

Report on Queer Inclusion in Mystery Anthologies

One of the objectives of the Queer Crime Writers (QCW) has been to monitor the representative number of members and their stories in the mystery community. Over the course of 2023, Queer Crime Writers began a study of the mystery stories included in mystery anthologies to determine how many had been written by queer authors.

Since our organization's inception, we have heard anecdotally that queer mystery authors were not being included in mystery short story markets. We listened to these complaints and decided to investigate the data for mystery anthologies over the course of a single year. We did not choose to look at other short story markets, though we might at some later point. Given the amount of time and energy required, we committed to focus on a single market for the moment.

We did not do this to point fingers; we conducted this investigation to better understand representation of queer writers within the larger mystery short story community. However, we did find areas where we, as a community, can improve. This report is intended to present the issues we identified regarding representation of queer author in the mystery short story market and make suggestions on how best to move forward.

Methodology

The methodology was simple. The Short Mystery Fiction Society website was used to develop a list of anthologies for the calendar year of 2023. We defined an anthology as any short story work featuring more than two authors participating in the book. QCW matched the publishers from that list against those included in the Mystery Writers of America's Approved

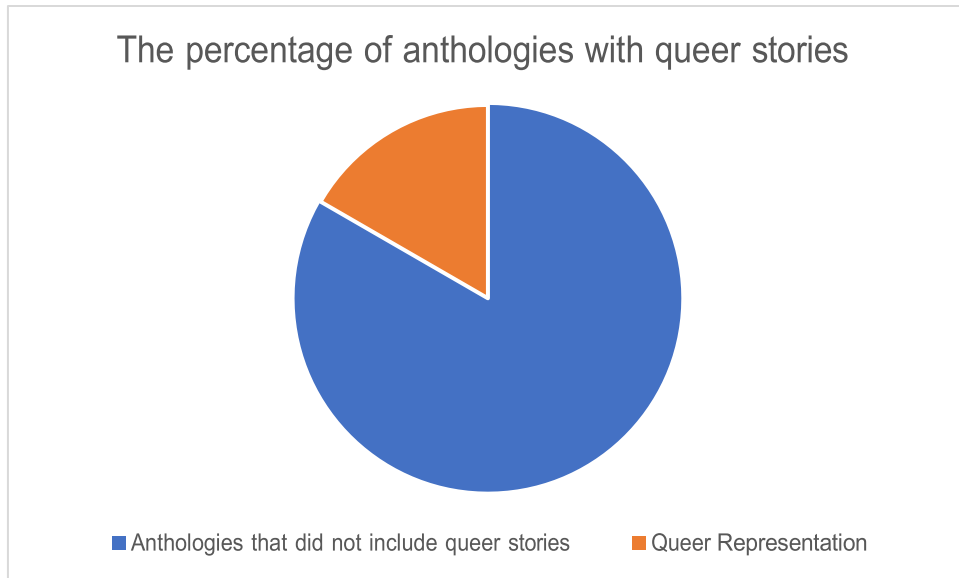
Publishers List. This gave us thirty anthologies for 2023.

From this list, we looked at the number of stories in each anthology written by out, queer (LGBTQ+) authors. We defined out as someone who has made a public statement of their orientation or gender identity. We chose not to include those who did not fit this definition as we were concerned that doing so might require us to name authors who had not yet made a public statement concerning orientation or gender identity. Under no circumstances did we want to invade anyone's privacy.

Findings

Using the abovementioned criteria, thirty (30) anthologies were reviewed for purposes of this study. Of those thirty, only five anthologies contained at least one story by a queer author.¹ This equates to queer participation in 16.6% of anthologies for 2023, or one out of every six anthologies including a story by a queer author. While ideally, all anthologies would strive to be inclusive, it's clear that, currently, we're not at the halfway (50%) mark.

¹ Note: this does not mean that five unique authors participated. It only means that five books contained a story by a queer author.

