

# ***She-Ra and the Princesses of Power: Queer Animation***

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## **Abstract**

In order to create a queer show, it needs to go beyond just having queer representation by challenging and overturning heteronormativity. Animation has an inherent queer potentiality that live action does not have because there is a separation from reality that is created with animation that allows for queer worlds to exist in that space. I will research how *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* uses the queer potentiality of animation to queer themes, character, form and content. So far, there have been many studies and scholarly work done in Queer Theory and Animation Studies, as well as a few smaller scale studies on *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*. I will be conducting a literature review on these sources in order to then watch *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* through the lens of Queer Theory and Animation Studies. Through this analysis, I will organize my findings into the categories of themes, character, form, and content to see the various ways *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* is a queer show. This research will show what elements create a truly queer show, the value animation has in this process, and the impact queer shows have on its audience to show that we need to continue to create queer shows.

## Introduction

Recently, tv shows, including animated shows, have had more queer representation. GLAAD's TV Report for 2021 through 2022 found that "of the 775 series regular characters scheduled to appear on scripted broadcast primetime programming . . . 92 characters (11.9 percent) are LGBTQ. This is an increase of 2.8 percentage points from the previous year and marks a record high percentage of LGBTQ series regulars on broadcast. On original scripted programming for [streaming services] GLAAD counted 245 LGBTQ series regular characters and 113 LGBTQ recurring characters"(Ellis). While this is a positive step forward, there is a lot more to creating a queer show than just having queer representation because it is possible to have queer characters in a heteronormative show. A queer show will overturn or "queer" normative themes, stereotypes, worlds, characters, binaries, etc. A queer show will thus challenge and overturn the heteronormative ideals we see in society and stories we see most in media. Animation as a medium has an inherent queer potentiality for creating queer shows. Animation has this queer potentiality that live action does not mainly because of the true freedom that animation allows since you are not limited by what can be filmed in real life. Thus, animation has this sense of being separated from reality that you can not fully achieve with live action. This separation from reality is important in creating a space for a queer world to exist because our current reality and society is governed and associated with heteronormative ideals. I want to go more in depth on how animation can be used to create a queer show by studying how one animated show in particular, *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, uses the queer potentiality of animation to queer themes, character, form, and content.

## Background/Related Work and Motivation

So far, there have been studies in Queer Theory that are foundational for this research. *Queer: A Graphic History* by Meg-John Barker provides a detailed overview of LGBTQ+ movements throughout history as well as the development of queer theory. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* by José Esteban Muñoz discusses queerness as a horizon, or utopia, that we want to strive towards, and I want to see how this theme of a queer utopia is shown through *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*. There have also been many foundational studies in animation. *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* by Maureen Furniss explains the terminology used to discuss animated works, as well as significant factors affecting production, exhibition, and reception of animation. *On Animation: The Director's Perspective Interviews with the Most Talented Directors in Animation* by Ron Diamond contains various interviews with twelve animation directors on their process and personal stories about their work in the industry. *Identity in Animation: A Journey into Self, Difference, Culture, and the Body* by Jane Batkin discusses the identity of some of the most influential characters in the history of animation while also questioning stereotypes and unconventional representations in animation. In terms of how animation is a queer medium, there have been a few studies mainly with Judith Halbertsma in his book *The Queer Art of Failure* where one of the chapters explores how the queer art of failure is applied to and displayed in animation. There have also been a few smaller scale studies and articles about *She-Ra* as a queer show, mainly in terms of its groundbreaking representation. These articles, like an interview with ND Stevenson in *Entertainment*, focus on the creator's experiences and any difficulties they faced in trying to get this queer representation approved as well as the impact and importance of queer representation in media (Moen). There are also a few studies that focus on specific themes that are queered in *She-Ra and the Princesses*

of *Power* like in Thomas Paul's essay "*She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* as Queer Monomyth". I will combine these sources in order to critically analyze how these themes are applied in *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* to create a diversely queer show. In addition to researching this from the perspective of film, tv, and queer studies, I will be able to use my own position as an animator to contribute to and inform my analysis. This research will impact and influence how people choose to create shows in the future. Queer shows like *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* are needed because of the lessons they inherently teach by being a queer show, for example overturing boundaries. It is especially important to continue making these shows for queer folks, especially queer youth, to feel seen and supported in media. Also, by examining a show that has done this successfully, people in the future will be able to use this to influence their own work in order to continue to create queer shows.

### **Methods**

The first step in my research will be to will complete a literature review on relevant scholarly sources related to Queer Theory, Animation Studies, and *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*. I will then watch *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* through the lens of queer theory and animation studies. In this process, I will take notes on the different ways animation in particular is used to queer the show. I will also choose specific episodes or scenes to rewatch in order to take more in depth notes so that I will know what parts of the show I will focus on in my paper. I will then go through my sources again to do a more thorough analysis in order to gain a deeper understanding of how they relate to the specific episodes and scenes I want to analyze. Next, I will further organize all these various notes and analyses into the themes, character, form, and content categories in order to start honing in the information I have gathered. At this stage before I have a completed draft of my research, I want to talk to various people, friends, family,

peers, and professors about the research I have collected thus far and see if they have any questions or refutes that I can address. If needed I will rewatch or reread anything I need to in order to answer these questions and refutes. Then I will do one more round of talking to people about my research after this to see if they have any further questions.

### **Expected Results**

My results will have a detailed analysis of the various ways *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* is able to utilize animation to make a queer show. The findings will emphasize the importance of all these aspects in creating a queer show that goes beyond simply having queer representation. My research will highlight the value and role animation plays in this especially since animation tends to be undervalued in the industry. Thus, people can take what I find about how animation can be used to create a queer show and continue to make queer shows using animation. This is important because even though we have come along way in terms of queer media, that doesn't mean it is time to stop. Queer shows are continually needed, especially ones like *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, because of their impact on youth and adults equally. They create a safe space for queer folks and teach everyone values and ways of thinking and seeing the world that are needed in society.

### **Conclusion**

As queer representation has been growing in tv shows, it is important to analyze effective and impactful queer shows that can influence the future of media. In order to further develop as an industry, it is important to understand what creates a diverse and authentically queer show. I plan to analyze scholarly sources on Queer Theory and Animation Studies in order to apply these ideals to *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*. Through analyzing how the queer potentiality of

animation is utilized in *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, I can clearly lay out and explain the elements that make it a truly queer show. Thus, this research will highlight how queer shows must go beyond including queer representation, the value and role animation plays in this, and the importance and impact queer shows have on the audience.

## Works Cited

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### Budget

Description of Expense	Cost
Compensation for 10 hours a week for 9 weeks at a minimum wage	\$1350

### Timeline

Weeks 1-3	Weeks 4-6	Weeks 7-9
Gathering scholarly sources and interviews on Queer Theory, Animation Studies, and <i>She-Ra and the Princesses of Power</i> . Annotating sources and analyzing specific themes I want to focus on.	Watching <i>She-Ra and the Princesses of Power</i> through the analytical lens of Queer Theory and Animation Studies. Taking note of specific episodes and scenes I want to focus on.	Taking both my notes on my sources and the show to conduct a deeper analysis on <i>She-Ra and the Princesses of Power</i> . Sharing my findings with peers and my professors to see if there are any questions or refutes I can address.