



LGBT Representation

In Animated Media for Adolescents

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So What?

Statistics

TGNC

- **53%** of TGNC individuals believe society regards them as “freaks/abominations/undesirable”

TGNC:
Transgender/Gen
der **N**on-
Conforming

TGNC

- **33%** of TGNC individuals believe that society’s negative perceptions of trans people come from media portrayals

Trans

Queer/LGBT

GLB

TRANS

- **84%** of trans adults report experiencing depression for at least one year

Crisis within queer community as researched and reported by Steele et al., McCallum et al., and Rood et al.

TRANS

- **36%** of trans people experience regular suicidal ideation

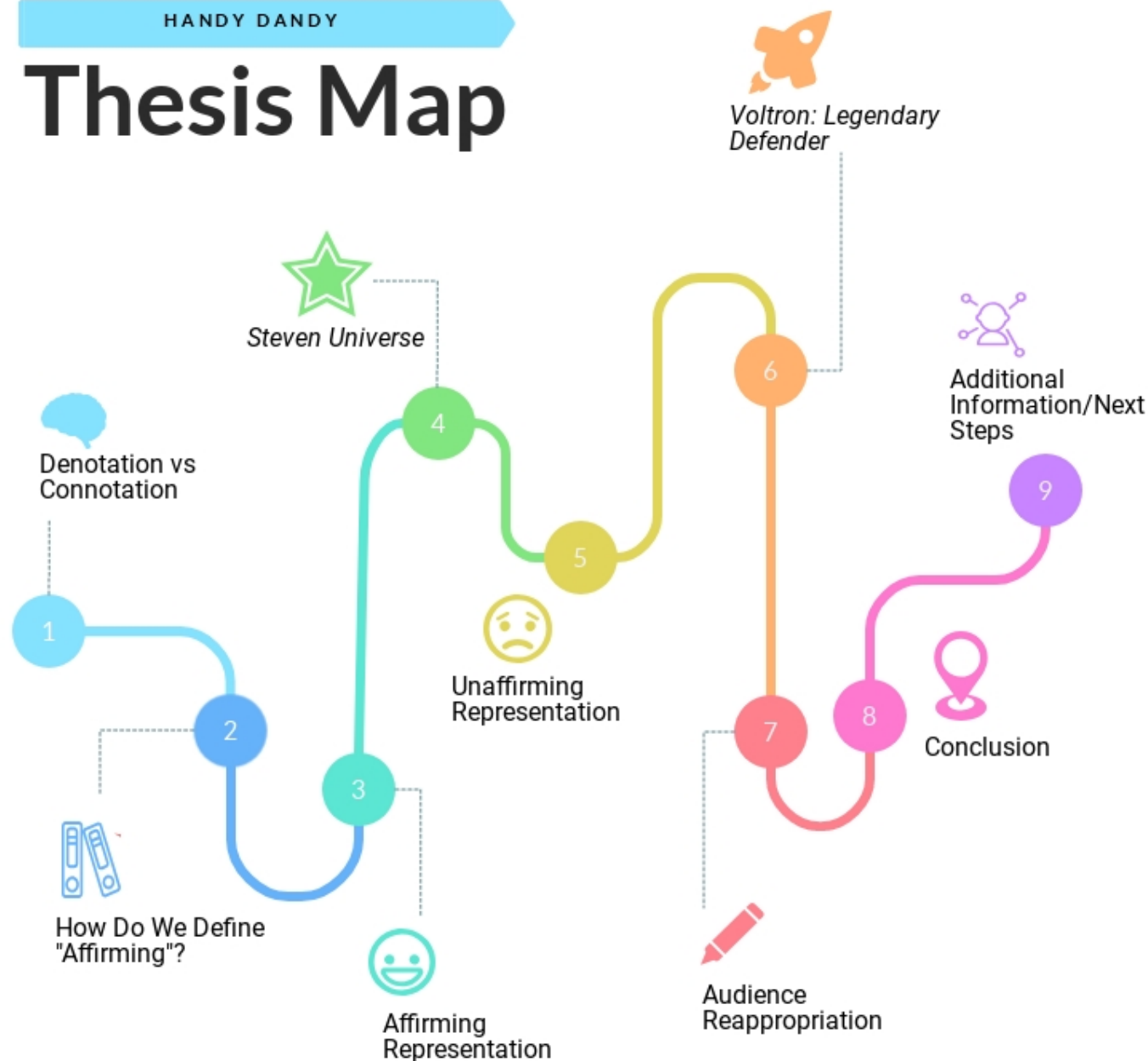
TRANS

- **10%** of trans respondents reported attempting suicide at least once within the last year

GLB

- Queer youth are **2 times** as likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual adolescents, **3.5 times** more likely to self harm, and **5 times** as likely to experience suicidal ideation

Thesis Map



D.A. Miller

Denotation vs. Connotation

Unintentional



Implied



Conspicuous



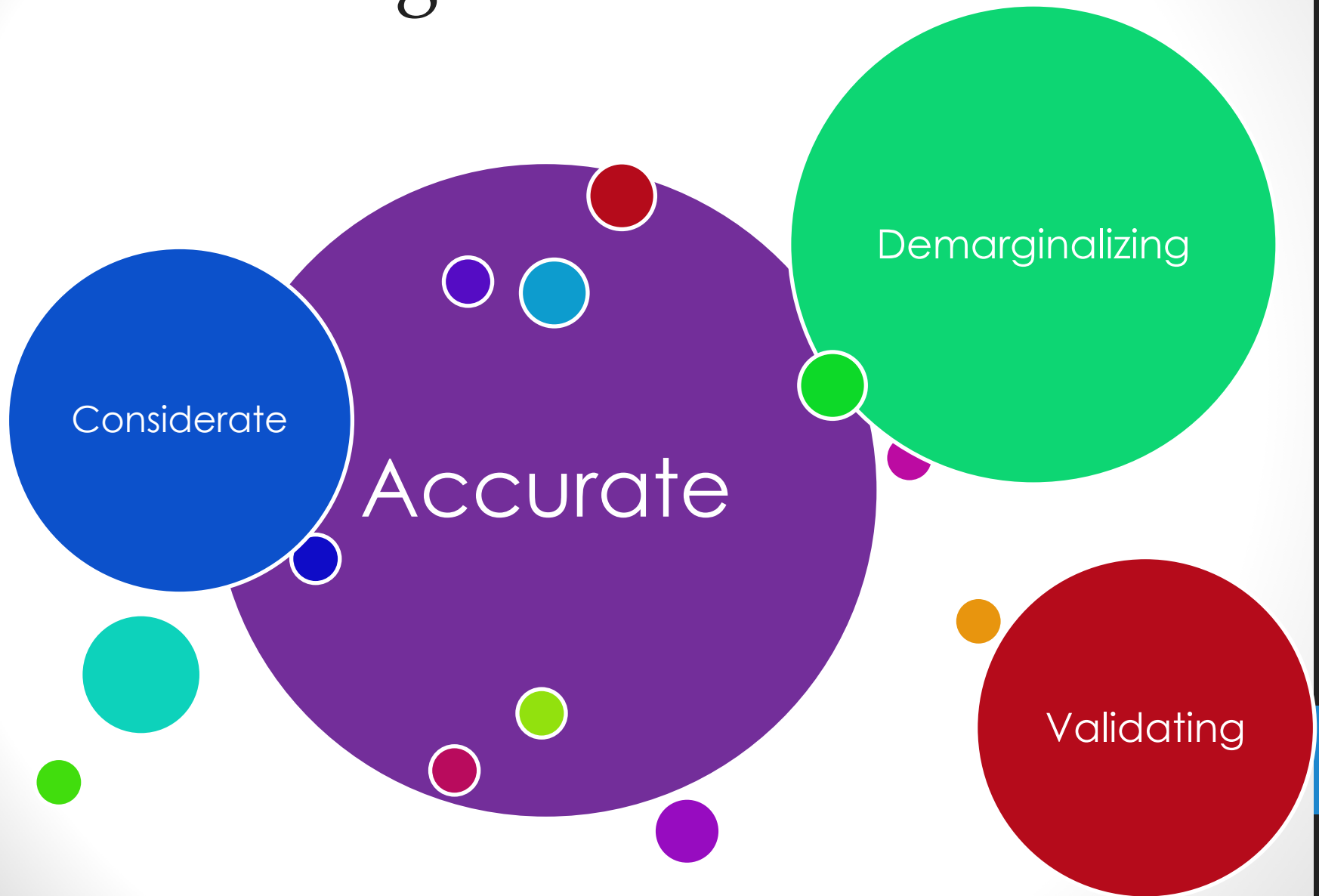
Andi Mack s. 3 ep. 11 (Feb 8, 2019)

