



*University of Utah*

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH JOURNAL

## WHAT WE TELL CHILDREN: QUEER REPRESENTATION IN CHILDREN'S ANIMATION

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This thesis explores the history of queer representation in mainstream children's media -- both implicit and explicit -- and the historical movements that influenced their structures. Starting with the emergence of the "buddy" genre in the late 1950s and early 1960s, I use this as the basis of implicit queer representation and same-sex desire. I then move onto contemporary shows like *The Legend of Korra* and *Steven Universe* as the movement from implicit to explicit queer representation. I also analyze the representations within these contemporary, "out" shows to see if they've moved away from the trappings of implicit representation.

Queer representation in mainstream media is burgeoning, with children's animation being the last to make this advance. But this year, because there have been so many standout representations of queer identity in children's animation, the 29<sup>th</sup> GLAAD Media Awards (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) created a new category: The Outstanding Kids & Family Programming award. Four of the five nominees are animated television shows (*Danger & Eggs*, *Doc McStuffins*, *Steven Universe*, and *The Loud House*), three of those four are on mainstream networks (Disney Channel, Cartoon Network, and Nickelodeon), and two of those three have the entire show nominated (*Steven Universe* and *The Loud House*), instead of a single episode (GLAAD). This is a huge step as it shows the progress that American children's television has been through in recent years. These developments being (1) that queer representation is happening within mainstream networks, (2) they are considered positive and salient in their communities, and (3) it is sustained through either a main or reoccurring character. But why is this "outing" in children's animation happening now and how progressive is it?

By analyzing moments (see fig. 1 and fig. 2) from the two most progressive animated children's television shows in the last ten years, *The Legend of Korra* and *Steven Universe*, I argue that social change, fandom interaction, profitability, and creator intention are the reasons behind this move forward and the current limitations. Through this project, I hope to challenge the notion that queer identity, relationships, attraction, and love are not for children.



Figure 1 The final scene in *The Legend of Korra*, Korra/Asami confirmed (“The Last Stand”).



Figure 2 Ruby and Sapphire fuse into Garnet, a metaphor for their romantic relationship (“Jail Break”).

#### Works Cited

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