stars such as Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo, two actresses who are classically linked to lesbianism in Classical Hollywood due to their androgynous roles in films such as *Morocco* (Von Sternberg, 1930) and *Queen Christina* (Mamoulian, 1933). These omissions can no longer accurately or justifiably describe Garland's fandom as other demographics gain more prominence and our cultural understanding (and acceptance) of queerness has dramatically changed. Moreover, according to Cohan, there are debates in the online communities about the prevalence of gay men within her fandom, and whether or not their devotion to her career is a driving factor to her cult status. I, too, have witnessed several discussions on her gay fandom, and the fans, as I recall from the JGMB, referred to the historical Garland, the one whose death potentially instigated the Stonewall Riots, and how her career meant something to gay men during the 1950s and 60s repeatedly in these discussions. These debates prove there are untouched demographics making their voices heard in online groups. The progression of awareness and rights for LGBTQ+ people in America have made as Cohan calls it "the gay thing" a less prevalent topic for discussion among the more serious fans.

With these two factors in mind, I decided, like Dyer, to uncover *why* people were interested in Garland. I wanted to know *why* people in the 21st Century continued to connect to Judy Garland. It was my belief that the fans who were exposed to Garland as her career flourished and faltered between the 1930s and 1960s might have different reasons for their interest. Those reasons could be steeped in the moment of Garland the *historical* star versus the point of attraction for Garland the *present* star. For instance, participants in Dyer's study had seen Garland in person, either in concert or candidly. Today, a handful of those fans exist, but their participation in her fandom contrasts heavily with newer fans. Fans of the past forty years have never experienced Garland firsthand and rely on digital albums and repeated viewings of her films and television show for their overall appreciation. These generational gaps and differences piqued my curiosity to extract or uncover a bridge between her past and present fan base. To find this connection, I wanted to make the variables for audience participation wide and available to as many demographics as possible. It was my aim to prove there were fans of Judy Garland of every gender and sexuality—that perhaps there was something *else* apart from her appeal to gay men that preserved her fandom—and to make their presence known.

An ethnographical approach to this particular study was necessary because I did not want to base my thesis on recurring newspaper and magazine articles that continuously arose with each passing anniversary of Garland's death or with her film rereleases. Apart from later scholars and authors like Pellegrini and Fricke, who openly and unabashedly write as fans of Garland in their works, much of the articles and summaries of her legacy seemed to be written by journalists and biographers with an objective to rehash her the time-worn stories of tragedy. As a fan who has read the concerns regarding Garland's star image on discussion boards and Facebook, I felt it was important to tap into the opinions and personalities of a group who *appreciate* every facet of

Garland rather than confine her to a one-dimensional level of stardom. Therefore, ethnographic research in the form of an audience reception study was a sound decision for this particular project. While quantitative research using hard evidence and numbers would be beneficial regarding some of the statistical information I wanted to uncover (such as the number of fans within a particular demographic), the statistics would not answer the question of *why* they were Garland fans. Consequently, I decided to do a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative research, with qualitative as the main focus and quantitative results as merely tools for clarification on the demographics reached.

Researcher Martin Barker classifies the type of methodology that I adopted for my thesis as perspective seeking. In his article, “Assessing the ‘Quality’ in Qualitative Research,” he offers solutions to the general mistrust and validity involved in qualitative research. They involve ensuring the research data, materials, evidence, concepts, theoretical framework remain relevant while also confirming that the research remains tactful in its results by asking questions such as, “Whose understandings of the world might be altered by the findings of the research?” By following these “requirements,” a researcher can presumably produce “quality” qualitative research (Barker 332). One of his observations involves the perspective seeking stance as a means of “recognition and relevance” in ethnographic studies. He states, “There is a substantial tradition (to which much of my own work without question belongs) of seeking to research *on behalf of* particular (often silenced, marginalized) groups,” which deems this approach as methodologically appropriate due to its ability to override some reluctance involved in the practice and application of qualitative research (331). After reading this particular line from Barker’s essay, I knew this was the primary purpose of my thesis: to give a voice to

contemporary Garland fans whose representations become lost amidst the dialogue and scholarly analysis that has defined her fandom since the 1960s.

Comparably, David Silverman defines this methodology as an “emotionalist” model in his book *Doing Qualitative Research*. He believes there is a criterion to determine whether or not the qualitative researcher is “using a particular model in reality,” which again denotes a tone of wavering faith in qualitative versus quantitative (Silverman 190). The emotionalist model is defined as a style of “qualitative interviews which aims to ‘get inside the heads’ of particular groups of people and tell things from their ‘point of view’” and much of it relies on feelings (191). Although the responses from the participants are entirely subjective, they offer up “authenticity,” which is, arguably, an element of objective reality. Therefore, I would assert, it is a necessary approach for instances involving fans as their relationship with and appreciation of a star. Silverman notes the potential for problems to arise between the researcher and participants, especially in terms of their ability to remain objective both in the participant’s response and the researcher’s interpretation of the content. Thus, for the purpose of maintaining a sense of objectivity, mainly due to my own leanings in this debate as a Garland fan, I chose to remove my biases (to the best of my ability) in both the survey I wanted to create and my observations of the group.