Cyrus comes out on Disney channel exclusive



But why isn't
denotative
representation
enough?

“Affirming”



Steven Universe



2013- present on Cartoon Network

- Imaginative, coming-of-age tale
- Steven
- Homeworld/Crystal Gems
- Themes of goodness, imperialism, family, and identity

Steven Universe

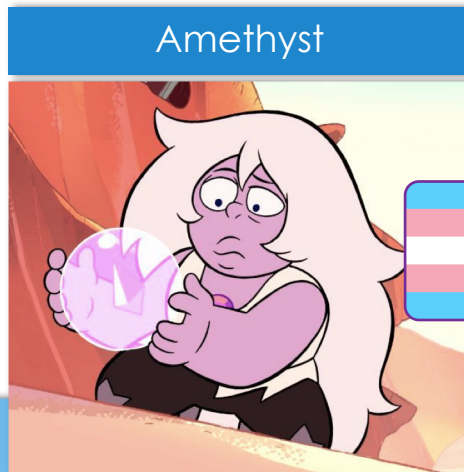
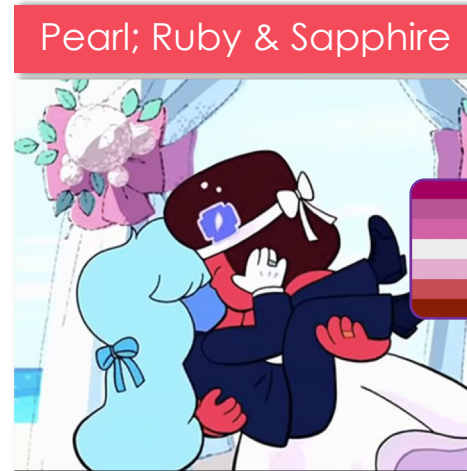
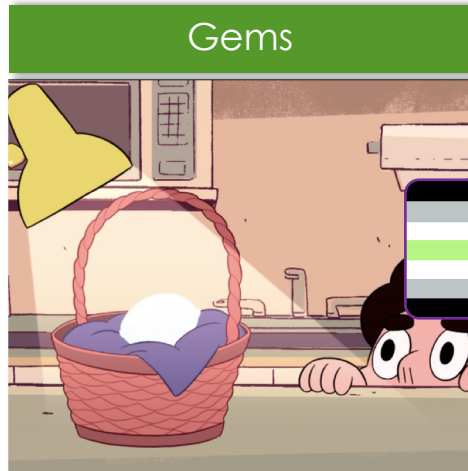
Queer Content by Queer Creator

“We need **to let children know they belong** in this world... You have to tell them while they're still children that **they deserve love** and that they deserve support and that **people will be excited to hear their story**”

