

BEYOND THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW: QUEER AND TRANS TELEVISION IN THE AGE OF STREAMING

[Transcript]

INTRODUCTION

TV MONTAGE

- Are you gay?
- I'm bisexual.
- I'm gay.
- Actually, I'm a trans man.
- Actually, I identify as homoromantic asexual.
- I'm a lesbian, dear. Deal with it.

NARRATOR

Who is America? Television tells us powerful stories about who belongs in our national imagination. After decades of invisibility and marginalization, we now see lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, non-binary and transgender people in hundreds of contemporary television shows. How did television representations of LGBTQ people become commonplace today? And how have characters and narratives changed along the way? This is the story of how LGBTQ images have become essential to our television world in the past decade. What roles did streaming services, social media, and global flows of content play in this transformation?

UGLY BETTY (ABC: 2006-2010)

- We know you're gay, and that's okay.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

In the last decade, there is just more TV now. Mostly due to the rise of streaming services like Netflix, Amazon, Hulu and YouTube that have decided they want to be in the TV business. And so they are buying lots of shows. They're ordering straight to series. We are in a bubble market where there's just more representations of everybody, and so there's of course, more representations of queer people.

THE L WORD: GENERATION Q (Showtime: 2019-2023)

- Look, I don't think I can make it all the way through dinner without telling you something first.
- I know. You're trans. I saw you on Grindr.
- I've got a gift card.
- Oh.
- Yeah.
- Oh, my God.

MARI BRIGHE

In the last decade, I mean, we've seen a dramatic shift, I think, in how we represent queer and trans identities -- in that we represent trans identities at all. I think ten years ago, gosh, we were, I think, still in the talk show era of the sort of spectacle-ization of trans folks.

LISA HENDERSON

I wish I could confidently say with volume has come inclusion. And there has been some, you know, you can't have that many programs with the exact same characters across 250 series. So there are some middle aged people. I wouldn't say there are old people, as there are not, for the most part, on television, on any platform. There are lots of young people. There are more Black and brown characters. Non-binary gender is still treated very delicately when at all, and trans characters are few and far between. So I think we see some mirroring in commercial culture. Some of the changes in the scope of movements for sexual and gender equality.

NEWS CLIP

But we begin tonight with the decision by the Supreme Court declaring marriage a fundamental right and a right that gays and lesbians cannot be deprived of.

LARRY GROSS

Ever since the truly dramatic issues of "Don't Ask Don't Tell" in the military and marriage the visibility of LGBTQ people in American culture has just become commonplace in a way that just wasn't the case. And I think the real difference is primarily focused on younger people as part of the audience, as a voting group and as a group for whom the gay issue is a civil rights issue. Particularly, I think because as one might have expected, coming out happens earlier and earlier.

PRETTY LITTLE LIARS (Freeform: 2010-2017)

- If I say I'm gay the whole world is going to change.

- Yeah. It will.

KATHERINE SENDER

So it's easy to take for granted the abundant roles that we have on television for LGBTQ characters today. But it wasn't always this way. So into the 1960s, LGBT people were pretty much invisible on U.S. television. In the 70s and the 80s we began to see occasional characters, but they usually fell into the kind of victim or villain stereotype. And this began to change a little bit more in the 1990s. But at that stage the condition of acceptance was that mostly gay men and occasionally lesbians they had to be saints so they were usually white, they were usually affluent. They were not allowed to be political and they were certainly not allowed to be sexual.

ELLEN (ABC: 1994-1998)

- I mean, why can't I just see the truth? I mean, be who I am? I'm 35 years old. I'm so afraid to tell people, I mean, just-- Susan, I'm gay.

LISA HENDERSON

I remember when Ellen came out on television and I was watching with a group of lesbians and we were just shaking our heads thinking we never thought we'd live to see the day. And now you can't keep up. It's impossible to be the critic who has the entire archive. So something worked for the networks, for streaming. They wanted a gay audience and a gay market, but they also discovered that gay content and certain kinds of off the beaten track sex and gender portrayals were very flattering to a non-gay audience.

VIDA (Starz: 2018-2020)

- Who is this?
- My girlfriend.

NARRATOR

LGBTQ images on U.S. television have flourished in recent years, going from 2% of characters in 1999 to more than 12% today. These more plentiful and complex LGBTQ representations are the direct consequence of many years of social, political and technological transformation. Yet with these media and civil rights gains has come a backlash from conservatives at the federal, state and local level who are attempting to push back on LGBTQ inclusion. We can make sense of these struggles through the lenses of television production, distribution and consumption.