So, in order to reach out to these fans, I chose to compile a list of questions that would potentially unearth a consistent *pattern* of reason (rather than elicit a *reaction*) among fans in spite of their age, gender, and sexuality for being drawn to Judy Garland. However, before I compiled the list of questions for the survey, it was important for me to know the demographic and feel confident that I would even receive responses, so I contacted a few of the fans I knew within the Garland community. After conversing with a well-known fan, Martha, I discovered

there had been previous attempts to solicit opinions on Garland for a number of reasons.<sup>9</sup> One particular unsettling instance for this group was a survey conducted on the Yahoo! Groups-based Judy Garland Experience forum by a user named “susieflora.” The group felt hesitancy due to the newness of the user to the group and her previous inactivity. Martha provided both a copy of the initial forum post and the survey itself for my perusal. A moderator of the group, “sarah,” stated in the forum post: “I have just done the survey and it actually did get a little more difficult, personal, and negative dwelling towards the end. I know some members might not appreciate this, so thought I’d mention it so you can decide for yourself if you want to do it.” The questions asked by the user, as cautioned by the moderator, were personal and, above all, leading questions. For example, inquiries like “Are there certain kinds of fans that you don’t like, people who feel drawn to Judy for the wrong reason?” or “Do you or close family members have a history of problems with drugs or alcohol?” set a common tone. Furthermore, the user never provided a rationale or purpose behind her survey apart from researching “those of us who love Judy.”

Resistance to the researcher is common in ethnographic studies. In an anthology titled *Qualitative Research Practice*, Anne Ryen discusses the importance of *trust* in a chapter on ethical issues. Ryen explains that trust “is the traditional magic key to building good field relations” and striking a balance where trust is achieved and deception is curtailed proves to be a trying task throughout any given study (n.p.). Her examples involve ethnographic studies where researchers go “inside” potentially life-threatening situations, such as an undercover cop in a crime circle. Despite the circumstances of the researcher, however, Ryen believes that “trust, empathy, rapport, and ethics” are tied together in all types of field work (n.p.). And, furthermore,

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<sup>9</sup> One incident involved members of the Weinstein Co. soliciting responses to a script of a potential biopic based on Gerold Frank’s biography *Get Happy*. Anne Hathaway was cast in the role, but the project never came to fruition.

the representation of found data is a point of concern for the interviewee as trust is “associated with fidelity” and an “obligation” to tell the truth with the information provided (n.p.). Therefore, in the case of Judy Garland fans—although the risk seems low compared to that of criminal investigations—they had reason to resist the invasive survey of susieflora. Their uncertainty of her survey was built upon a lack of familiarity, a sense of vulnerability involving the type of questions asked, and the mystery of where the information would be utilized. Ultimately, it was my responsibility to take these concerns into and I resolved to observe the manner in which the online communities interacted with one another in order to successfully approach them and petition for my own research.

Throughout my stint of Garland admiration, one group, in particular, stood out to me as the authoritative and official group in which Garland fans of all walks of life belonged: The Judy Garland Experience.<sup>10</sup> As mentioned previously, I have been a member of several of these communities for years—however, due to my transition to primarily Facebook-oriented groups where “liking” a photo is a form of affirmation and admiration, my presence was not as obvious as it had been on other online platforms and I felt I did not have the visibility (nor the influence) to freely ask these groups. For months, I surveyed the types of interactions between members, which usually consisted of cheerful remembrances or discussions of Judy Garland’s overall talent. They often played trivia games, created memes with clever inside jokes only true fans could find humorous, and shared photos with one another. It was obvious, very early on, that *most* of the members did not want to dwell on the negative aspects of Garland’s life and that they tended to shy away from engaging in questions that placed her career in a harmful light—instead the atmosphere of The Judy Garland Experience was, for the most part, celebratory. Upon

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<sup>10</sup> In fact, the other website I contemplated using for my survey, The Judy Garland Message Board, closed after ten years in March of 2016.

witnessing the protective and admirable nature of her fans, I recognized that the types of questions I wanted to ask were non-invasive with the intent to extract genuine responses, as if they were responding to a question posed within the group.

But, before I surveyed the Judy Garland Experience community, my advisor and I decided it would benefit the overall outcome of the survey to conduct a pilot survey with a small focus group of students. The students were enrolled in a cult cinema course and were required to attend a lecture that detailed the cult following of *The Wizard of Oz* and, to a lesser extent, Judy Garland. I drafted a survey with the following questions and distributed it to the class to complete with the understanding that they were not required to complete it; their information would not be used in my final thesis; and their responses were completely anonymous:

Age:

Gender: M | F | Prefer not to disclose

Sexuality: (Optional)

1. At what age were you exposed to Judy Garland?
2. What film introduced you to Garland's career?
3. In the same vein, do you recall the moment when you felt you were drawn to her as a star/person/actress/singer (e.g., a particular scene, interview, song)?
4. How did learning anecdotes or biographical information about her personal life affect your perception of Garland?
5. Do you seek out personal information on Judy Garland?
6. Why does Garland resonate with you in comparison to contemporary stars?
7. What do you believe to be different about Garland compared to her Classical Hollywood peers?

8. Do you believe Garland to be a tragic figure? If not, why?
9. How do Garland fans interact with one another?
10. Do you belong to any Garland fan clubs, forums, or online communities?
  - If yes, which and for how long?