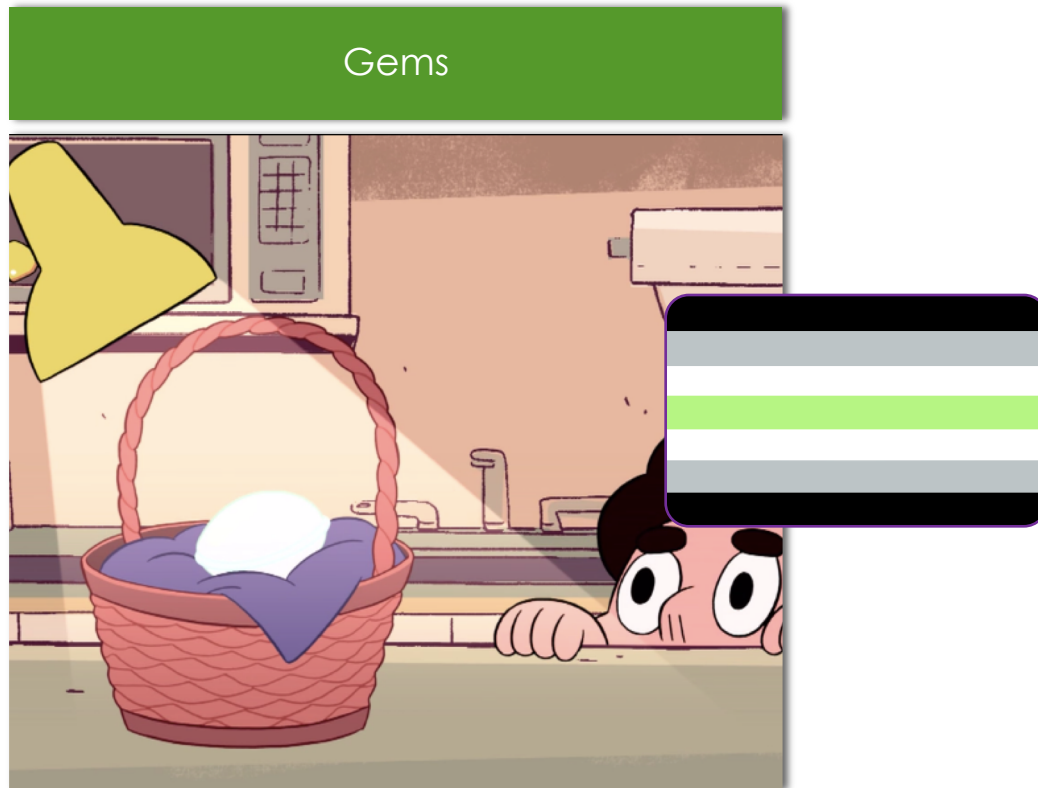
(Romano)