TRANSFORMING TELEVISION

NARRATOR

Ellen cracked open the closet door for network and cable channels in the early 2000s to begin to explore sustained lesbian and gay characters, sometimes in lead roles. Rapid changes in digital distribution technologies opened space for streaming services to compete with legacy channels for audiences' attention and revenues. They did so with innovative shows, centering LGBTQ narratives.

THE NEW NORMAL (NBC: 2012-2013)

- Marriage is not for dogs. It is not for children. And I'm sorry, boys, but it is not for you.

KATHERINE SENDER

It's interesting to look at television before the streaming services started producing their own content in 2013. So up until that point, network television started to explore LGBTQ characters and they were emboldened by the examples that they were seeing on Showtime and HBO and one really popular example of a network show is Modern Family.

MODERN FAMILY (ABC: 2009-2020)

- Look at that baby with those cream puffs.
- Okay. Excuse me.

LARRY GROSS

Modern Family and The New Normal and some others are adaptations of the standard sitcom or television domestic dramas to add the gay element.

MODERN FAMILY (ABC: 2009-2020)

- What?
- She's got the cream puffs.
- Oh.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

When you saw gay people on TV in the 90s, in the 80s, they almost were never intimate with one another. And Modern Family really made a big scene about the fact that they had a main gay couple on that show as stars of the show. And yet fans were like, but you're not going far enough. Why don't they ever kiss?

MODERN FAMILY (ABC: 2009-2020)

- Beautiful Gloria just like my Mitchell.
- Oh, oh, oh. Wow.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

So there's an episode where Mitch and Cam, you know, finally kiss but let's just do a quick peck really quickly. Just to show that we're not afraid of it and then move on.

LARRY GROSS

It's still the pattern of introducing the gay experience and the gay person into the normal heterosexual world that has been so much what television has always done.

GLEE (Fox: 2009-2015)

- Hi, I'm Kurt Hummel, and I'll be auditioning for the role of kicker.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

Glee was super important for queer representation because it started out as a show that wasn't afraid to have an out gay character. And then it just kept adding more identities.

EVE NG

At the beginning, Kurt was joined by Blaine, and then in season two, we got this off the cuff comment about Santana and Brittany maybe dating or maybe just having sex.

GLEE (Fox: 2009-2015)

- I don't know how I feel about us.
- Look, let's be clear here. I'm not interested in any labels unless it's on something I shoplift.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

By the end of it, it seemed like they had most of the major LGBTQ identities represented on the show, and I think it really opened the doors because it was broadcast television, it was Fox. It made people in the industry less afraid of difference.

NARRATOR

Into the early 2000s, most LGBTQ characters had to be saints to be included in the television universe. They were usually white, cisgender, homonormative and virtuous. Networks couldn't take the risk of alienating mass audiences and the advertising industry that paid to appeal to them. When streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime began to produce original content their subscription model freed them from these constraints. They drew attention to new shows by profiling much more diverse and three-dimensional queer and trans characters in central roles.

TRANSPARENT (Amazon Prime: 2014-2019)

- I think I would like to start transitioning medically.

LISA HENDERSON

From an industry perspective, when streaming services started providing original content, they had to add value. They had to figure out what they could do that existing television services didn't do because they had to persuade people that it was worth subscribing.

EVE NG

I remember when Orange is the New Black premiered. I was one of the people that signed up for Netflix specifically to get that show. I was very impressed with the range of representations, the fact that they had queer women of color, trans women, or one trans woman.

ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK (Netflix: 2013-2019)

- Pretty hair. When those roots start to show, be sure to come and see me. Okay?

JEN RICHARDS

And what you see a lot of is, you know, what Jenji Kohan calls the kind of Trojan horse model that she employed in Orange is the New Black, where for the lead character, you still have someone who is by the culture seen as an attractive white person at the center, but then you can surround them by lots of diversity.

ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK (Netflix: 2013-2019)

- These white girls trying to throw down.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

I think Laverne Cox is a really interesting example in that show in that she is a, you know, out Black trans woman playing an out Black trans woman on a major show.

ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK (Netflix: 2013-2019)

- Sound the alarm. Get out of here.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

It's interesting that, you know, Laverne Cox was Emmy nominated for that role, but she's Emmy nominated as a guest star. She's not really a significant part of the narrative.

TRANSPARENT (Amazon Prime: 2014-2019)

- We're going to have to pat you down.

- Why?

- You've got a groin anomaly.

LISA HENDERSON

Amazon really used Transparent to make its mark as the producer of original content. And so I think queer TV put Amazon on the original content map.

TRANSPARENT (Amazon Prime: 2014-2019)

- Ma'am, you can put that away.