Even though the majority of students were not familiar with Judy Garland or her personal life, the pilot survey taught me numerous lessons. To begin, my desire to appeal to her fans was too passive. In my attempts to make the fans comfortable, I sacrificed the qualitative for the quantitative. My initial questions did not require in-depth answers, nor were they thought-provoking. In turn, the students gave straightforward and brief responses. In order to narrow the focus of the survey, I thought it was necessary to input *some* semblance of a question that tapped into the *pathos* of the fans' relationship to Garland. Five questions were altered to remedy these inherent flaws:

6. Do you believe Garland to be a tragic figure?
7. Do you relate to Garland's life experiences? If so, how?
8. Garland is known for being a gay icon. Do you feel this is an accurate label? Does this describe your relationship to Garland?
9. How do you interact with other Garland fans (e.g., festivals, online communities)?
10. Do you feel a personal connection to other fans of Garland? If so, how?

These questions allowed for the members to volunteer information, if they wished to do so, and I believed giving them open-ended options for the questions with the ability to expand upon an answer was key.

Upon completing the questions for the survey, the limitations for the participants were determined to comply with the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) screening process of



this reception study. The Board ensures behavioural studies are not harmful to the subjects of social sciences and humanities studies, both physically and emotionally. The BREB also guarantees that the information provided by the participants are completely secured and confidential. After much consideration, one of the limitations for my survey was the age demographic, which was set to 18 years and over. Despite this limitation, I knew I was targeting the group of individuals desired for this study since most of the users on the Facebook group chosen had to be 18 years of age in order to sign up for a Facebook account. Other ethical considerations involved leaving gender and sexual orientation completely optional. This allowed members to test their comfort with the survey from the outset. And finally, the participants had the option to remove themselves from the study at any given time, if they wished to do so to develop another level of initial comfort with the survey.

Following the approval of the BREB, I selected a time frame of three weeks to conduct the survey with aspirations to attain 30 to 40 responses. When I posted the survey on the private Judy Garland Experience Group, I formally introduced myself and outlined my intentions (as to avoid a situation similar to the susieflora survey) and informed them of the BREB approval process to further the validity of the survey. Despite my efforts to assuage the fans' possible concerns, I received a message, almost immediately, in my inbox from a fan with further inquiries into my research. Upon explaining my background and hypothesis for the project, she responded:

“What a wonderful response! Sorry to come out of the woodwork and ask questions about the project. Not really sorry I asked but sorry if it came off as invasive, but if you're familiar with Judy Fans at all, you'll understand we're also sick of articles/books about her from a tragic standpoint. Happy to hear the

direction you're going and being a woman myself, I look forward to what you find out regarding the Judy Garland fans that aren't gay men. Working on the survey right now!”

Her vote of confidence was the first indicator that I had potentially removed any chance for resistance from the fans. Interestingly, the responses began to arrive more rapidly any time a member commented on the original post for the survey, especially after this endorsement from Martha:

“I'll give the survey and Hilary's efforts a vote of support. [...] You won't feel as though you're being asked to reveal deep dark secrets nor is this an attempt to cast the legacy of Garland in any particular light. It's all about what attracts the fan to her and at what point that fan-attraction came about.”

Upon reflection, both Barker and Ryen's contributions to the study of qualitative research became a reality. By asking questions that were relevant to the research and establishing the intent of my research with the fans at the beginning of the survey, I met the “requirements” outlined by Barker. After receiving over thirty responses, I knew the quality of the questions indicated to the fans that their responses could potentially shape how others understood not only their interest in Garland, but Garland, in general. Additionally, without my direct involvement in the Garland community and the support of other fans, I am not certain I would have gained the amount of trust needed to successfully conduct a survey. By studying the group and interacting with them, I gained the trust that was needed.

## Chapter 3: Audience Reception Study

After the survey ended, it was impertinent to sift through each of the responses. Firstly, the responses were placed into groups based on age group to pinpoint the decade in which they were born and connect it to the timeframe in which Garland was still alive herself versus those who became fans after her death. However, the assumption that a specific age group had a collective awareness of Garland or entry point to her career was quickly dismissed when Phil, a fifty-three-year-old, claimed that he discovered Garland in 2005 while simply “looking for free music on the web.” An additional attempt to quantitatively group the demographics into gender and sexual orientation floundered as a total of seven out of thirty-three decided not to include their sexual orientation or gender. So, my focus shifted from my initial intent to unveil these hidden demographics of people. Though, I must state these groups clearly existed from the range of responses received from people as young as eighteen to fans well into their seventies. These statistics along with responses from lesbian women, straight men, gay men, and straight women revealed that my hypothesis about her fanbase was correct (thus far). For this chapter, the bulk of the reception study was assessed through qualitative patterns across *all* of the demographics. In the section which questions her status as a gay icon, there will be notation of their sexual orientation, but only if the participant chose to disclose this information. Otherwise, the participants will be identified by their first name and age.