Categories of Representation in *Steven Universe*



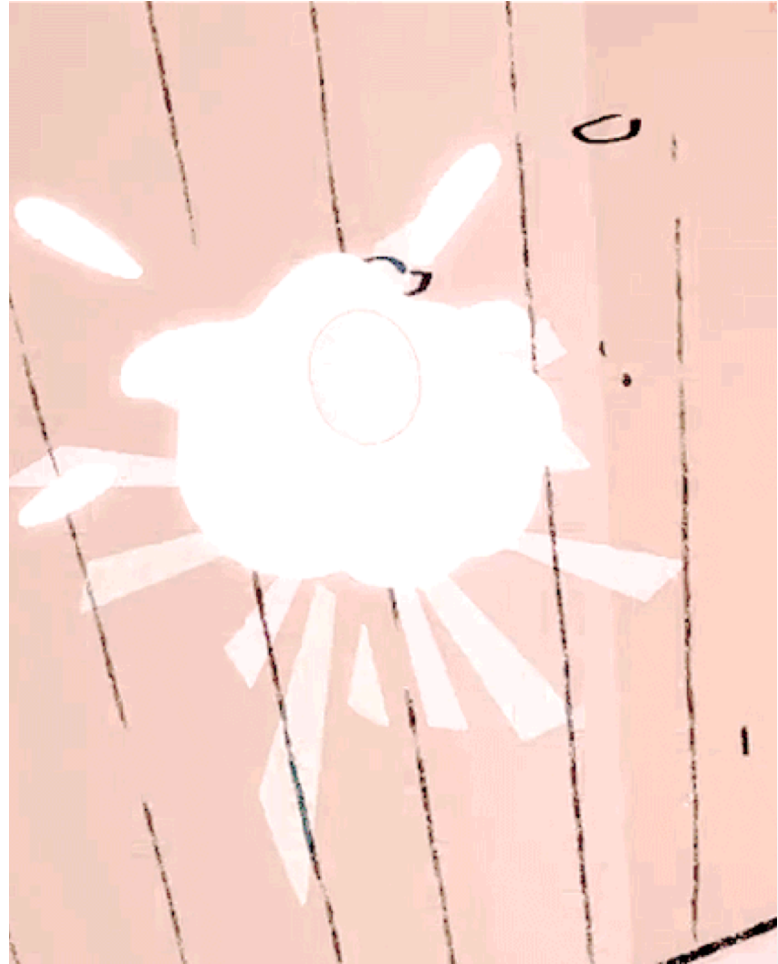
Agender Representation



Gemstones & “Poofing”

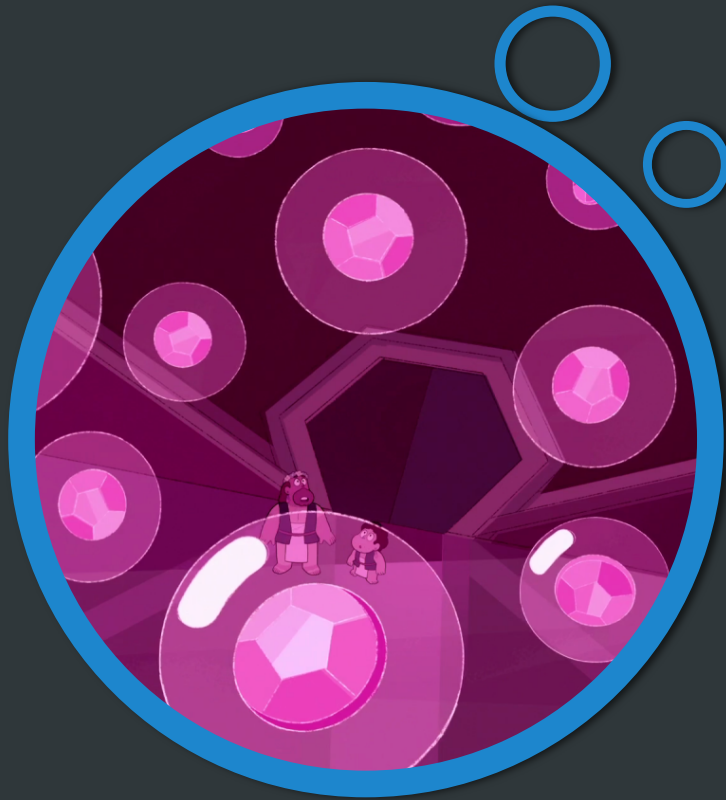
“Our bodies are actually projections generated by our gemstone. Think of it like a hologram but with mass”

(“What Are Gems?”
00:00:23-29)

