

Queer Representation Matters: TV, tropes and trauma

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Abstract:

Has queer representation in screen media really changed or improved? Do queer audiences still suffer the trauma from watching their favourite queer characters die on television? While lesbian and bisexual women characters and storylines have increased significantly in the last decade, queer women fans are often left with tragedy and trauma as their legacy. While the term “bury your gays” has been around for decades and refers to the killing of LGBTQ+ characters (usually lesbian or bisexual women) often because they are queer, or simply to advance the story of a straight (often male) character. The trope resurfaced in public discourse in 2016 when 25 queer women characters were killed in a span of a few months, sparking outrage from fans and critics alike and bringing more awareness to the trope. Recently a new trope, “cancel your gays” which sees shows with queer characters and storylines being cancelled after one or two seasons, again perpetuates audiences’ feelings that queer people are not entitled to endings (let alone happy ones). Resultingly, the loss of any one of those characters or stories is more keenly felt by LGBTIQ+ audiences.

Issues around queer representation such as the “bury your gays” trope are known by most LGBTIQ+ people and screen studies academics, but many non-LGBTIQ+ people know of its existence, its history, and its damaging impact on LGBTIQ+ audiences. These issues are explored through an interactive documentary intended for a broad range of users including the general public, media professionals and screen media educators. Users can explore the interactive documentary through different pathways including a historical timeline that illustrates how these issues and themes have evolved over the last 100 years, through interviews with academics and creative practitioners, and watch the *All Our Lesbians Are Dead!* theatrical play (or excerpts from it), which was the catalyst for this project. This project links theory and practice to bring discussions of media representation from the academy into the public sphere in an accessible way. It demonstrates the capacity of participatory digital media to inform and educate a wider audience on important issues of media representation.

Bio:

Dr. Natalie Krikowa is a media scholar and creative practice researcher at the University of Technology Sydney. She holds a Doctor of Creative Arts in media and cultural studies and a Master of Creative Writing. Her research focuses on issues of media representation and identity politics in screen studies, popular culture, and transmedia, particularly how it relates to LGBTIQ+ people, audiences, and communities. In addition to this, she works as the Creative Director of Zenowa Productions, writing and producing queer female focused works including *The Newtown Girls* (2012), *All Our Lesbians Are Dead!* (2017) and *Queer Representation Matters* (2023)