- I'm not going to put it away. And please don't call me ma'am.

MARI BRIGHE

I was extremely skeptical about Transparent, particularly it being a major network show where they cast a cisgender man to play the lead role. And I was pleased to see that Jill Soloway, you know, worked to include trans women in the production of the show. And really, you see interesting shift there in how transness is represented -- in that getting to at least see Maura having friends.

TRANSPARENT (Amazon Prime: 2014-2019)

- I like getting fucked.

- Yeah. Okay. Well, here's to getting fucked.

MARI BRIGHE

And we got to actually see trans actresses play trans women. I think that really shows how when you can bring trans folks into the creation process, you get these deeper, richer and more three-dimensional, more authentic, more sincere representations of what it means to be trans.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

They knew that the show would have to explore deep cultural themes about gender and age and also, to a lesser extent, religion, because it's about a Jewish family and that that would give them some critical attention and heft so that they could get the awards that they needed, they could get the reviews that they needed so that they could get quality actors for their next original programming initiative, which it turns out is going to be spending \$1 billion on the Lord of the Rings.

NARRATOR

Producing original content proved a successful strategy for the streaming services. Netflix gained 26% more subscribers in the year their own shows debuted. Traditional broadcast and cable channels had to compete for audiences' attention by also offering more complex and diverse LGBTQ characters.

INTERSECTING IDENTITIES

SENSE 8 (Netflix: 2015-2018)

- I am a gay man. I've never said those words in public before. I am a gay man. I am a gay man.

NARRATOR

According to GLAAD, the media watchdog, in 2010 only 19% of LGBTQ characters were Black, Asian or Latinx. Now more than half of all queer and trans roles are played by people of color. The Black Lives Matter movement combined with television channels need to stand out, demanded much more racially diverse LGBTQ portrayals.

EMPIRE (Fox: 2015-2020)

- ♪ The kind of song that makes a man love a man ♪ ♪

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

Empire was a really significant one because it was a broadcast TV drama with an all-Black cast, which had really never been done before on that level. And it was a huge hit. And the show kind of sets up like this tension between global capital and sexuality and really trying to resolve these tensions in the Black community where queer people aren't really represented in the Black community.

EMPIRE (Fox: 2015-2020)

- Your sexuality, that's a choice. You can choose to sleep with women if you want.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

I mean, there's parts of the show that are problematic, but there are also parts of the show that are really healing. And it's about sort of healing all this intergenerational trauma.

EMPIRE (Fox: 2015-2020)

- ♪ I just want to be / Yeah, good enough / Good enough / Good enough / Good enough ♪ ♪

HOUSE OF LIES (Showtime: 2012-2016)

- Consulting is like dissing a really pretty girl so that she'll want you more.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

House of Lies is a show about management consultants and the ways in which they sort of prey on and they're parasites in the corporate system.

HOUSE OF LIES (Showtime: 2012-2016)

- You think I haven't hired and fired a thousand management consultants. I know all of your bullshit tricks.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

So the office environment, which is the primary domain of the show, is very masculine and very capitalist and corporate. And the show flips that by, in that central character's home life, giving Don Cheadle in the first couple of seasons, a child who's exploring their gender in interesting ways.

HOUSE OF LIES (Showtime: 2012-2016)

- Auditions are today.
- For what again?
- Grease.
- And what part are you auditioning?
- Sandy.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

So Don Cheadle's father is home and retired, and he's a therapist, so he's a cisgender man, but he's a little bit softer than Don Cheadle.

HOUSE OF LIES (Showtime: 2012-2016)

- So I just--
- You want to fuck him up about it? Just lean on in, call him a Nancy boy.
- He's looking for me to push back.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

And then the kid you know, growing up privileged because his dad makes all this money is just like feeling totally free.

HOUSE OF LIES (Showtime: 2012-2016)

- I get it. I have an irresistible magnetism.
- Okay.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

I think it's a fabulous representation for Black people because Black representation on TV has been so circumscribed. And Black men on TV particularly have to be a certain way. They're almost always straight, cisgender, really masculine presenting. And that show gives us a range of Black male representations and gives us a gender non-conforming character that really destabilizes Black representation.

LOOKING (HBO: 2014-2016)

- Can you believe our little brother is getting himself a cholo boyfriend.
- I know.
- You are such a racist.
- I can't be a racist. I'm Latino.
- You're from Coral Gables.

YEIDY RIVERO

I think recently there have been many more representations of Latino gay and lesbians on television. Grey's Anatomy is a medical show, and it's about the life of these doctors. So you have the character of Callie Torres. She was part of the series from the beginning. You see a Latina character who is accomplished, and then she came out as bisexual, and she is very proud of who she is. I think that's very important. I mean, both in terms of ethnicity and previous representation of Latinas and also in terms of sexuality.