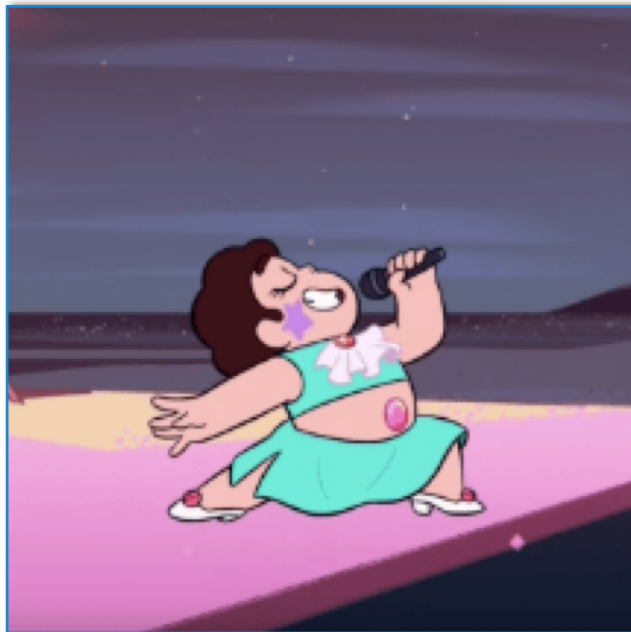
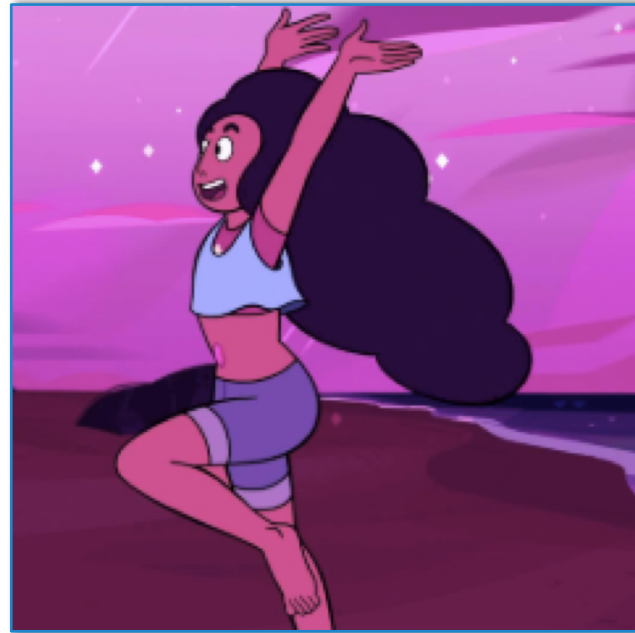


Agender Representation

The Body as a Projection



Gender Unlimited by Binary



Lesbian Representation

Pearl; Ruby & Sapphire



Sugar's Roadblocks to Representation



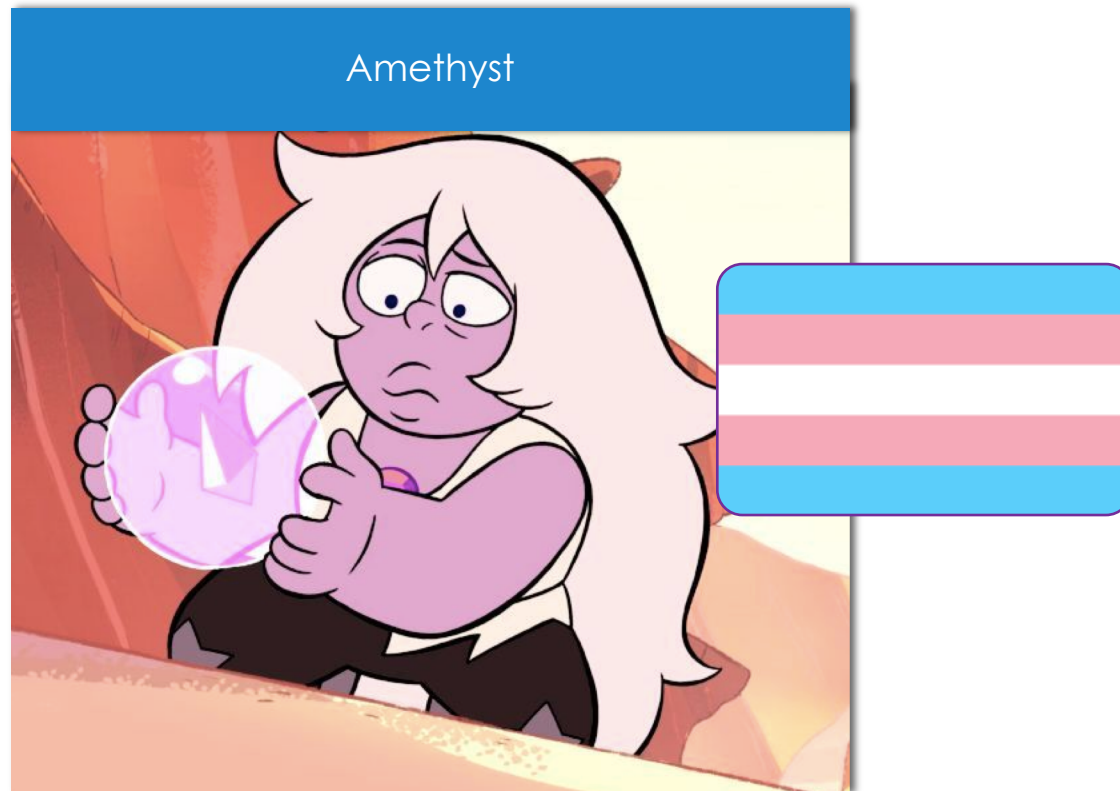
“It was a little
bit like staring
into the sun”

