Queer Seriality, Streaming Television, and *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*

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Abstract

This article argues that queer seriality manifests as a unique feature of streaming media. Through an examination of the Netflix children's show *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018–2020), a case study in both queer representation and format, I apply research on affect theory to understand streaming media via a framework of intimacy and queer identity. The article focuses on how streaming services produce affect in their viewers via the perspective of a queer theoretical framework. I argue that affect is produced in the intimacy of the streaming experience, drawing from television studies to consider how the domestic space is both celebrated and expanded by streaming media like *She-Ra*. The expansion of television from the solely domestic realm has important implications, not only for the economic functions of streaming media but also for their sociopolitical purposes. Specifically, queer seriality becomes a central framework through which we can understand the political potential of streaming media.

Keywords: television studies, queer studies, queer television, affect theory, streaming television, Netflix

Introduction

This article argues that queer seriality manifests as a unique feature of streaming media. Through an examination of case studies in both representation and format, I apply research on affect theory to understand streaming media via a framework of intimacy and queer identity. Simultaneously, through discussion of the limitations of capitalist media to express and understand queerness, I recognize the "cruel optimism" of seeking identity and/or community in a neoliberal media landscape.[1] Here, I draw in part from the work of scholars who ask, "What would a queer *theory* of television look like if it did not take as its starting point the *identity* of the queer . . . but rather an understanding of queerness as *method*?"[2] I also build from research by scholars like Amy Villarejo, who demonstrate the inherent connection between technological developments in television and representational changes for LGBTQ+ communities as well as the contradictions inherent in analyzing television through a queer lens.[3] The connection between historical considerations of television and queer theory, as well as the coinciding establishment of queer television studies as a subfield, demonstrate precedence in the theoretical overlap of these phenomena.[4]

Much scholarship has focused on the specific manifestations of queerness and heterosexism in streaming television, discussing how the content being produced by services like Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, and Disney+ centers on questions of gender, sexuality, and power.[5] This article focuses on how

1. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
2. Theresa L. Geller and Anna Marie Banker, "'That Magic Box Lies': Queer Theory, Seriality, and *American Horror Story*," *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 79 (Spring 2017): 38.
3. Amy Villarejo, *Ethereal Queer: Television, Historicity, Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).
4. Lynne Joyrich, "Queer Television Studies: Currents, Flows, and (Main)streams," *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 2 (Winter 2014): 133–39.
5. Billy Holzberg and Aura Lehtonen, "The Affective Life of Heterosexuality: Heteropessimism and Postfeminism in *Fleabag*," *Feminist Media Studies* (2021), http://doi.org.10.10 80/14680777.2021.1922485; Anna Llewellyn, "'A Space Where Queer Is Normalized': The Online World and Fanfictions as Heterotopias for WLW," *Journal of Homosexuality*

streaming services produce affect in their viewers from a queer theoretical framework. I argue that affect is produced in the intimacy of the streaming experience, drawing from television studies to consider how the domestic space is both celebrated and expanded by streaming media. Domesticity is no longer the sole setting for televisual consumption, as mobile media make streaming content accessible at work, on a bus, or in an airport. At the same time, the domestic realm itself is expanded through streaming, which allows audiences to watch not just in their living rooms but in spaces as intimate or personal as their beds. This expansion of television from the solely domestic realm has important implications, not only for the economic functions of streaming media but also for their sociopolitical purposes. If television is no longer "relegated" to the traditionally feminine-domestic sphere, what does that mean for its gendered and sexual associations? How does this connect to the masculinization of "quality" television that prioritizes heterosexist stories and/or production contexts? While the discourse around the proclaimed "golden age of television" tends to celebrate more heterosexist narratives like *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013), *House of Cards* (2013–2018), and *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019), "quality" itself is made complicated by the fact that the very concept of "mass culture" is increasingly null and void. The widespread availability of a huge range of media offerings means that audiences are no longer limited to watching shows that dominate the media landscape—they can now watch NBC's streaming Peacock original *We Are Lady Parts* (2021–), a show about an all-female Muslim punk band, just as easily as they can watch Marvel's predominately white, heterosexual, and/or hegemonic fare like *Loki* (2021) and *WandaVision* (2021) on Disney+. All

