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Jordan Gingrich

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(Mis)Representations of Queer Media on TikTok: The Politics of Coming Out

LGBTQ+ representation in the media can be hard to find and even when it is, pertinent questions must be posed about it. Given the complexities that arise within the consumption, curation, and production of queer media, I investigate the implications of cisgender and heterosexual (what I call non-LGBTQ+) storytellers utilizing queer stories and how users on TikTok are discussing these utilizations. The portrayal of queer stories by non-LGBTQ+ individuals may not only be unauthentic, but they may also be harmful. This textual analysis of TikToks aims to answer this question by centering on LGBTQ+ media that is being written, portrayed, and expressed by non-LGBTQ+ individuals. The findings highlight that LGBTQ+ youth often do not feel represented in LGBTQ+ media that is not created by queer and transgender content creators. However, the individuals engaging in this discussion are non-experts and their discussions lack nuance. This lack of nuance can be harmful as it may create an environment where storytellers who appear non-LGBTQ+ to the public who are actually LGBTQ+ may feel forced into coming out.

Keywords: Queer, Gay, Transgender, Lesbian, Media, Representation, Authenticity