**‘A BRIEF HISTORY OF LGBTQ IN TV’**

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While some people may think LGBTQ hasn’t been addressed in entertainment until recent years, they are in fact wrong. Although LGBTQ characters have been more mainstream and considered the norm in recent years, it was arguably back in the ‘70s that LGBTQ roles were first written into TV – although they were minor as opposed to leading roles, they were still being represented.

***That Certain Summer* (1972**) was supposedly the first TV movie to deal compassionately with a **gay couple**. Following Doug Salter (Hal Holbrook) and Gary McClain (Martin Sheen) as the former attempts to hide his life partner from his teenage son Nick (Scott Jacoby), before finally explaining their relationship to him.

**“A lot of people — most people, I guess — think it’s wrong. They say it’s a sickness. They say it’s something that has to be cured. I don’t know. I do know it isn’t easy. If I had a choice, it’s not something I’d pick for myself. But it’s the only way I can live. Gary and I have a kind of marriage. We … we love each other.”**

For its time, *‘That Certain Summer’* was indeed an extraordinary film, being greenlit for television in the early 1970s – a time in which being gay was still frowned upon; despite legalisation in 1967. Progression was extremely slow, it wasn’t until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association would remove homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. According to *Out* magazine (2014) despite a strong working relationship with NBC, Link and Levison had to look to ABC in order to gain approval for the script. Even with the support of executive Barry Diller, the writers were forced to include Holbrook’s above quote that some saw homosexuality as a sickness. There was even pressure to remove Doug’s line saying that he and Gary “love each other,” but the writers fought successfully to keep it included.

The handling of these moments for its era is done surprisingly well, and much of that success can be credited to its choice of leads. Hal Holbook would become one of the most active actors of the 1970s, but in 1972 had only starred in films for a few years. The general sentiment in Hollywood at that time was that any part playing a homosexual was career suicide. Holbrook initially turned down the role, eventually accepting the part due to the kinship he felt towards the main character, Doug. This was primarily due to the fact he had recently separated from his wife but was unable to tell his young children.

Martin Sheen, the actor selected to play his partner; Gary, had also only been in film for a few years. When he was presented with the possible negative reaction he may face for playing a gay character, he supposedly responded, **“I’d robbed banks and kidnapped children and raped women and murdered people, you know, in any number of shows. Now I was going to play a gay guy and that was like considered a career ender. Oh, for Christ’s sake! What kind of culture do we live in?”**

It was amazing that two distinguished actors took a chance by working on a film with such a volatile subject matter for its time. The film did **NOT** harm either of their careers. Instead it depicted homosexuality in a sympathetic light and on that basis it could be assumed it got a positive reaction from the public. While the topic had been mentioned previously in popular culture, it was rare for it to be done in such a way that condones homosexual lifestyle. But thank god they did, because it will have most definitely paved the way for a brighter future.

It could be argued that this TV film was a reaction to the ongoing in society at the time. Just 3 years prior the Stonewall riots took place between 28 June 1969 - 1st July 1969. The series of spontaneous, violent demonstrations by members of LGBTQ+ community happened due to a police raid that took place at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighbourhood of Manhattan, New York City. Widely considered to establish the most important event that lead to the gay liberation movement and the modern fight for LGBTQ+ rights in the US.

IS THIS NECESSARY? DOES IT NEED PLACING ELSEWHERE IN THIS SECTION?

***Soap* (1977)** is thought to have featured the most well-known early gay character on TV. Although Jodie Dallas was not the first (credit to the short-lived *The Corner Bar* from 1972) Dallas is most commonly noted as the first recurring gay character, played by Billy Crystal. Starring as a **gay** dad – who fathered a child after a one-night stand - having an affair with a famous quarterback and contemplating gender-reassignment surgery. He amassed considerable media attention for his portrayal.

It’s been said that few shows in television history have been as ‘groundbreaking, innovative, controversial, and downright funny as Soap.’ It got a mixed bag of reactions and yet still managed to cope for four seasons between 1977-1981. The show supposedly handled controversial subjects such as homosexuality, in such a frank manner. There were also lies and misinformation about the show being “saturated with sex,” which caused religious groups to mount a campaign to keep it off the air. The character of Jodie had religious groups ‘up in arms’, while gay groups were also supposedly expressing concern. Worried that Jodie immortalised stereotypes, such as his desire to have a sex change. After meetings with several gay rights organizations, the plotline for Jodie’s sex change was said to be ‘toned down.’

Due to the controversies over its supposedly ‘raunchy’ content, Soap carried a warning disclaimer during its entire first season. It carried the first “viewer discretion” warning ever for a U.S. television series. In both a screen display and spoken announcement, the audience was warned by announcer that the show explored ‘adult themes’ and that “viewer discretion” was advised.

This show has definitely had a lasting legacy, and more than likely is responsible for opening the door to more LGBTQ+ characters.