(2021), http://doi.org.10.1080/00918369.2021.1940012; Justine Lloyd and Jilly Boyce Kay, "Gender and Transnational Media," *Feminist Media Studies* (2021), http://doi.org.10.1080/14680777.2021.1945651; Frida Lyonga, "Shades of Homophobia: A Framework for Analyzing Negative Attitudes Toward Homosexuality," *Journal of Homosexuality* 68, no. 10 (2021): 1664–84, http://doi.org.10.1080/00918369.2019.1702352; Teresa Caprioglio, "Does 'Queer Narrative' Mean 'Trauma Narrative' on TV? Exploring Television's Traumatized Queer Identity," *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 22, no. 4 (2021): 452–64, http://doi.org.10.1080/15299732.2021.1925865.

of these factors make our understanding of streaming, seriality, and affect significantly more nuanced.

I will begin by discussing how queer representational content has been subsumed by hegemonic formatting, specifically in contemporary Hollywood film. Large studios write select marginal characters as being marginally queer and include blink-and-you-miss-them scenes of queer representation, baiting LGBTQ+ audiences in attempts to pander to them/us while not risking the loss of homophobic audiences in the process. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in works by Disney, including its recent children's fare as well as film franchises like *Star Wars* and Marvel. For example, *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019) was promoted as including LGBTQ+ representation only for that representation to be comprised of two unnamed female characters kissing in a very brief celebration scene near the end of the film, prompting a *Vanity Fair* article to ask, "Are We Really Going to Pretend That Gay Kiss in *The Rise of Skywalker* Matters?"[6]

This discussion of hegemony and heterosexism in contemporary Hollywood film will contribute to my analysis of how formatting has functioned in the contemporary moment and also how it can function in different, counter-hegemonic ways. Thus, the next section of the essay considers the relationship between streaming television and affect, reading both format and representation as queer in a case study. My discussion of how the streaming context is changing over time ultimately considers how formatting of streaming platforms can be queer, especially in the sense that intimacy becomes the most central feature of this medium. Affect is routinely weaponized by neoliberalism in support of hegemony; however, I argue that it is also simply a feature of contemporary media that audiences are able to exert control over. The result is that streaming media reflect a form of queer seriality with politically useful implications.

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6. K. Austin Collins, "Are We Really Going to Pretend That Gay Kiss in *The Rise of Skywalker* Matters?," *Vanity Fair*, December 20, 2019, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2019/12/are-we-really-going-to-pretend-the-gay-kiss-in-the-rise-of-skywalker-matters.

Defining Key Terms

This essay primarily draws from theoretical frameworks of affect and queerness. When I use affect theory, I am building on the work of scholars including Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, and Judith Butler.[7] My use of the term *affect* focuses on the relationship between embodiment and emotions—audience affect in the context of streaming television not only emerges from how audiences emotionally react to particular programming but also from how they consume such programming (whether via the traditional method of sitting and devoting singular attention to a show in a shared domestic space or, for example, by listening to a show that includes visual impairment aids like audio description while doing errands or chores). The wide variety of ways in which audiences can consume streaming television and can interpret and emotionally respond to such content make affect an important framework through which we should interpret the streaming media context. I also use affect theory because of its importance to the feminist queer framework from which I am working; when we talk about queerness and media, it is necessary to account for the importance of traditionally maligned aspects of experience and identity such as feelings and physicality.

The queer theory from which I draw in this essay centers on queer identity representation in media as well as queerness as a counter-hegemonic position. I am particularly interested in drawing from the work of scholars like Berlant, Butler, and Kadhi Amin, the latter of whom notes the historical connections between affect and queer theory.[8] Broadly speaking, my use of queer theory in this context focuses on queerness as identity, intimacy (in both relationships and methods), and revolutionary potential.

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7. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).
8. Kadji Amin, "Haunted by the 1990s: Queer Theory's Affective Histories," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 44, nos. 3 & 4 (2016): 173–89.