(Romano)

Denotative Representation



Trans Representation



Stuck in the Wrong Body

Amethyst and Gender Dysphoria

- All gems are grown in the earth
- Amethyst was “overcooked” (in the earth too long)
- This leads to stunted appearance, ridicule from peers, and a feeling of being born in the wrong body



Bodily Projection and Gender Performativity



- Dissatisfaction
- Self-creation
- Comparison to a gem that “came out right”
- Dysphoria
- Community and solidarity
- Comfortably performs her identity

Amethyst Design Progression



Steven Universe as a Model for Affirming Representation

- Accurate- takes into account the real struggles of queer people
- Considerate- characterizations rely on creators' experiences, not tropes
- Demarginalizing- identities are never Othered
- Validating- characters are heroes

Voltron: Legendary Defender



Unaffirming Representation

Easier to pinpoint in media

- “Queerbaiting”
- Reliance on degrading tropes/stereotypes
- Isolating/villainizing queer identities

Voltron: Legendary Defender

- 2016-2018 on Netflix
- Science fiction mech show
- Led by creators who made *The Legend of Korra*



Comments on LGBT Representation

Show Creators Dodging Questions or Baiting Fans?

Story editor Tim Hendrick:

“I think I’ll just let that play out as we go”
(Kelley)

Executive producer Lauren Montgomery:

“We have those first 13 episodes, and if we ever went beyond that, we would like to push the envelope”
 (“Voltron Special”)

Executive producer Joaquim Dos Santos:

“We’re fighting to create as open and as broad a spectrum of characters as we can”
 (“Voltron NYCC 2017 Recap”)

Queerbaiting



Thank you all for asking. Yes, we ship
klance.

09/08/2018, 01:43

1,688 Retweets 3,560 Likes





“Psycho Lesbian” trope





“SLAUGHTERING YOUR GAYS”





















Even if it isn't the "original"
Shiro dying, the audience
still sees the physical
representation/persona of
the one canonically gay
hero die an unreasonable
number of times

Audience Reappropriation

A Solution to Fallible Media

- Even if a text misrepresents or insufficiently represents a community, it isn't necessarily irredeemable
- Fan works can recreate texts and forge community
 - Zines, fanfiction, fanart, cosplay, conventions, etc.

“Fan critics work to resolve gaps, to explore excess details and undeveloped potentials. This mode of interpretation draws them far beyond the information explicitly present and toward the construction of a meta-text that is larger, richer, more complex and interesting than the original series” (Jenkins 278).

“Once television characters enter into a broader circulation... they belong to their audience and not simply to the artists who originated them. Media texts, thus, can and must be remade by their viewers so that potentially significant materials can better speak to the audience’s cultural interests and more fully address their desires” (Jenkins 279).

Conclusion

- Affirming the identities and value of queer adolescents by including them in our narratives
- No text is ever going to be perfect, but texts can be redeemed
- With the ability to distinguish between affirming and unaffirming representation, allies of the queer community can make an active effort to support positive instances of representation

More Information for Allies

- Renewal on online streaming websites: social media, “thumbs up,” viewership (Prudom)
- Human Rights Campaign 2018 LGBTQ Youth Report available at the front

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