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Channel Surfing

In an article “Qu(e)rying Comic Book Culture and Representations of Sexuality in Wonder Woman,” Brian Mitchell Peters discusses sub-textual LGBTQ themes embedded within the history and plotlines of children’s pop culture, specifically the drag and lesbian themes within the subtext of Wonder Woman. In reference to drag, Peters states that the queer identity of the author is reflected in the characteristics of Wonder Woman, creating an “imaginary sequence of drag.” He describes many cases where Wonder Woman expresses lesbian characteristics, but in general, Peters claims it is maintained through “her inherent combination of traditionally male and female stereotypes.” Peters argues that when queer themes are identified within the comics, those “detectable areas of queer text” would in turn be repeatedly extinguished. He explains instances such as Artemis’s death to show how even though queer themes exist in comics, they have always been short lived. He states that Artemis’s death occurred because she was “too out” and “too detectable” so the queer characteristics of Diana were silenced as well. Peters’ overall message is that “the outside world's often far too hesitant response towards queer identification and queer life” prevents the LGBTQ community from having full visibility. I agree with Peters when he states that there is a constant presence of queer ideas within pop culture and is constantly being silenced as a reflection of society’s cautious response; however, I also think that the fluidity and continuous change results in the slow progression of accepting those ideas,

especially through children's media. In the past, these ideas were always present sub-textually, and now these ideas are more clearly present and represented throughout all of pop culture.

Children's shows such as *Sailor Moon* are clear proof of queer identity being silenced; nevertheless, remakes like *Sailor Moon Crystal* prove the change in pop culture ideals. *Sailor Moon* in its original Japanese form included multiple gay and lesbian relationships amongst the characters. However, these details were left out and/or changed in the American translations into more "heteronormative" characteristics. In the article, "Sailor Neptune and Uranus Come Out of the Fictional Closet," Sara Roncero-Menendez describes what was left out in the American version and what that said about the American culture. "People weren't puzzle pieces that needed to be designed into the 'right' shapes, but were in fact perfect as they were." Roncero-Menendez explains that changing the identity and sexuality of some of the characters shows that these types of characters are not acceptable because it argues that a person need to be altered. Altering the identity made it seem that a person should not be who they are; thus, cannot accept or respect themselves. It not only discourages youth to be who they are, but also allows them to think it is wrong; as well as thinking prejudice is acceptable. Roncero-Menendez basically describes how it was unethical to alter the original relationships between characters into the heteronormative, even if *Sailor Moon* was a children's show. In a survey done by the Pew Research Center, "75% [of parents] favor tighter enforcement of government rules on TV content during hours when children are most likely to be watching," in 2005. It is understandable why the choice was made to censor the characters since *Sailor Moon* aired in the United States around the 2000s. However, in another survey, "(32%) [of parents] said they were very concerned about their children watching programming with homosexual characters and themes." This was the smallest concern with themes in children's media compared to drugs, violence, etc.

Despite unfortunate decisions made when editing the original *Sailor Moon*, Roncero-Menendez also mentions how the remake, *Sailor Moon Crystal*, has redeemed American culture and will include the intended identities and sexuality. She ultimately explains how society has changed over the years with *Sailor Moon Crystal* as the proof. It was not necessary to cut out the real issues that surfaced in *Sailor Moon*. I agree that in doing so, it negatively reflected former societal views and that it shows that being ourselves is not always acceptable and should be changed or hidden. Especially in the way the characters were altered. “The American team was so worried about showing gay or lesbian characters that they went out of their way to create whole new identities and relationships for them [...] these changes contradicted the very message of the show and were emblematic of the still prevalent issue of media representation.” I especially agree with Roncero-Menendez with this statement because it ruins the integrity of the show’s message. When growing up, I loved watching *Sailor Moon* and was blissfully unaware of any alterations that were made. I was not much older when I discovered the true relationships between the characters. I was upset, not because of the presence of LGBTQ themes, but because the original plot was ruined. Instead of a lesbian couple, they were perceived as cousins. Instead of a gay couple, one was made to appear as female. It was like everything I knew and loved about the show was a lie. Censoring these themes occurred because the producers were worried about exposing children to “inappropriate” themes. Everything learned from childhood shapes our morals as we mature. Censoring LGBTQ themes shows discrimination against the LGBTQ community so instead of protecting children, they exposed them to negative behavior. However, I also agree when Roncero-Menendez says that the world has changed a lot. People’s views are changing and becoming more accepting.

Many children's movies, such as, *ParaNorman*, *The Box Trolls*, *Frozen*, and *Coraline* continue to promote LGBTQ issues even though it still receives controversial backlash. In the article, "WATCH: Do Kid's Movies Push The 'Gay Agenda'?", Diane Anderson-Minshall discusses how many children's movies, primarily the ones done by the film team Laika, have taken steps to bring awareness and visibility to LGBTQ issues. She explains how the intention of Laika was to state their overall message of being themselves, "we're not in any way trying to be activists. We're just trying to be who we are. [...] There are going to be people who simply don't agree with that and we understand, but we also won't flinch from the consequences of that. The kinds of films we make have to be consistent with our values and how we look at the world, and sometimes that means putting yourself out there a little bit." Laika is stating that even if they receive negative opinions, it is more important to show who they are and what they stand for. This type of fight proves that some groups among the film industry is taking a stand for what they think is right, which is the acceptance and visibility of LGBTQ issues.