My use of the term seriality focuses on the medium specificity of streaming television as well as the narrative implications of serial storytelling, with an emphasis on how episodic formatting influences the relationship between viewers and streaming content. In short, I focus on seriality because I see it as the most important formatting element of streaming television to take into consideration when focusing on the affective dynamics that characterize platforms like Netflix. When I characterize this specific type of seriality as queer, I am referring in part to the counter-hegemonic potential of storytelling that is episodic.

Contextualizing Streaming and Queerness

A concern of LGBTQ+ communities that has become particularly prevalent in the streaming context is how queer representation gets subsumed by hegemonic media structures. Disney films have become especially emblematic of this issue in recent years: media like *Onward* (2020), *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021), and *Luca* (2021) make queerbaiting the new normal. Headlines like "Congratulations to Disney's 7th First Openly Gay Character" demonstrate audience awareness of the cynical appropriation of queerness by the studio.[9] Disney's Marvel made a point to announce in 2018 that "LGBTQ heroes" would begin to appear in the franchise, only to have the first such appearance in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) be an unnamed griever who has two minutes of screen time (played by codirector Joe Russo).[10] Like the serialized narratives of culture itself, the co-optation of queerness by structures of heterosexist capitalism becomes fundamentally cyclical. It is repeated again and again (and again) in the contemporary moment.[11]

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9. Briana Lawrence, "Congratulations to Disney's 7th First Openly Gay Character," Mary Sue, May 26, 2021, https://www.themarysue.com/another-first-openly-gay-character/.

10. David Mack, "'Avengers: Endgame' Features Marvel Studios' First Openly Gay Character in a Small Role," BuzzFeed News, April 25, 2019, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/davidmack/avengers-endgame-first-gay-character-joe-russo.

11. Jackson McHenry, "*Avengers: Endgame*'s Gay Moment Is a Nice Gesture That Just Feels Exhausting," Vulture, April 29, 2019, https://www.vulture.com/2019/04/avengers-endgames-gay-moment-just-feels-exhausting.html.

In seeming contrast with these filmic representations, television shows with significant queer representational content like *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018–2020), *Pose* (2018–2021), *Dear White People* (2017–2021), *Orange Is the New Black* (2013–2019), and *Queer Eye* (2018–) are increasingly prevalent in the streaming television context across various genres.

The extent to which these queer representational elements align with hegemonic ideologies varies. For example, a show like *Stranger Things* (2016–), in its romanticization of and nostalgia for the 1980s, tends to reify heterosexism and misogyny through its writing of characters and romantic relationships. This is despite the fact that the show introduced a lesbian character in its third season (Robin Buckley [Maya Hawke], who came out in the second-to-last episode of season three) and has hinted but not confirmed that another character might be gay since the pilot episode (Will Byers [Noah Schnapp], whose mother admits in the first episode of season one that his peers bully him and call him homophobic slurs). Additionally, the prevalence of media made by creators like producer Ryan Murphy (*Glee*

Figure 1: Though representation was more subtextual in the first season of *She-Ra*, scenes depicting the intimate relationship between Adora and Catra demonstrate that the show was always informed by queerness. *Source:* Netflix

[2009–2015], *American Horror Story* [2011–], *Ratched* [2020–]) is often emblematic of the commodification and especially the whitening of queerness on contemporary television.[12] In addition to being a production-based phenomenon, this form of hegemonic white queerness is also an audience phenomenon that undermines queer and trans people of color as both fans and creators. For example, the CW show *The 100* (2014–2020) saw widespread fan backlash against its use of the "bury your gays" trope on a white woman,[13] but backlash against the show's routine killing-off and torturing of Black characters, among other forms of racism, was virtually nonexistent among white fans and never gained the media attention that the "bury your gays" outcries did.[14]

Representation aside, the formatting of major Hollywood films and television shows that dominate the industry reflect hegemonic epistemology, prioritizing heterosexist ideologies among other worldviews. Though Hollywood films can reflect or incorporate radical elements in their form (for example, in the case of works by director Douglas Sirk like *Written on the Wind* [1956], which presents a nearly surrealist camp interpretation of seemingly heterosexual desire), in the contemporary moment, they are more likely to reify formal elements that maintain capitalist ideologies first and foremost. For example, the plot holes and inconsistencies in a film like *Avengers: Endgame* demonstrate the irreverence with which studios like Disney tend to conceive of their franchises as storytelling or formal enterprises. This is not to deny the fact that the aesthetics of computer-generated imagery (CGI) are central elements of films like *Endgame*, nor to deny the potential of CGI

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12. Noel Duan, "In 'The Assassination of Gianni Versace,' Ryan Murphy proves—Again!—He Can Never Get Race Right," Quartz, March 7, 2018, https://qz.com/quartzy/1222574/ryan-murphy-proves-again-he-can-never-get-race-right/.

