

# Bruce E. Drushel

Co-editor of *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture*

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Queer Studies in Media  
& Popular Culture

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Bruce Drushel (Ph.D., Ohio University, 1991) is a professor in the Department of Media, Journalism and Film at Miami University. His teaching and research interests are in the areas of media policy and economics, media audiences, media history, and LGBTQ representation in electronic media and film.

Can you tell us a bit about *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture* and what makes it unique?

The journal grew out of separate proposals made by Kylo-Patrick Hart and me, one focused on queerness in popular culture and one on queerness in media. It made sense to Intellect to find a way to fuse the two ideas into a single journal. QSMPC is unique because its subject matter evolves very rapidly: new media are constantly being created and popular culture, by its nature, is never static. Given its origins in the Popular Culture Association (PCA), it is not surprising that its approach is interdisciplinary. It is the only English-language journal with its focus and approach.

What inspired you to become involved with the journal?

My work as chair of the LGBTQ+ Studies group at PCA meant I was exposed to an incredible amount of truly outstanding scholarship exploring sexuality and gender identity in culture, yet much of it was not being published because there were few good peer-reviewed venues for which it was a specialty. To me, there was an obvious void there that needed to be filled and a new journal seemed a good way to do that.

How do you define 'queer' in the context of media and popular culture?

'Queer', of course, originally was a synonym for 'strange' and came to specifically refer to those whose sexuality or gender expression was seen as differing from convention. With the development of queer theory and queer studies in the 1980s, it came to be a study of how LGBTQ+ people are routinely defined by mainstream culture, usually as inferior copies of the mainstream, and how recognition of that is the first step toward altering that power relationship. Specifically, 'queer' is a rejection of the mainstream's approach to the relationships among sex, sexuality and gender. In the media and popular culture, this is reflected in whose stories are told, how they are told and who tells them.

What exciting trends or emerging areas in queer media and popular culture studies are you seeing right now?

Probably the most evident one is its globalization. We're seeing more and more manuscripts from scholars outside of North America, the UK and Australia, including those from Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The potential for this scholarship to inform and even disrupt conventions in queer studies is exciting, to say the least.

Why is queer representation in media and culture important?

To go back to George Gerbner and Larry Gross, cultural invisibility amounts to symbolic annihilation. Or, to paraphrase Susie Bright, stereotypes and heavily coded treatment of queerness in media turns LGBTQ+ people into ghosts – and ghosts that maybe no one believes in.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to contribute to the journal?

First, to read an issue or two so that they have an idea of our approach to scholarship, including possible topic areas, foundational works and standards for sources. I'm not suggesting at all that they restrict themselves to those – only that they are aware of the quality of scholarship our readers expect.

How do you think queer representation in media and popular culture has shifted over the past decade? What role has academia played in that transformation?

There is unquestionably much less of a focus on sexuality and more of a focus on gender, on its expression and its fluidity. Until recently, that was reflected in classroom content in a variety of coursework in the humanities and social sciences, as well as in campus life. If students didn't know much about queer and trans people when they arrived on campus, that certainly wasn't true of them when they left.

Where would you like to see queer media and scholarship go in the next five to ten years?

I don't advocate a particular direction, other than to say that our theoretical foundations must continue to build on the pioneering work of scholars such as Butler, Sedgwick, Munoz, Foucault and Halberstam. In addition, because of my love of history, I would love to see continued efforts to disinter the LGBTQ+ events and people who have shaped contemporary queer culture.

What changes would you like to see in how media industries treat queer narratives and creators?

Much as has been the case with other marginalized communities, the biggest is authorship. We need to see industrial practice encourage the nurturing of queer and trans creative people, including writers, producers and talent. It's not the case that non-queer people can't create authentic queer and trans characters. But lived experience is the best guarantor of diversity and stories that ring true.

How can readers, scholars and the public support queer media and cultural work more meaningfully?

In the current political environment, queer and particularly trans people are under attack by those for whom their challenge to traditional ways of thinking about sex, gender and sexuality is threatening. People must continue to read about sexuality and gender, to encourage those who write about it, and to consider the ways their own work could be threatened by efforts to erase LGBTQ+ people from culture.

Is there a particular article or issue of the journal that you're especially proud of?

Not really. I have found work to be proud of in each of our issues.

If there's one thing you hope people take away from the journal, what would it be?

I don't think it's too trite to say, but that queer scholarship is legitimate, is more than non-queer scholars may think, and has much to say about mainstream culture. Similar to the experience of international travel, travellers return and must rediscover their home anew.



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Edited by  
Bruce E. Drushel and  
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