

The Lack of LGBTQ+ Representation in Film & Television

Most kids adore television and film characters in which they may identify. Consequently, this means mainly only straight people are able to connect with TV and movie scripts concerning relationships. Some writers have expressed their opinions of writing LGBTQ+ characters. For example, Steven Moffat, the creator of the *Sherlock*, said in an interview that “If [Sherlock] was asexual, there would be no tension in that, no fun in that – it's someone who abstains who's interesting” (Jeffries, 2012). This quote exemplifies that people who identify as asexual are mocked in the media as not being social acceptable because they are said to have a scarcity of emotion due to their lack of sexual attraction. Essentially, LGBTQ+ people are currently incorrectly represented which harms the LGBTQ+ population; therefore, it is crucial to change the film industry so that a major portion of the population, especially teenagers, won't continue to be discriminated against.

Most of the LGBTQ+ characters in today's movies and television shows aren't represented accurately. Although flamboyant gay men exist, not all men identifying as homosexual know the dance routine to Beyoncé's *Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)*. A person's sexuality doesn't need to dictate their appearance or personality, although it can. Therefore, it is unreasonable for the majority of gay men in media to be solely theatrical and feminine. One character that embodies this particular gay stereotype is Kurt Hummel from the Fox television series *Glee*. Hummel embodies practically every gay stereotype. He dresses based on style magazines, sings as a soprano, and struts like a model instead of walking like a regular person down the halls of his high school, Lima High (Murphy, 2009). Most people don't point out the faults in this character since he was one of the first gay protagonists on a television show and

were perplexed that a gay character was finally allowed to exist on the Fox network which has a tendency to be homophobic. The Guardian described this dilemma, saying “what about the majority of gay men who aren't represented on TV? Gay teenagers must gulp with fear when they see Kurt, as he confuses the closet-door with a piano lid and makes being gay look like a full-time job” (The Guardian, 2011). Many stereotypical LGBTQ+ characters are rewarded Emmys simply because of the rarity of LGBTQ+ visibility in the media.

One of the common issues of the television and film industry is the lack of certain orientations of the LGBTQ+ spectrum being presented. In the initialism LGBTQ+, the “L” stands for Lesbian (homosexual attraction for females), the “G” for Gay (homosexual attraction for males), the “B” for Bisexual (attracted to both males and females), and the “T” for Transgender (gender is either male or female but is different than the person’s gender of birth) (UCF Student Development and Enrollment Services, 2016). Additionally, the “Q” stands for Queer and the plus sign represents all of the other sexual orientations and gender identities (UCF Student Development and Enrollment Services, 2016). Asexual, Pansexual, Genderqueer, Nonbinary, and Genderfluid, to name a few, are examples of the need for a shortened title. By stating that there are other sexualities and genders with the use of the plus sign, everyone can fit under the terms of the spectrum.

Although many queer characters are based on harmful stereotypes, there are some beneficial depictions. The United Kingdom seems to produce more shows and movies with LGBTQ+ people featured as protagonists such as *Doctor Who*, *In The Flesh*, *Torchwood*, *London Spy*, *Orphan Black*, etc. Netflix also features LGBTQ+ characters in their original series including *Orange Is the New Black* and *Sense8*. One example of a well-represented character is

Captain Jack Harkness from *Torchwood*. The only information that can be confirmed about the character is that he was born in the 51st century, works for a government funded organization called Torchwood located in Cardiff, and will date practically anyone regardless of gender or species (Davis, 2006). This character provides an example of an accurately depicted gay couple in television. He dates Ianto Jones for most of Seasons Two and Three. Particularly in the third season, the character's relationship is open and healthy. This is well representative of actual relationships because it demonstrates that they are no different than any other normal, straight couple. Without examples of healthy LGBTQ+ relationships, LGBTQ+ teenagers are unlikely to comprehend that there isn't a drastic distinction between a straight couple and gay couple.

Most shows today that include LGBTQ+ characters have dialogue that emphasize the character's sexuality. By having the characters frequently represent the stereotype of their orientation, they don't accurately represent the LGBTQ+ community. BBC Wales produced a miniseries called *In The Flesh* that showed the aftermath of a zombie apocalypse. This show uses the discrimination against zombies as an extended metaphor on homophobia and the damaging effects it has on LGBTQ+ people. Creator, Dominic Mitchell stated that "*In the Flesh* is really a story of identity. How do you fit in when you're completely different and people are labelling you?" and that Kieren Walker is not "not gay but he's not straight. He's more in love with the person than the gender" (Mitchell & Sim, 2013). Although we know that Kieren Walker, the protagonist, had a boyfriend and comments are made about him being gay in the show, he never actually comes out as being solely attracted to men. This demonstrates progress in film and television as Kieren Walker never explicitly labels himself. Instead of the show being solely entertainment, Mitchell uses it to show powerful orientation issues subtly.

Several organizations have formed to encourage LGBTQ+ representation. GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) is one such organization that attempts to help LGBTQ+ people with everyday discrimination in film. They released a graphic that showed the percentages of LGBTQ+ characters depicted in top major motion films of 2014. According to this graphic, 82.5% of the most watched films of 2014 lacked any LGBTQ+ characters. Additionally, 65% of the 28 characters were gay men and 0% were Transgender (GLAAD, 2015). With this information, it can be seen that there is not a great enough proportion of LGBTQ+ characters in film. They also focus on highlighting accurate representation in film and television. For instance, in an article focusing on how bisexual men are being represented more frequently in 2016, they referenced Magnus Bane from the Freeform show, *Shadowhunters*. In the article Deerwater says Bane “casually mentions past lovers, male and female, the way any character would refer to past relationships. These low-key affirmations make it clear that Magnus is bisexual without having that be his sole defining characteristic” (Deerwater, 2016). This quote exemplifies the harsh reality that most characters in television and film that identify as queer are written only based on the stereotypes commonly associated with their sexuality. With high rating shows like *Shadowhunters* being promoted by GLAAD, change can be made in the future to have LGBTQ+ characters be more prominent in the media.

LGBTQ+ people are almost never represented well in the media; however, when they are they provide teenagers with role models. Therefore, the film industry needs to change so queer audiences can relate with characters like straight people can currently. If this changes in the future, more LGBTQ+ people may pursue film so more accurately depicted characters can be portrayed in television and movies.

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