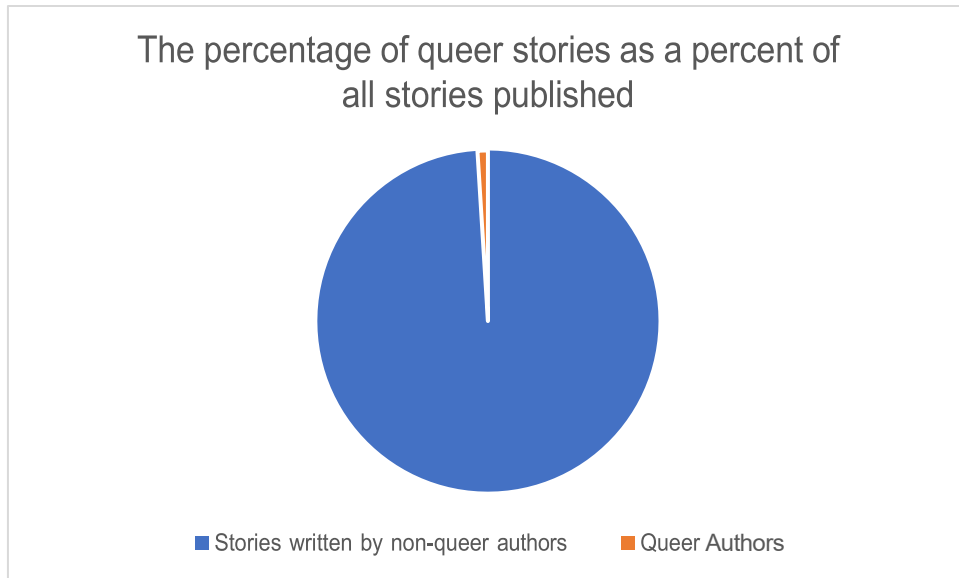


Within these 30 anthologies there were 510 stories that did not meet our criteria for queer representation plus the five stories mentioned above for an average of seventeen stories per anthology. In actuality, the number of stories per anthology ranged from eight to thirty-two. Thus, less than one percent (< 1%) of the total stories written represented queer authors.

Discussion

Here's where you introduce Kinsey's studies: quick what-about, how relevant to purposes of this study, their findings.² Based on conclusions drawn by Kinsey's studies, we would expect queer representation in mystery short story anthologies to be closer to 10% of all stories published rather than less than 1% as found in this study. That is a shortfall of more than 90%.

² Kinsey, Alfred. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. 1948. A 1993 Janus Report estimated the percentage of gay men at 9% and lesbian women at 5%.



As mentioned earlier in this report, our intent is not to point fingers. Instead, it is to raise awareness of concerns surrounding the representation of queer authors in the mystery short story market. In that spirit, we would like to mention those sources that stood out for their inclusion.

- First, hats off to Josh Pachter, who not only routinely included queer authors in his anthologies but also included multiple queer authors in one entry (*Happiness is a Warm Gun*) for this year. He was the only editor to do so.
- As we start 2024, we are thrilled to learn that Robert L. Fish Memorial Award winner Rob Osler was included in the Edgar Award for Best Short Story nominees.
- In anecdotal communications from members, we have learned that at least seven stories and three authors have been included in contracted mystery anthologies for 2024. This means that the percentage of queer representation in anthologies will be increasing in this coming year.

Recommendations

Typically, the reviews of submissions to anthologies are conducted through blind review. While blind review might seem a simple solution, the submissions only have the authors' names removed, not the content. Hence, a story with queer characters cannot be hidden.

many anthologies, especially those at the annual mystery conventions, have a different editor each year, creating a lack of continuity in selecting stories. As a result, there is no way to identify editorial bias until such time as the table of contents is released.

If an anthology contains twenty or more stories, but none of them are from queer authors, then we must assume that the selection of short stories is flawed. The call for blind submissions, while respecting concerns about name bias driving acceptance, does not help to promote inclusion on the part of queer and other diverse groups.

Queer Crime Writers recommends these courses of action to help mitigate the issues listed in this study.

- 1) When the anthology uses more than one judge for its submissions, at least one judge should represent the LGBTQ community. Minority groups have a unique perspective on authors and literature. Their inclusion would allow for a greater diversity of stories.
- 2) If there will only be a single judge an anthology, the judge should use invitations to ensure a more diverse set of stories. Looking at the data provided, many LGBTQ authors choose not to participate in short story writing since the chance of inclusion is abysmal. Invitations are used to include best-selling authors and those who are guests of honor at a conference. It can be used to

encourage queer authors to participate as well.

- 3) Send calls for submission to Queer Crime Writers so that our authors can be made aware of planned anthologies, information that is not readily available to many authors in our organization.
- 4) Remember that queer crime writers include more than gay men and lesbian authors. Reading about our community and understanding us removes some of the potential bias when reading our stories.
- 5) Queer Crime Writers will create and publicize a page of queer crime writers with short story experience. It will include names and a list of published stories. This will make it easier for editors and publishers to find queer short story writers for their anthologies.

Conclusions

There are hundreds of short stories published every year, and of those, the number of short stories by queer authors is very small. In the current market, the likelihood of one of the five stories published in 2023 being nominated for an award is slim. Fewer awards, Best of... recognitions, Readers' Favorites, and reviews further reduce opportunities for visibility of queer authors within the mystery short story market.

The inclusion of more queer authors in the anthologies currently being published every year would increase the visibility of queer crime writers and allow for more recognition of their works. The addition of stories by queer authors to anthologies will also give these authors a chance to build their brand and become familiar names to the readers. With many groups attempting to silence queer authors and books with queer characters, the need for representation

and equity becomes an imperative.