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Op-Ed Writing Assignment

“Red, White & Royal Blue” is possibly one of the corniest films I have seen in recent years and it features two queer characters. The film follows a love story between the son of the United States president and a Prince of the British royal family. I would never harp on a fun, corny film, but it did surprise me when I watched it for the first time. Why is that? Because after years of the effects of homophobia on film and television, seeing queerness represented with all of the joys of a romantic comedy was a breath of fresh air.

Queer joy is a rarity, yet “Red, White & Royal Blue” embraces queer joy and other recent titles like Netflix’s “Heartstopper” feature queerness as something to be embraced. I’m a queer person with a longstanding history of media analysis and vast knowledge of the history of queer representation in the industry. One of the reasons queerness has been so taboo in film and television is the Hays Code. [The Hays Code](#) was an early film self-censorship code that determined Hollywood screens for over 30 years. From the 30s through the 60s, the code packed a punch towards LGBTQ+ representation as it was banned from productions unless it was clear that the ‘deviant’ behavior and qualities were punished in some way.

Thus, the rise of queer people as [the villain](#). From Maleficent to Jafar to Ursula, the vast majority of some of the most popular [Disney villains](#) are queer-coded with their voices, makeup and even the way they walk, despite never being explicitly confirmed as queer. This has normalized queerness as something to be afraid of and that makes someone sinister. For new films and television shows to show queer people as people capable of kindness, even heroic, is super important to breaking down this idea. An example of how queer joy is being represented in television is Nick Nelson from “Heartstopper” who, despite dealing with some hardships, is a joyful character, often referred to as the ‘golden retriever’ of the series. His lovable and genuine personality is the kind of queer character people need to see nowadays, especially queer youth who shouldn’t feel like a villain for their identities.

Alongside villainization, queer people became the butt of the joke. Transgender people faced the brunt of the mockery, often reduced to punchlines in both [platonic](#) and [romantic](#) contexts. This is not the equivalent to a drag performance that may be comedic in nature because it is the choice of the performer for that to be comedic and be perceived as such. The mockery found in film and television was, and is, done with the intention to harm and produces harmful transphobic narratives. As a nonbinary person who has been subject to countless “I identify as a helicopter jokes” and other dehumanizing punch lines, being able to watch movies and shows that don’t make fun of my identity is something I’ll be eternally grateful for. The 90s film “But I’m a Cheerleader” is a gem of queer comedy that presents many of the queer characters as joyous, hilarious and discovering themselves.

None of this means that queer characters cannot have bad traits, be parts of comedic media or ignore the [traumatic parts](#) of having a queer identity. When discussing the desire to improve queer representation, there is sometimes pushback that the creation of more positive films and

television shows presents the experience in a reductionist and unrealistic way. Not only does this dismiss the complexity of many of the queer characters in the more positive representations such as Adam Groff in "Sex Education", but it also ignores how important it is to have queer media that doesn't constantly exploit the trauma of the queer experience, paint queer people as the bad guys or make us out to be jokes.

It is not hard, once delving into the history of LGBTQ+ representation, to understand why "Red, White & Blue" might be a relief for queer people. I wholeheartedly embrace the goofiness of the film and would highly recommend it for any person out there who is looking for a new romantic comedy to sit back with.