13. Erin B. Waggoner, "Bury Your Gays and Social Media Fan Response: Television, LGBTQ Representation, and Communitarian Ethics," *Journal of Homosexuality* 65, no. 13 (2018): 1877–91.

14. Nicholas Rickards, "New Places, New Races: Neocolonialism and Postracial Racism in the Young Adult Dystopian Series, *The 100*," *Journal of Popular Culture* 53, no. 2 (2020): 409–30.

elements to be used for counter-hegemonic formal and narrative ideologies. Rather, I point out the inconsistencies of narrative in such films to demonstrate how the formal elements of storytelling are generally leveraged for capitalist ideologies.

By comparison, some streaming television of the contemporary media landscape, though it is obviously still created by platforms like Netflix to be profitable, also incorporates more counter-hegemonic elements in both its form and narrative. Because Netflix is often resistant to renewing shows past one to two seasons anyway,[15] its creators are more likely to experiment with unique, distinctive approaches to their programming as in shows like *Dear White People* and *She's Gotta Have It* (2017–2019). This is not to say that creators do not make a point of trying to produce shows that will be renewed for as long as possible, as I will discuss in greater detail below; however, it is to say that streaming television provides opportunities that allow for both narrative and formal experimentation, and this experimentation makes streaming television uniquely different from tentpole blockbusters in terms of its affordances. As I will discuss in greater detail below, children's media are also especially reflective of radical formal and storytelling potential.

Overall, streaming television has the potential, and in some cases has seen that potential through, to adopt queer methods and formatting. Even in shows with little-to-no queer representational content like *Bridgerton* (2020–), elements of production like "series drops" that facilitate binge-watching, thematic focuses on sexuality and desire, and visual design that emphasizes aesthetics as being of central importance to the program all reflect potentially counter-hegemonic elements of queerness. To better understand how streaming television produces and takes advantage of queer seriality for both storytelling and profit, we need to consider a specific example in more detail.

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15. Dan Clarendon, "Why So Many Netflix Shows Have Only One Season," TV Insider, July 6, 2021, https://www.tvinsider.com/1004638/why-netflix-shows-have-one-season/.

Affect, Streaming, and *She-Ra*

Taking *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* as a central case study, I argue that seriality in streaming contexts produces queer affect in part by producing intimacy. This children's show, based on the toy franchise and television series *She-Ra: Princess of Power* (1985–1987), was adapted for television by writer Noelle Stevenson. The show is identified by both audiences and critics as being of particular interest to and itself particularly interested in LGBTQ+ communities—as a *Los Angeles Times* article about the show's fourth season notes, "In Netflix's 'She-Ra,' even villains respect nonbinary pronouns."[16] *She-Ra* is made for children but drew audiences from a range of older age groups, particularly LGBTQ+ adults, in part as a natural result of its attraction for audiences who watched the original version in the '80s. The context and availability of binge-watching, alongside the ways in which
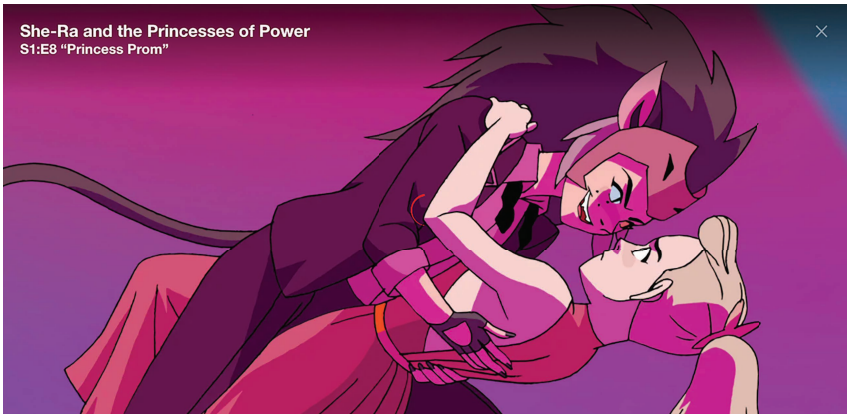

