

” WRITING

Here, Queer, Yet Not Really

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TYPE
NARRATIVE

If you look at representation in entertainment and media, most people would say that pretty much everyone is represented in everything. I hate to say it, but not everyone is really represented, and not in the right way. There may be characters of color, but they are most likely Mexican, Black, East Asian, or an unidentified ethnicity, along with being atheist or Christian, cisgender, and/or straight. You never really get to see characters who wear hijabs, are Latin American but not Mexican or Puerto Rican, practice Hinduism, or identify as nonbinary. Even when minorities are represented, they are not always represented in the right way—especially when it comes to the representation of queer people.

When it comes to representation of minorities, queer people in this case, in entertainment and media, there will always be stereotypes and labels. Like for someone who is transgender, in real life or in fiction. Stereotypes of being transgender include being oppressed and rejected by family and peers, being in drag or being a cross-dresser, having had or planning to have sex reassignment surgery, or being gay. I

know of people who are transgender who do and don't fit with these statements. But I will go out and say this now: stereotypes can be true, but they can also be false.

In entertainment, where stereotypes are alive and well for queer characters, portrayals of non-cisgender and non-straight characters have become more realistic since the late twentieth century. There is still a long way to go when it comes to proper representation of queer identities, relationships, and stereotypes. But not all are so bad. You can look at Santana and Brittany or Kurt and Blaine from the musical teen drama *Glee*, for example. Both relationships are healthy, yet of course they have their thin ice moments when touching coming-of-age topics such as coming out, bullying, cheating, and breakups. Kurt and Blaine both express their love of the arts, Broadway, and fashion, as well as having the feminine qualities of your stereotypical gay teenage boy. Yet these qualities are not exaggerated. Santana and Brittany, however, have no fairly visible stereotypes incorporated in their characters. Their relationship isn't the usual "butch-femme" lesbian relationship. Brittany isn't the bisexual to not commit in a serious relationship. And Santana being a Latina puts out a good example of a queer person of color. Qualities from both of these relationships put out great examples of your more modern queer youth.

Of course there is good representation, but not all representation is good. Yes, you see people who are gay, bisexual, or lesbian in a relationship, drag queens (sometimes), or people who are transgender. But where are other existing gender identities and sexual orientations? People who are religious, people of color, or disabled people, who are also

in queer relationships? Queer people in healthy, lasting relationships? Drag kings? Transgender relationships? Perpetuating realistic and healthy stereotypes in good ways?

An example of this absence would be the constant killing of queer women in entertainment, from the stray bullet that killed Tara Maclay in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to the other stray bullet that killed Lexa in *The 100*. I have no idea why it's mostly by gunfire that wonderful queer women are killed, but these deaths also killed off great relationships. Both Tara and Lexa had just gotten back with their significant others before being killed. What message does this show? That queer women can't live happy lives in healthy relationships with the person they love? Hopefully, one day, we will know the answer without a bogus statement about getting viewer ratings up.

And now for the things we all know and love: bad stereotypes and misconceptions. Like Tyrell Wellick from *Mr. Robot*, who perpetuates the really bad stereotype of bi and pan characters not being able to commit in a relationship and sleeping around. And of course he shows this by sleeping around, having an unhealthy obsession with another character, and just being a real schemer. A fail at telling queer history was the movie released in 2015 titled *Stonewall*, which attempted and failed to tell the story of the Stonewall Riots in 1969 in New York. Just by looking at the trailers you could tell what went wrong in this white-cis-male production: no lesbians, drag queens, transgender people, or many people of color. In the movie, there was no mention, showing, or dedication to the drag queens of color or transgender women of color who started the riots. Sylvia Rae Rivera was probably spinning in her grave after that movie

was released.

Then there are, of course, other identities to be represented that aren't just LGBT: QI+ was added to the current acronym for a reason. Before going off air, the MTV show *Faking It* had the first intersex character portrayed by an intersexactor (pretty big, even if it was for one episode) and the first recurring out intersex character on television. And most gender-bending characters I've seen who are well played out and not overly stereotypical are found in anime. Haruhi Fujioka from *Ouran Highschool Host Club* and Haruka Tenou, AKA Sailor Uranus, from the *Sailor Moon* franchise are both rumored to have gender identities under the trans umbrella (specifically genderfluid). These very, very few characters who live beyond the binary and have identities that are underrepresented in media and entertainment are one step closer to proper representation of queer topics and characters. Some media is telling the stories of queer characters from underrepresented religions, some of whom are disabled as well. Like Laila, a teenager with cerebral palsy, who is in a lesbian relationship with Khanum, who is blind—both women are from India and are Hindu, as seen in the film *Margarita With A Straw*. Or Rasha Zuabi, a lesbian, practicing Muslim, and Syrian refugee from *Degrassi: Next Class*.

Queer people being represented in an informational way is not as common as it should be. I haven't seen or heard of any textbook or class that speaks of queer history, current civil rights struggles, or sex education units. The only thing gay-related that was taught to me in school was HIV/AIDS. Even in the news, where most of the content is

devastating in order to raise viewer ratings, I barely saw the stories of over seven transgender women's murders or that of the first person to be legally recognized as agender. Is this because this would just ruffle the feathers of people in high positions or "concerned" parents? Maybe . . . probably . . . but who can tell for sure these days.

This may seem like a lot of representation, but it is realistically very little. And like the way society is able to give people who aren't minorities proper representation and rights, these things should be available to those who are minorities as well. Teach the young and old about what really goes on, and tell them there needs to be equality, in entertainment and in real life.

Would you think that I believe queer people and other minorities have a long way to go?

YES.

Do you agree with me?

That is up to you.