### 3.1 *The Wizard of Oz* and Becoming a Fan

True to John Fricke’s assumptions about *Oz* as the “best loved” film of her career, it was far-and-away the most common answer to the question, “What film introduced you to Garland?” Twenty-two of the responses cited *Oz* as their first exposure to her career (with *A Star is Born*

trailing in second place at a total of three responses). Interestingly (and not surprisingly), many of the responses claim to have known Garland from an early age—as early as three-years-old—due to this particular film. Louisa, age fifty-nine, claimed she was exposed to Garland at age four and stated, “When she sang ‘Over the Rainbow’ [in *The Wizard of Oz*], I was feeling trapped in a colourless world and identified with her.” She was not alone in her assessment of the film’s iconic song, as a number of fans cited ‘Over the Rainbow’ as the entry point to their fandom. In addition to the song’s popularity, the character Dorothy also held appeal. Another fan, Susie, age fifty-five, professed, “I really just loved [*The Wizard of Oz*], the age I was at when I first saw it, I imagine I was starting to look around for heroines and role models ... her portrayal of Dorothy was just so wonderful, she was brave and pretty, things that appealed to me back then.” Others expressed obsessive and devoted behaviour toward the film, which only highlights impact of *Oz* and Garland’s role, “I just loved the annual showing of [*The Wizard of Oz*],” Estel, age fifty-two, remembers, “so much so that I recorded the audio onto a cassette tape. I would listen to it every night when I went to bed.”

However, the overwhelming vote for *Oz* as the film that exposed fans to Garland did not translate into the second question “... do you recall a specific moment when you were drawn to her as a/n star/person/actress/singer?” for most of the fans. Certainly, *Oz* appeared in some of the responses, such as this example from Bronwyn, age thirty-six, “When [Judy] whispers to the Scarecrow as the Tin Man is dancing. Something about it struck me as really authentic.” But for most of the fans, it was not a moment in *Oz* but another instance entirely, as if to say Garland’s talent could (and potentially *should*) be separated from *Oz*’s popularity, “Like almost every American kid, I grew up watching *The Wizard of Oz*,” Juliana, age thirty-five, who finds *Oz* both “enchanting and breathtaking” explains, “But I didn’t truly discover Judy Garland—who she

was, how she performed, how her voice could make me feel—until age 25.” She expanded on her proper introduction to Garland in a later question:

I really discovered Garland at age 25 when I happened to pick up a compilation of her hit film songs at a record store. I could write a page about every single song on that 20-track CD that literally changed my life. But I particularly remember my mind and heart exploding over three songs. In "You Made Me Love You," the juxtaposition of her childlike speaking voice and her incredibly mature singing voice made the record needle on my brain scratch over and over again. When I listened to "On the Atchison, Topeka, and the Santa Fe," I remember marvelling over her musicality. The rhythm and modulation and pacing of each sung lyric was so perfect. Some (fantastic) singers make whole careers out of playing with notes; Judy never had to. All she had to do was sing it. Lastly, "The Man that Got Away." To listen to someone singing—singing like that—for the sheer love of singing . . . it simply floors me every time.

A theme of discussing “Judy” versus “Dorothy” emerged in numerous responses. Some fans spoke of a generational appreciation of Judy Garland, detached from her role as Dorothy, within their family, like Lucy, age sixty-six:

My mother, and her mother, my grandmother, were fans. I only knew Judy as Dorothy until the album *Judy at Carnegie Hall* was released. The local classical music radio station was playing it uninterrupted on a Saturday afternoon. I sat in the living room with my mother to listen to it with her. That’s when my life changed. To me this is when I first discovered Judy.

Martha, age fifty-seven, mentioned in the previous chapter, notes a comparable experience of her

childhood when she was exposed to Garland. She saw *Oz* on television “from the womb,” but does not consider it to be the pivotal introduction to Garland and instead refers to an instance with familial ties:

... but really the “pow” introduction the summer Garland died ... I had just turned 11, and mom put the *Carnegie Hall* recording on the living room stereo. ‘I think you’re old enough for this,’ she said. Yes indeed.

An additional overwhelming consensus to this question was Garland’s voice as a stand-alone motivator for their fandom. Phil, the fan who discovered Garland while searching for free music on the internet, remarked, “I found songs on The Judy Room. It's Love I'm After and Zing Went the Strings of my Heart 1935. I was blown away a young teenager could sing with such feeling.” The “feeling” or power in Garland’s voice was a driving factor for their continued interest in her performances and career.

And finally, some fans reached beyond her voice to the performances, onscreen or in-person, where Garland’s presence and personality were the attraction. James, thirty-five years of age, gushed, “The very first moment I saw her on the television, I was taken. I wanted to BE her. Or her best friend. She was so charming, the energy and the focus was on her.” While Meghan, age thirty-one, remembers a specific scene in *The Harvey Girls* (Walters 1946) that drew her into Garland’s *oeuvre* based on her comedic skill and timing:

About 30-45 minutes into the film "The Harvey Girls", there is a scene where the local tavern/burlesque hall has stolen meat from the restaurant where Judy works. She decides to rectify this thievery herself and confidently steals two guns from a nearby holster hanging on a coat tree. What follows was such a delightfully silly scene of Judy (Susan Bradley) going between many emotions in

trying to help out the Harvey House. Many fans (myself included) will speak for days about how Judy's voice is unparalleled but I will also remember that the reason I loved her first was because she was HILARIOUS!”

The need to distinguish Judy Garland from Dorothy Gale by pinpointing her *exact* talents and *specific* moments appeared to be an important distinction to make, as if these distinct characteristics set them apart from run-of-the-mill “fans” who only know Garland through her Ozian role.

