

Killing Villanelle: A Qualitative Investigation of LGBTQ+ Representation in Media and its Effects

Undergraduate Dissertation



Image credit: Twitter

liv thomson
(disclaimer: spoilers ahead!)

Cast your minds to a favourite LGBTQ+ character of yours over the years. From a film, a book, a TV show. Someone you admired, or identified with, or simply enjoyed in an on-screen capacity.

Now consider: what happened to them?

How many of you can say that your chosen character lived ‘happily ever after’?

Chances are, if you are LGBTQ+ yourself, you have sought out shows with such characters (Reitz, 2017). We do this for reasons simply beyond our enjoyment of the plots and storylines; characters are the pinnacle of memorable television, particularly characters we can identify with (Hatchel et al., 2019). This project was inspired by the importance of onscreen representation for the LGBTQ+ community, through the lens of BBC hit show *Killing Eve* and its fandom. As a part of the *Killing Eve* fandom myself, I had witnessed the intense reactions (of which some were my own) to Villanelle’s death. This impassioned protest against the ‘bury your gays’ trope inspired me to further investigate *why* members of the LGBTQ+ community react so viscerally to perceived injustice against beloved characters.

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of LGBTQ+ representation in film and broadcast television. While current literature focuses on the increasing presence of LGBTQ+ characters onscreen, as well as audience attitudes, there remains little research on why representation is so important to the LGBTQ+ community, and further why it can have such significant effects. Using a qualitative questionnaire, participants shared their thoughts and experiences about the BBC hit show *Killing Eve* and the death of one of its central characters, Villanelle.

In total, 29 people provided responses. Thematic analysis of the resulting data established four key themes: the power of representation on self-identification; the disillusionment caused by worn-out tropes in media; the impact of representation on mental health; and the importance of normalising LGBTQ+ characters onscreen. Two sub-themes were also identified, concerning both past and community experiences. Ultimately, it was suggested that LGBTQ+ individuals have become disillusioned by the perpetuation of negative tropes,

such as ‘bury your gays’, in media, and that mental health and self-identification can suffer as a consequence. The results also indicated that positive LGBTQ+ representation has the ability to empower and validate LGBTQ+ viewers, thus illustrating the gravity of its importance on current and future generations of LGBTQ+ viewers. Future research should consider larger sample sizes, media inclusivity, and the long-term effects of stereotypes and negative media tropes, in order to continue filling the gaps in the literature where this topic is concerned.

Geology for Beginners Report

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