

And They Were Roommates: An Analysis of ‘Straightwashing’ History and Its Impact on Modern Meme Culture, Through Exploration of r/Sapphoandherfriend.

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Abstract

From Achilles and Patroclus (Johansson, 1990), Saint Sergius and Bacchus (Boswell, 1994), and the cisgender representation of Janus, who, in some Indo-European cultures was intersex, (Ouzounian, 2004), to contemporary ‘straightwashing’ within real-world spheres, a frequent occurrence is the erasure of queerness and queer relationships from the narrative. The infamous Bowie interview, wherein the musician must reaffirm his bisexuality thrice before the topic is cast aside, is an excellent example of how the tactic of removal of queerness from popular culture and the public sphere directly affects representation and popular thought (Thames Television, 1979). This phenomenon has caused such frustration to queer communities, that it has also led to a secondary consequence: a satirical, subversive, and equally informative, meme culture illuminating examples of both historical and contemporary queer erasure through the form of visual imagery. The most prevalent of these is found in the social media site Reddit, r/SapphoAndHerFriend. This paper explores the creation, evolution, and relevance of the queer community in popular culture, and the methods in which LGBTQ+ people and allies find humour in erasure, while still highlighting ‘straightwashing’ issues to a wider audience. To explore this, the creators and moderators of the subreddit in question will be interviewed, and a discussion on how memes can influence change is planned. Further, this study will explore and reaffirm the notion that research and discussion on the necessity to bring parody, subversion, and illumination of oppression into a cisgender, heteronormative history is vital to the re-inclusion of queer history.

Keywords: erasure; meme culture; queerness; social media; subversion.