### **3.2 Seeking Biographical Information**

When asked about their knowledge and feelings on Garland’s personal life from biographies and archives, the writing tone noticeably shifted to sympathetic and, occasionally, empathetic. Certain fans were inclined to mention her drug or drinking habits, but they were quick to rescue Garland from a tarnished image by offering words of support in her struggles, “What I learned from all the anecdotes made me love her as the underdog, the mistreated artist,” a fan, Jerry and seventy years of age, compassionately responds, “I could only sympathize with her various addictions and her strength in carrying on.” Similarly, Linda, age fifty-six, names Garland’s fortitude and ability to carry on as an instigator of her appreciation, “It made me fascinated to learn more. She seemed to cause such diverse emotions, such loyalty and love. Her honesty and failings and needs just drew me in.” Despite the inability for many of these fans to ever truly know Garland as a person, it was clear from responses, such as one from a particularly heartfelt fan named Peter, age fifty-two, that Garland fans are both protective and caring of the star: “I remember finding a book about Judy at my grandmother's house. It went into detail about her problems with prescription medication and marriages... I remember wishing I could help her.”

The ridicule Garland's image faced nearing the end of her life and after her death was another concern of the participants. Mark, age fifty-six, remembers those final years and how he felt when he read about Garland in the newspapers and tabloids:

We worried about her and often fretted, or cringed, when difficult news of her would appear or we'd see a particularly unhealthy-looking picture in the news. Though I was only 9 when she died, I knew enough to know she was somewhat out-of-control, and more bad things were likely to happen. Her death was devastating to our family, yet not at all surprising. So while the tabloids could be cruel, much of my own perception was influenced by events she likely had little control of. After her death, the biographies appeared and by then, as a teenager, I think I knew to filter out the likely truths from myths.

The balance between these "truths" and "myths" was a consistent consideration among fans, and not only from tabloid sources. Several named biographies (albeit, none specifically) to be untruthful or laden with conflicting information about Garland. A younger fan, Alex, age twenty-two, decided to turn his focus away from them entirely, he writes, "...the many conflicting stories about her made me decide to focus more on her work, since that is what I think is more interesting (and more fun)." While Meghan deemed John Fricke as Garland's saving-grace in terms of biographical and anecdotal information available on her life:

Learning about Judy in the beginning was a difficult task and ultimate realization. Growing up without the internet for much of my childhood, I was guarded from her personal life and only found interest in her movies and characters. However, I did finally see a biography on television and seeing how sad her life was. I can look back now and see the bias and "fondness for ratings" as to why they spoke



the way they did about her. It wasn't until I discovered John Fricke (the best thing to happen to Judy Garland) that I realized, there is someone out there that can speak to her reality with kindness, wit, and intense caring. And her reality is so much more than the down times.

All in all, the fans seem leery of biographical information and either choose to ignore it or avert their focus to the the pathos and tangible aspects of Garland such as her career and talent.

### **3.3 Tragic Figure**

The “down times” were discussed further in, what I believe to be, the most lucrative question of the survey, “Do you believe Garland to be a tragic figure?” Out of the thirty-three responses, only five thought Garland should be considered a tragic figure. Their reasons were “health and lifestyle,” “drugs and booze” or the “odds against her,” in reference to the addictions in her life that were set in motion at such a young age. Considering the literature on Garland and the manner in which her star persona and legacy is consistently framed as tragic, this statistic is significant once it is stacked against the other responses to the question. However, the results were not divided between absolutes of “yes” and “no”; ten of the participants responded with answers that either renamed the word tragedy or they admitted to understanding the tragic label, but refused to accept the label as definitive of Garland. Mark explains the logic behind straddling both “yes and no” to this particular question:

I know that she intensely disliked being called "tragic," as do her children, though tragic things of great consequence happened to her. It is indeed tragic that her life was short. It is tragic that addiction and mental illness were not understood and considered real, treatable diseases in her lifetime. But overall, when it is considered what she left the world and how she enjoyed living, her life was a

soaring triumph.

But, in the responses that were not absolute, they felt the need to, yet again, shield Garland's image and come to her defence, "I believe she was broken. All of her life people would just use her for their own gain, be it financial or professional," Terry, age forty-nine, elucidates, "She was doing everything she knew what to do to survive." Other fans remarked that "tragic things happened to her," but that in itself did not make her a tragic figure. Or, the completely gracious responses gave Garland credit for improving their own lives and implied that her legacy and how she made fans feel should erase the tragic label, such as this response from Alexander, "Tragic things undeniably happened to her but a person that spread so much joy (to me) can't be all tragical."

Based on the pushback and resistance to previous surveys and the much-needed votes of confidence in my survey, I suspected the fans who responded "no" to this question would answer perhaps indignantly or exhaustively. However, it was apparent that many were happy to explain the reasons why she was not a tragic figure, as if they *finally* had a chance to defend her. First, there was a group who reflected on how Garland must have felt throughout her life, their answers were akin to a response from Max, fifty-seven, "No, not at all -- scarred, damaged, hurt of course. But not tragic." Or they were reminiscent of Louisa's sentiments, "Not completely. A difficult life, to be sure, but she did what she wanted. Manipulated by many who claimed to love her. That must have hurt deeply." The "hurt" Garland felt was an apparent place of empathy for those who did not consider her a tragic figure. Those who had read about her life and understood all of its ups-and-downs believed it was unfair to label her as tragic when they felt as though they knew or could relate to her circumstances (which will be discussed further in the last section of this chapter).