Figure 2: Netflix advertises *She-Ra*'s queer representational content in the thumbnail image for season one, episode eight, depicting Catra and Adora in a charged dance.
Source: Netflix

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16. Tracy Brown, "In Netflix's 'She-Ra,' Even Villains Respect Nonbinary Pronouns," *Los Angeles Times*, November 5, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/tv/story/2019-11-05/netflix-she-ra-princesses-power-nonbinary-double-trouble.

binge-watching has affected production elements of television, make word of mouth an important determining factor in a streaming show's success. Word of mouth is often how LGBTQ+ content is shared among LGBTQ+ audiences, and the Netflix recommendation algorithm is also an important kind of technological "word of mouth" that uses viewers' activity and preferred media to determine what to recommend to them. If Netflix's algorithm suggests *She-Ra* to a user based on other media that they have watched (and that other and/or similar viewers also liked), that user might be receiving a new media kind of "word of mouth" recommendation from a fellow LGBTQ+ person without even knowing it.

As a children's show that nevertheless drew a fanbase of teenagers and adults as well as children, *She-Ra* provokes specific questions about aspiration. For example, reviews of the show on parenting websites like Common Sense Media note that it emphasizes choosing good over evil, being true to oneself, and that it prioritizes diversity in its characters' identities.[17] Showrunner Stevenson noted in an interview that "the idea that a kid could wear their sneakers and their shorts to cosplay She-Ra is really exciting to me."[18] This accessibility makes *She-Ra*'s status as an aspirational text possible for the target audience of children over seven years old and is of interest from a queer perspective partly because of the importance of attainable role models for LGBTQ+ children. Children's media can already have queer associations in terms of its formatting—for example, the seriality of the classic Saturday morning cartoon (like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* [1987–1996]) can lend itself to nonsequential consumption. Rather than being only reflective of the stereotypically "simplistic" nature of children's media, I argue that this nonsequential characteristic is queer in the sense of being nonconforming

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17. "Kid Reviews for She-Ra and the Princesses of Power," Common Sense Media, accessed May 5, 2022, https://www.commonsensemedia.org/tv-reviews/she-ra-and-the-princesses-of-power/user-reviews/child.
18. Mariella Mosthof, "Here's When The Original 'She-Ra & The Princesses of Power' Aired," Romper, November 13, 2018, https://www.romper.com/p/when-did-the-original-she-ra-the-princesses-of-power-air-netflix-is-bringing-back-a-classic-13137881.

or counter-hegemonic. In upending traditional Western narrative structures, nonsequential seriality can be understood as a challenge to the epistemology that most of us have been trained into via dominant narrative formats.[19] Similarly, media made for young children are often queer in their broken-up nature—for example, shows like *Sesame Street* (1969–) and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (1968–2001) are comprised of nonnarrative, arguably non-linear, and sometimes nonfiction sections of the show rather than a cohesive story arc. Such shows are often comprised of a series of lessons and minis-tories that may or may not share unifying elements as broad as a particular letter or number of the week. This nonsequential formatting is not character-istic of *She-Ra* because of the linear nature of Netflix's structure (which makes sequential viewing of a show's episodes the most convenient and automatic watch option for audiences) and because of the show's traditionally struc-tured narrative (which builds broader plots to a climax at the end of each season rather than only featuring one-off episodes that could be watched in any order). However, the rewatching that child audiences are known for (and that makes children's media so profitable) is made both possible and easy by the Netflix format. While the interface of Netflix prioritizes linear consumption, it also encourages rewatching through suggestions like "Watch It Again," and this rewatching can be understood as a partially nonlinear practice that allows audiences to revisit particular episodes out of order.