For the majority of the 70s and then later the 1980s gay representation pretty much stayed the same as mentioned. Factors such as the Stonewall Riots in the US and the legalisation of homosexuality in the UK are credited for pushing the need for LGBTQ+ visibility on television whilst the AIDS crisis of the 1980s hindered the representation due to fear-mongering broadcasts and miseducation. It wasn’t until the 1990s that LGBTQ+ representation started to become more realistic and evolved.

*Ellen* (1994) focused on the comedians character working in a L.A. bookstore called ‘Buy the Book’, hanging around with her friends and discussing ordinary things such as lovers, work and family. During its fourth season the show came under controversy when the title character came out as a lesbian. It was shortly after that writer Ellen DeGeneres did the same in real life. At the time, her coming out was huge.

In the weeks following her character coming out to over 46 million viewers, many religious groups supposedly began to protest outside their local ABC station to take *Ellen* off air. Of course they did.

Folding under pressure, ABC put disclaimers at the beginning of each episode saying ‘there may be themes that are ‘inappropriate’ for children. The ratings reportedly dropped and in an interview at the 1998 Golden Globes DeGeneres questioned whether the world was ready for an openly gay character, let alone actor.

“**It was only meant to be, you know, just being honest. And it became this snowball, this avalanche, that just got bigger and bigger and bigger. There was no stopping it. It turned into people not liking me, because they thought that I was somehow political all of a sudden.”**

Political or not, Ellen’s decision to come out when she did, when the world still wasn’t as progressive as it is today, was a brave and historic one. It was Ellen in the end who had the last laugh, her highly successful chat show showed a massive resurgence in her career and her being awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for her work in the LGBT community serves as proof of just how far the world has come sine 1994.

*Will & Grace* (1998)

In direct comparison to the controversy that surrounded ‘Ellen’, ‘Will & Grace’ is often hailed as ‘the TV series that changed America’. First airing in 1998, the show was the first to have an openly gay character in the lead role. Critically the show was met with some skeptism at first but critics turned out to be worng- by the end of its original run in 2006 the show had received 16 Emmy Award (from a total of 83 nominations) and had been the highest rated show among millennial audiences between 2001 and 2005.

In an article written for Huffington Post, Jack Myers (2016) argues that the show proved to be successful as it was non-threatening, the story relied on Will and Grace’s friendship and interactions for its storylines and used sexuality secondly for the comic relief. This meant that audiences didn’t feel excluded from an unfamiliar narrative.

The impact of the show is proved with the surge of LGBTQ+ characters that appeared in major storylines of other prime time shows thereafter, the fact that the show was brough back for a second run over 10 years after its season finale AND by the fact that former US Vice-President, Joe Biden, is quoted as saying that theshow did more for the advancement of the gay population in America than anything else in the 90s.

Well if its good enough for the White House…

*The L Word* (2004)

It is argued that what ‘Will & Grace’ did for gay men, ‘The L Word’ did for lesbian women.

The pilot episode of the drama series introduced us to characters we had not seen before. Up until 2004 queer-identifying women had often been secondary characters, part of an ensemble cast or were additional characters brought in for guest roles as ‘the token lesbian’ (Bendix, 2014). ‘The L Word’ changed that narrative with its portrayal of lesbian women as well-defined, three dimensional characters.

Although criticised in hindsight for its lack of ethnic diversity, the show is still celebrated for pushing the message of a need for better queer female representation and is still the only modern show to feature an entire lesbian ensemble cast.

Rumours of a revival have been floating around Hollywood for the past few years and its certainly fitting that shows with central LGBTQ+ characters need to be more visible, especially in such harsh political times, however many argue that because of its lack of diversity the show would have to ‘adapt more to the changes that have happened in the past 10 years so that it is still as revolutionary as the original’ (Nicholson, 2017).

Only time will tell on this one.

I Am Cait(2015)

In 2015 Caitlynn Jenner shocked the world by officially coming out as transgender woman. The former Olympic athlete and motivational speaker, previously known as Bruce, had found a career resurgence by documenting her and her families lives in the highly successful show ‘Keeping Up with The Kardashians’

Now revealed to society as Caitlynn, Jenner began documenting her transition and the struggles involved in the show ‘I am Cait’.

The documentary-style series premiered to a massive audience of 2.7 million and was praised for its portrayal of the trans community and accurately capturing ‘the figuring out of what it means to be transgender, struggling with sexuality, finding comfort with a new appearance and negotiating family relationships’ (Ford, 2015).

Although a controversial figure now due to her political views, ‘I am Cait’ was embraced by many in the trans community with some seeing it as an ‘accessible starting point to educate cis-gendered society on the plight of trans people everywhere’ given Jenner’s previous success and fame due to her step-daughters notoriety (Cross, 2015).

Now off the air the show remains one of the most well-known and relatable docu-series to be broadcast with the subject of trans rights, the community and the need for acceptance.