A pattern emerged from a handful of fans that recalled her ill-treatment from others, specifically her husbands and the MGM studio. Martin, age fifty-four, gave a thorough response:

The studio system that gave her a voice and a career also chewed up every bit of heart and soul she had to give and when she could no longer produce, it seemed like they couldn't be bothered with her. I say 'seemed' because I hear different stories such as how LB Mayer continued to pay her medical bills after she left MGM.

Brian, age fifty-six, offers a comparable response, "[Garland] once said 'things happen to me...I don't know why.' I think that sums it up. While she had bad romances, bad financial handlers and bad times at MGM, a lot of her life was happy. She laughed a lot and all the bad things were made to be funny." Perhaps the most indebted response came, again, from Peter, who chose to highlight her ability to bring out the best in everyone through her traits and talent:

There were things about her life that were tragic, but Judy was anything but tragic. She was extremely intelligent and so very funny and witty. When she sang there was definitely that sparrow in the wind aspect. She was a master at weaving the lyrics so that you felt what she felt. Happy, sad, lonesome or in the pit of despair, she brought you there with her and led you back out again as well.

The perceived humour in Garland's personality was also a repeated rationale in the responses on her status as a lighthearted person. To the fans, humour either mitigated or removed the tragedy from her *personality* (not her circumstances) altogether. In her explanation, Juliana chose to remove Garland from her star status in order to explain why she does not consider Garland to be a tragic figure:

No. I absolutely do not believe Garland to be a tragic figure. I understand

that for some people, seeing her as a tragic figure helps them relate to her more, and I can't and wouldn't deny that there's a certain quality of pathos surrounding her. But I see Judy Garland as a human figure. Someone who had good times and bad, who had a scintillating sense of humor and wit, who had true joy and true sorrow. If that makes someone a tragic figure, then I suppose all of us are. Personally, I'd rather be remembered for the good times, and so that's how I remember Judy.-

Overall, Garland is recognized by the majority of her fans as, to quote the moderator of the Judy Garland Experience, Buzz, “a woman who enjoyed life to the fullest” despite her circumstances. And even those who classified her as a tragic figure put the blame on circumstances rather than Garland the person or personality.

### **3.4 Gay Icon**

The question concerning Garland’s gay iconicity is also of great importance in this study. Not only does it aim to clarify or update the works of Dyer, Staiger, Cohan, and Pellegrini but it also attempts to further the perceptions of certain stars across multiple generations. Is Garland a gay icon? And, moreover, does it matter to this generation of fans? The question, “Garland is known for being a gay icon. Do you feel this is an accurate label? Does this describe your relationship to Garland?” received similar responses to the question about her label as a tragic figure. It was not a group of cut-and-dried “yes” or “no” answers. Instead, one third of the responses declared that she was, in fact, a gay icon. Eight responses did not feel the label was accurate. And fifteen of the responses were in-between or undecided. Though much of this study has been qualitative, I feel it is necessary to point out a statistic regarding the number of LGBT+ fans that participated in the study. Of the thirty-three responses, fifteen identified as either gay or

lesbian. Seven responses were left blank and the remainder of the fans identified as straight. Therefore, fascinatingly, even some of the fans who identify as LGBT+ do not consider Garland to be a gay icon OR do not consider the correlation between their queerness to be a factor in their fandom.

Before the straight-forward responses are analyzed, I wanted to point out a few unique responses to the question that I categorized as “undecided” or “in-between” upon tallying the statistics that involve the gay iconicity as an historical label. Phil unabashedly expressed in his response, “I must be honest. When I became a fan in 2005 I had no idea,” and proceeded to offer up his calculated opinion as to why she *might* be considered a gay icon:

I have asked on the JGMB and I don't think people have figured out the reason why. I think it's a description which is out of date but accurate for those of a certain age. For me she is more of a nostalgia figure. I saw her on TV as a kid and never figured out why she was so popular until I saw her on DVD and heard her on CD with modern technology.”

His “out of date” assessment was repeated in other responses, as well. “I believe this is accurate but speaks more to the past than current day,” Meghan explains, “I understand the importance of Judy in the older gay community (which includes many other female icons) and it should not be forgotten or dismissed, but I don't feel it reflects the current fabric of her fans.” Brian, who noted her struggles with MGM in a previous question, identifies as gay and also discusses the historical implications of her gay iconicity:

She had a huge gay audience and her funeral - it has been said - sparked the Stonewall riots which started the gay rights movement. So yes, she was a gay icon, however as time passes, her history is being lost - so the younger gay

audiences don't really know who she is. While I see her appeal to the gay audiences, I don't know that being a gay icon is a total description of my relationship to her. It helps a lot, but there's a lot more to her than just being a gay icon.

Comparatively, Buzz calls upon historical evidence correlating to the idea that the label is potentially a term of the past. He states, "She was, and to some extent is still, a Gay icon, but that is only a small fraction of her reach. She herself hated to have her audience labeled as she had fans of all ages, sexes, races, and persuasions. If you look at the footage from her wake and funeral it is the diversity of the mourners is remarkable."