The history of *She-Ra* affects our understanding of the Netflix reboot and its affective as well as ideological functions. Peggy A. Bulger writes that the original *She-Ra* franchise was primarily created to cater to working mothers of the 1980s who sought empowering, positive female role models for their daughters:

> The character of She-Ra may be seen as logical outgrowth of the women's
> movement and feminine struggle for equality in the workforce. However,

19. N. J. Lowe, *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative* (Cambridge: Cam-bridge University Press, 2000).

this positive imaging has been co-opted and combined with conventional role modeling by the toy industry to turn a handy profit. At the same time, the actual play of children will, at times, have very little connection to the marketing images perpetrated by toy manufacturers and media managers, or the altruistic models sought by today's mothers. This proposition would suggest that toys, rather than being designed and created for children, are fashioned by adults for other adults—the parent/consumers.[20]

A spin-off of the toy and television franchise *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* (1983–1985), the original *She-Ra* can be seen simultaneously as a cynical cash-grab and as an at-least somewhat feminist answer to the aspirational functions of *He-Man* for child audiences. Aspiration, however, as Bulger notes, is affected not just by children's media but also by the other surrounding factors that affect children's development. Bulger describes watching her young daughters play with She-Ra dolls and reify gender stereotypes about shopping, nurturing, and performing other expected "feminine" acts in the process, despite the fact that She-Ra is not associated with those particular gendered functions. Does this affect our understanding of the Netflix reboot of *She-Ra* and its various attributes?

While sociological work of the kind that Bulger did should be undertaken to fully understand how child audiences process the narratives that they are presented with in children's media, this article focuses instead on asking how affect "by adults for other adults" can be understood in this particular case study. As Bulger notes, "Toys and dolls offered to our children are created by adults for adult consumers. These artifacts are generated in an attempt to teach current expectations of adult behavior to the developing child. These expectations, especially those involving gender roles, are shaped by the economic imperatives of the adult labor force and the cultural materialism that impacts society as a whole."[21] Expanding on this point,

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20. Peggy A. Bulger, "The Princess of Power: Socializing Our Daughters Through TV, Toys, and Tradition," *Lion and the Unicorn* 12, no. 2 (1988): 185.
21. Bulger, "The Princess of Power," 190.

I argue that adults also look to children's media to understand themselves and their roles in the cultural landscape. This particularly applies for fans of the original *She-Ra* show who might be watching the reboot with daughters, nieces, or other children in their lives. In the case of Netflix's *She-Ra*, some LGBTQ+ adults as well as children sought out a show that provided personalized experiences of aspiration, identity recognition, and/or embodiment—in other words, a show that provided desired affect.

Aspiration is built into this show because of the fact that the main character herself is a transformed ideal: Adora turns into She-Ra as a magical process, and she regularly comments on how She-Ra is taller, stronger, and has "better hair" than Adora in her normal form. The ideal self not only comes from the original *She-Ra* franchise of the 1980s but also from the magical girl anime subgenre from which the reboot draws (with this subgenre being particularly notable for how it is frequently beloved among LGBTQ+ audiences).[22] Identity recognition emerges from the queer nature of the show's narrative, particularly the relationship between Adora and Catra, who begin as best friends, become complicated enemies, and, by the show's finale, confess their romantic love and kiss one another. Though queer representation was not as explicit in the first season of the show, it became more prevalent as audiences reacted positively to it:

> "Studios and networks tend to be cautious, and never want to stick their neck out farther than they have to. It's easier to convince them if this is something that other shows have already done. There was a lot of fear at first," Stevenson says of the first season of her *She-Ra*. "There always had to be plausible deniability, with the exception maybe of Bow's two dads, because other shows had been including gay parents. It only started changing once we started getting positive, vocal support from fans of the show. They picked up on all the queer subtext, and they wanted more." That groundswell of

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22. Clare McBride, "Sailor Moon and the Queer Art of Questioning Gender and Sexuality," Syfy Wire, June 24, 2019, https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/sailor-moon-and-the-queer-art-of-questioning-gender-and-sexuality.

support for a central queer love story that had, up to that point, been merely implied, gave Stevenson what she needed to pitch executives on ending *She-Ra*'s run with [a] big swing. "When I was like, look, we want this queer relationship between the two leads to be the climax of the entire show—a fairly big ask—instead of getting a hard 'no,' I got a 'okay, sell us on it.' I was very very grateful for that trust and that opportunity."[23]

Stevenson's description of the process of making *She-Ra* explicitly queer demonstrates both how production is affected by the streaming context and how identifiable the show is for LGBTQ+ audiences. The act of making the subtextual textual is one that many audiences will identify with for its parallels to a person's real-life coming-out process.