Subtle queer details included within today's cartoons, like in *The Legend of Korra*, allow for visibility and change. In the final scene of *The Legend of Korra* depicts the characters Korra and Asami holding hands and going to the spirit world together. The clip was very brief and throughout the entire series, there were no obvious signs of LGBTQ issues. After the series ended, the creators Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko went back to explain their chosen ending which was discussed in the article "Legend of Korra Creators Officially Confirm Your Suspicions About That Ending". Konietzko stated that "Just because two characters of the same sex appear in the same story, it should not preclude the possibility of a romance between them. No, not everyone is queer, but the other side of that coin is that not everyone is straight." The creators were approved to show LGBTQ themes, but still had limitations on what they could

illustrate. They wanted to give visibility to the queer community even if it was a short lived scene. They felt it was necessary to start with subtly displaying LGBTQ issues so in the future, restrictions to what can be aired will be smaller. “We did it for all our queer friends, family, and colleagues. It is long overdue that our media (including children’s media) stops treating non-heterosexual people as nonexistent, or as something merely to be mocked. I’m only sorry it took us so long to have this kind of representation in one of our stories.” The creators were prepared and willing to take any negative backlash. According to Konietzko, there were more positive responses present. This shows that not only is the film industry fighting for LGBTQ visibility, but people among society approve as well.

Alternatively, in the article “Is *The New Normal* the New Derogatory?” Andrea Vale argues that although television and movies have allowed social acceptance towards the LGBTQ community, some issues are taken too lightly or too comically. “These shows have spread acceptance -- but only of persisting one-dimensional stereotypes. We automatically squeeze LGBTQ people into clichés, to the point of expecting certain behavior from them.” Vale states that rather than creating acceptance for the LGBTQ community with the film industry, it creates irreparable stereotypes that causes more discrimination than approval. Although in some cases this can be proven to be true, I believe that it is that visibility that can allow change. Whether it starts positively or negatively, I think that visibility is a place to start to learn and become more accepting. According to the Pew Research Center, in the United States “the percentage saying homosexuality should be accepted by society has grown by at least ten percentage point since 2007.” I believe this greatly due to media and pop culture. The simple presence of LGBTQ issues in media can lead to accepting ideals.

During my research, I have found that although LGBTQ issues are believed to be suppressed in pop culture, it is more likely to find an accepting view on including LGBTQ related issues. Some of the shows I have discussed, such as *Sailor Moon*, have created remakes to correct their misguided judgment on excluding, altering, or censoring any characters or ideas that were part of the original plot line. Other shows, like *The Legend of Korra*, are making small steps towards allowing the LGBTQ community visibility among children's cartoons. Learning to accept or to discriminate against others starts at childhood. The new changes in what is allowed to be shown on television allow children to develop with an open view towards others. Even though discrimination is prominent in our past and still exists in our present, society is slowly changing and now has a hopeful and accepting future.

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Annotated Bibliography

"Additional Findings and Analyses." *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press RSS*.

N.p., 19 Apr. 2005. Web. 27 Apr. 2015.

This is a research and survey based article. It gives updated numbers of parents' views on television exposure. It states the main concerns parents have with television, with homosexuality at the bottom and drugs and violence at the top.

Anderson-Minshall, Diane. "WATCH: Do Kid's Movies Push The 'Gay Agenda'?"

Advocate.com. N.p., 22 July 2014. Web. 21 Mar. 2015.

Diane Anderson-Minshall discusses multiple children's movies, such as, *ParaNorman*, *The Box Trolls*, *Frozen*, and *Coraline* to show the promotion of LGBTQ issues. She states that even if the producers receive negative opinions, they continue to show LGBTQ issues to display what they believe in.

Peters, Brian Mitchell. "Qu(e)rying Comic Book Culture and Representations of Sexuality in Wonder Woman." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 5.3 (2003): .

In this article, Brian Mitchell Peters discusses queer issues within the comic of *Wonder Woman*. He states that the overall issue is that even though queer ideas exist within pop culture, it is quickly silenced and hidden.

Robinson, Joanna. "Legend of Korra Creators Officially Confirm Your Suspicions About That Ending." *Vanity Fair*. N.p., 22 Dec. 2014. Web. 21 Feb. 2015.

This article discusses the suspicions within the show *The Legend of Korra*. It uses quotations from the creators to give a clear view on what the intention was for the show. The creators state that they wanted to give more visibility to the LGBTQ community as

well as attempt to break away from the heteronormative romantic assumptions between characters.

Roncero-Menendez, Sara. "Sailor Neptune and Uranus Come Out of the Fictional Closet." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 21 May 2014. Web. 6 Feb. 2015.

Sara Roncero-Menendez explains the issue of how the English translation of Sailor Moon negatively portrays societal ideals. She states that changing the true identity of the characters suggest that it is not worth being yourself and that people should hide whoe they really are. She ends with how the remake will include the intended roles, thus reflecting on how society has changed.

"Support for Tougher Indecency Measures, But Worries About Government Intrusiveness." *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press RSS*. N.p., 19 Apr. 2005. Web. 27 Apr. 2015.

This article has research and survey data on people's opinions on whether or not government intervention for television shows is necessary. It show the statistics on the parents who agree and who disagree that what is released on television should have strict policies. The survey also displays the number of people who think parents are at fault when it comes to what children are viewing, not the government.

"The Global Divide on Homosexuality." *Pew Research Centers Global Attitudes Project RSS*. N.p., 04 June 2013. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.

This article is also a research and survey based source. The data shows how the opinions of homosexuality have changed. It also shows demographically and geographically the number of people who do and who do not accept homosexuality.

Vale, Andrea. "Is *The New Normal* the New Derogatory?" *The Huffington Post*.

TheHuffingtonPost.com, 18 Nov. 2014. Web. 16 Mar. 2015.

Andrea Vale discusses how LGBTQ themes are often shown comically throughout television. She states that the LGBTQ community does not truly have visibility if they are being portrayed falsely.