The responses that deemed Garland a gay icon and identified as openly gay, but feel it is not an accurate reason to describe their relationship to Garland, resemble the previous examples as there is a certain hesitancy to limit Garland to that title. Philip, age sixty-four and openly gay, states, "It's an accurate label, but I feel her enormous talent transcends the 'gay icon' thing. So, no - it does not describe my relationship. I would be a fan even if I were not gay." Jerry, also openly gay, responds with a similar frankness, "... yes, she is a gay icon. I am uncomfortable with that label only so far as it limits a fuller appreciation of her." And Juliana's response is strikingly analogous to their answers, though it is met with an acknowledgement of the queer populace that, according to her, loves Garland:

I do feel that it's accurate to label Garland a gay icon, and though I'm a lesbian, this doesn't describe my relationship to her. Maybe it would if I'd been around in 1969! I like what Liza Minnelli says when asked why she thinks the gay community loves her so much: "They have good taste!" That said, I must add the caveat that I adore my personal community of fellow Judy fans, most of

whom are queer. And we really run the gamut! Lesbians, gay men, bisexual women, straight women... I think we create a safe space for ourselves that happened to spring up around our love for Judy.

And finally, there are the fans who do believe Garland is a gay icon. Some painted the title with a broad stroke like Linda, “She is a gay icon. I am not gay, however I see why she would resonate to the gay community. She respected everyone, white, black, young, old, gay, straight. Her love in humanity is her legacy, that is why I LOVE her.” Others like Monica, age sixty-one and self-identified as gay, simply concurred, “Absolutely.” But there were the exceptional few that credited Garland to successfully pushing through their “coming out” period, “She was... I consider her to be a guardian angel to me,” Peter appreciatively recollects, “It sounds strange I know, but she was definitely shelter during the storm so to speak.”

Of the responses, one stuck with me, not only because of the circumstances, but because of the perspective it gave on Garland’s status as a gay icon. Lucy explains:

I think Judy is an icon for anyone who feels deeply. Gays and Lesbians often have painful times coming out, and Judy could express that. I was molested by my father and brother. I often felt like used Kleenex in my family. Judy's music allowed me to recognize and express that pain, and helped heal me.

Lucy’s transparency and self-awareness of her appreciation of Garland through seemingly insurmountable circumstances is one to reflect upon. If Garland appeals to those who “feel deeply” or struggle through situations with the potential to be emotionally damaging, then this points to a possible conclusion on the muddled feelings about assigning rigid classifications such as “tragic” or “gay icon” to Garland’s legacy when she appears to do so much more.

### 3.5 Relating to Other Garland Fans

Perhaps the most “personal” or potentially invasive question, “Do you relate to Garland’s life experiences? If so, how?” was answered with as much depth and sincerity about their own lives as they were about Garland’s life. I found some of the answers to be utterly heartbreaking, yet I appreciated their transparency in this ethnographic study. For this reason, I have chosen to share the responses anonymously in this section. A few fans spoke of struggles with drug and alcohol addictions, and one even pointed to difficulties with depression. Another fan claimed to share a sense of humour with Garland. Overall, there was a consensus of understanding pain, overcoming struggles, and moving forward either through self-motivation or coping mechanisms—like Garland’s music—to carry on. A fan who declared his dissimilarities with Garland summed up this question with his response, “I just love how she was able to emote and articulate in her music the human emotions that we all feel at some point in our lives.” Relating to human emotion, or “feeling deeply,” as Lucy previously described it appeared to be the crux of relating to Garland.

For the purpose of anonymity of outside parties and respect for the participants of this survey, I have also chosen to omit the responses to the final question, “Do you feel a personal connection to other fans of Garland? If so, how?” as many of them were either too short to utilize in a way that successfully paints a picture of the Garland fandom and others too specific (i.e., mentioning names without the outside party’s permission). This was, on some level, a bit of a surprise because it proved that my survey, by its conclusive question, had developed a degree of comfort that I had not intended to establish. I had never dreamed fans would share deeply personal details of their life, nor divulge some of the issues they faced with other members of the fandom. Since the Garland fans felt ease in responding with such depth and sincerity to the



personal questions that I implemented following my pilot survey, which had been one of my main concerns from the outset, I had gained their trust and offered security in my research project.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

Though her name is not currently on the tip of pop culture's tongue like someone of Adele or Lady Gaga's stature, there is still a cultural capital surrounding Garland's legacy. In news media, it falls back on the category involving victimization or tragedy. The most recent fodder for the public was published on June 22, 2016 by *The New York Times*. In their Obituaries section, they posted a pseudo-tribute to Garland titled "The Rainbow that Judy Garland Never Got Over" to mark the anniversary of her untimely death. To set the tone, the author Mathew Brownstein writes, "Garland's dream of fame did come true, but she never found peace of mind" (n.p.). Throughout the article, he points to her successes, but the nearly hyperbolic repetition of longing and failure in the quotations incorporated into the article never stray from the idea that Judy Garland's life was tragic because she could not achieve what she wanted, seemingly because she did not know what she wanted apart from love and companionship. Garland's original obituary published by *The New York Times* on June 23, 1969, the morning after her death, undoubtedly assisted Mr. Brownstein's recent overview of her career. On the front page, a photo of Garland—with her small stature boldly singing onstage—is settled beneath the headline "Judy Garland, 47, Found Dead." The article begins, "Judy Garland, whose successes on stage and screen were later overshadowed by the pathos of her personal life, was found dead in her home [in London] today." This informal thesis functions as, yet another, blanket statement on her biography for the remainder of the rather lengthy obituary. The parenthetical embrace that tragedy has on the representation of Garland in popular culture will likely continue.