As the earlier mention by Stevenson of easy *She-Ra* cosplay options for children suggests, embodiment is also important for audiences,

Figure 3: Image from the series finale of Netflix's *She-Ra*.
Source: Netflix

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23. Joanna Robinson, "*Raya and the Last Dragon*'s Kelly Marie Tran Thinks Her Disney Princess Is Gay," *Vanity Fair*, March 5, 2021, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2021/03/raya-and-the-last-dragon-kelly-marie-tran-gay-namaari-raya.

particularly children. Themes of transformation, the aesthetic changes over time that the characters experience in the show (including Catra's haircut in the final season, from long hair to a short butch cut), and audiences' identifications with different characters all reflect affective investments in *She-Ra*. From the beginning of the show, Bow, the central male protagonist, presents a counter-hegemonic image of masculinity with his heart-decorated crop top and loving nature; the fact that he is read as being trans-coded by many audience members (his swimsuit from an episode early in the series includes a top as well as a bottom) also reflects how the show itself, in the writing of all of its characters, prioritizes representations of LGBTQ+ characters for its audience.[24] Though the distinction between trans and queer identities is important to note, entertainment news coverage of the show has generally grouped its representation of queer characters like Adora and Catra with its representation of trans and nonbinary characters like Double Trouble,[25] partly in line with historical connections between queer and trans communities via terms like *LGBTQ+*. The show's aesthetics also manifest in its consistent use of bright colors and features like the not-so-subtle rainbow that appears at the climax of the first season's finale.

Seriality is central to how affect is produced and understood in this case study because seriality allows for word of mouth, binge-watching, and rewatching, all of which are important elements to the success of both streaming television in general and *She-Ra* in particular. Accessibility makes the show reflective of both affective and ideological investments in its audience. For example, *She-Ra* is rated TV-Y7 ("suitable for ages 7 and up") on Netflix, making it literally accessible to child audiences, even if they are watching Netflix with parental limits on it. Given that queer content is often branded as being "adult," even if it is comparable in

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24. Susannah Alexander and David Opie, "She-Ra Boss Responds to Popular Fan Theory Regarding Bow's True Identity," Digital Spy, May 24, 2020, https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/ustv/a32653364/she-ra-noelle-stevenson-theory-bow-trans/.

25. Alexander and Opie, "She-Ra Boss."

nature to seemingly heterosexual romantic representation on shows meant for similarly aged children, the fact that *She-Ra* is available to the TV-Y7 crowd is deeply valuable to that audience and is particularly important for LGBTQ+ children. This accessibility supports my broader argument about the role that intimacy plays in queer seriality of streaming television.

Intimacy comes not only from character-driven storytelling but also from formatting that allows audiences to binge-watch content from a variety of locations and contexts. My use of the term *queer seriality* focuses on how the seriality of streaming television is inherently intimate, breaking down boundaries between various binaries and (for creators and audiences at least, if not necessarily for platforms) prioritizing affect above profit. Care and community manifest in the streaming context of *She-Ra* because audiences are empowered, not just to see themselves represented but to do so repeatedly.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated how queer seriality characterizes the Netflix show *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, arguing that the program is reflective of broader potential imbued in the streaming television context. Queerness as counter-hegemony that combats neoliberal isolation and capitalist imperatives not only manifests in the storytelling of *She-Ra* but also in its formatting. Through affective investments and accessibility, the streaming context represents a critical point of intervention in the contemporary media landscape. Programs like *She-Ra* show us how streaming can serve important, innovative functions for audiences of all ages.

Acknowledgments