However, the tragedy does not speak for her thousands—yes, thousands—of fans that continue to find her through her role as Dorothy or Esther Blodgett. Or maybe even from listening to a copy of *Judy at Carnegie Hall*. As it stands, fans of Judy Garland feel there are

some aspects of their community—and perceptions of Garland—that need to be qualified. Firstly, I would conclude that the buzzword of “tragic” could take a back seat in the analysis of Garland. Instead, they could be replaced with words I found recurrently in the fan responses: “life-changing”, “authentic”, “empathetic”, and what I see as the true antidote to her tragic circumstances: “hilarious.” The first word, “life-changing,” was, in no way, connected to any personal parallels in their own lives next to Garland’s. Instead, it was her music, her way of conveying “feeling” (another key word), and her ability to overcome difficult circumstances that made her an authentic figure worthy of admiration. That she could make light of her problems with a joke or a comic response appealed to her fans—after all, it was Lucille Ball, the queen of comedy, that claimed Garland made her look like a mortician, so their assessment of her humour holds some accuracy. And, furthermore, her ability to make a comeback, even through the turmoil, seem to be the consensus on why Judy Garland is deserving of such devotion.

Without jumping too far into analysis of these words and their implications, I think one of the responses summed up best how *many* of the fans felt. It was from Juliana, who stated, “But I see Judy Garland as a human figure. Someone who had good times and bad, who had a scintillating sense of humor and wit, who had true joy and true sorrow. If that makes someone a tragic figure, then I suppose all of us are.” Relating again to Dyer’s evaluation of stars as identification figures, this would implicate Garland as a relatable figure with a great deal of *pathos* exuding from her performances. The *pathos*, as *The Times* article mentioned, has not overshadowed her career, but rather it has humanized someone who achieved stardom. Garland who indeed faced tragic circumstances responded in a way that an average person would—not in the manner that her ideological star image demanded. Therein lies the human appeal of Garland.

As far as her status as a gay icon, it seems to be a non-issue. Even for the gay fans who

found comfort in Garland during a time in their life when they were coming to terms with their sexuality, there was hesitancy to “limit” Garland to such labels. And perhaps this is due to their knowledge that it is oftentimes the suffering and tragedy that ties their circumstances to her own. It would make sense, in our present state of progress with civil and human rights, why they would not want to be boxed in alongside her with such a negative term. In an interview with Irv Kupcinec in 1967, Garland was asked about her “homosexual” fans in response to an article published by *Time Magazine*. She declared, “I think that’s the most ridiculous thing because I have, in my audiences... I have little children, you know from seeing *The Wizard of Oz*. Strangely enough now, I have many teenagers. Then, people my age.” The article was apparently targeting homosexual males in a way that Garland did not condone. She continued with a rather progressive answer, “For so many years I’ve been misquoted and rather brutally treated by the press, but I’ll be damned if I like to have my audience mistreated.” It is clear that Garland believed her fan base to be filled with a variety of people for whom she held a great deal of respect, and her queer audiences were among this group. If she were still alive today, this evaluation would remain accurate based on the results of my audience reception study.

Garland has appeal, as I postulated, to a variety of individuals: young and old, gay and straight. This is not to say her queer fans or fans who fall in the non-normative category lack significance—nor that any of the previous studies on Garland analyzing her queer audiences were untruthful. They are, in fact, credible. But, rather, to show that perhaps analysis on queerness left us with a deeper understanding of how her *devoted* audience members relate to her. Drawing back, once more, to Dyer’s assessment of the “gay sensibility” and emotional quality in Garland’s star image and performances, I am reminded of the responses from fans who related closely to her ability to convey their feelings. To Lucy who candidly spoke of feeling like

a used facial tissue, but Garland helped her cope as she is an icon to those who “feel deeply.” So, it is still emotionality, but with differing life circumstances than that of gay men, that attract fans to her characters, career, and personality. I am also reminded of a scene in *A Star is Born* wherein Norman Maine (James Mason) is attempting to tell Esther why she is a great singer. He compares her skill to the feeling someone gets when they witness a skilled prizefighter or a fisherman catches a large fish. Eventually, after confusing Esther who, modestly, is unaware of her talent, he explains, “You’ve got that little something extra that Ellen Terry talked about. Ellen Terry, a great actress long before you were born. She said that that was what star quality was—that little something extra. Well, you’ve got it.” I am convinced that like Esther, “that little something extra,” is Garland’s ability to “feel” along with her audiences in her performances.

To conclude my thesis, I would like to make a call for updated articles on Garland—and perhaps I can fill those shoes—wherein her characters are studied for their relatable qualities on a human level, and her body or voice is examined for its ability to convey empathy over neuroses. Moreover, there is a need for an article on how fans are able to find humour in a star figure who *never* appeared in a comedic film. These are the types of articles needed in order to have a fuller understanding of Garland’s appeal to audiences of every demographic and to situate her away from newspaper clippings and the tabloid version of Garland that has received copious amounts of attention. My study does not disprove the numerous scholarly and non-academic articles available on Garland, but rather provides supplemental information to prove there is *new* information as time passes and *new* methods to adopt in order to reach these conclusions about her star status.

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