ONE DAY AT A TIME (Netflix: 2017-2019)

- When I think about love, I see myself someday loving a woman.

YEIDY RIVERO

But I think it's not until One Day at a Time where you see the transformation of a young woman, you know, discovering her sexuality. The main conflict comes with the father. He totally rejects Elena. And actually, he was supposed to have a dance with her in the quinceañera. And, of course, he goes to the quinceañera and then leaves, which is a very painful moment. That was like the end of the first season. But I think it's important to have that type of representation because that's how many Latino, gay and lesbian go through.

ONE DAY AT A TIME (Netflix: 2017-2019)

- I got you.

YEIDY RIVERO

So when you talk about Latino representation on U.S. television, you have to consider two main things. You have to consider English language television, and that's Hollywood, and you have to consider Spanish language television. Most of the Spanish language television programming comes from Latin America, and the genre is telenovelas. Brazil is one of the first countries in Latin America that actually legalize marriage, gay marriage and even though it was not an immediate transformation in terms of television, you see a progressive transformation.

DUAS CARAS (TV Globo: 2007-2008)

- [SCREAM]

YEIDY RIVERO

An important telenovela was Duas Caras. But that telenovela show violence against LGBT community in Brazil.

DUAS CARAS (TV Globo: 2007-2008)

- Going for the so-called gay kiss.

YEIDY RIVERO

Because one interesting thing that is happening in Brazil is that on the one hand, it's the most progressive in terms of gay and lesbian representations. On the other hand, it's a country that has witnessed an increase in physical, you know, like crime against gay and lesbians.

NARRATOR

Streaming services have also looked to international markets to increase their subscription base. Netflix began its global expansion in 2010 and now distributes to 190 countries. As streaming services expand across the world, they appeal to new markets by offering television shows in local languages.

ELITE (Netflix: 2018-present)

- Samuel doesn't know about me.

- Which part? That you're a dealer or that you're a fag?

KATHERINE SENDER

Netflix has realized that local content is essential for its international expansion. So they're investing millions and particularly in Spanish-language shows. So they've made *Cable Girls*, which features a polyamorous and transgender relationship; *Elite*, which is set in a very posh boarding school; and *Money Heist*, which was the first Spanish show to win an international Emmy.

MONEY HEIST (Netflix: 2019-2021)

- Two men meet, and they relieve each other. Boom, boom, ciao. They don't know each other's names. Great.

- Know what's great? The way women can get it on.

NARRATOR

Contemporary content on U.S. television challenges earlier assumptions that all the gays are white, American and English-speaking. Telenovelas have begun to explore LGBTQ themes, and streaming services see international distribution as increasingly necessary to generate profits. Original content produced abroad enriches the American television landscape with more cosmopolitan, queer and trans characters and narratives.

BEYOND BINARIES

EUPHORIA (HBO: 2019-present)

- Do you think people are like 100% straight, 100% gay?

- No. Obviously, there's like bi people, asexual, pan. Sexuality is like a spectrum, you know?

- Yeah, totally.

NARRATOR

As television shows began to represent intersectional LGBTQ characters from around the world, they also challenged the safety of rigid gender and sexual binaries. Pioneered by premium cable and streaming services, current television shows include regular characters who explore more fluid gender and sexual identifications.

JEN RICHARDS

A lot of the first trans people in media were serial killers. We often associated psychosis and violence with men who want to be women. So that's certainly been true of the villains side. And the victim side, a lot of us, our first roles, our first ten roles are as murder victims, as victims of violence or as sex workers. What all of these things have in common is that they tend to reduce the trans person to a singular quality, and that that character is really only there to serve a greater purpose for other characters in the story.

I AM JAZZ (TLC: 2015-present)

- I am a teenage girl. I'm also a soccer player. I'm also an artist. I'm also transgender. And I'm proud of that.

KATHERINE SENDER

Reality television was one of the earliest places where we began to see more complex representations of LGBTQ people and that has really continued. And what's interesting is that into the mix of gay, lesbian, bisexual people on reality shows, we're also seeing transgender and non-binary people in shows like Dancing with the Stars, Are You the One?, I Am Jazz, and I Am Cait.

I AM CAIT (ABC: 2015-2016)

- I don't think I have ever been more excited about life, living my true identity and hopefully going to make a difference in the world.

JEN RICHARDS

I Am Cait was a reality show that centered on Caitlyn Jenner, and suddenly there was this person who was suddenly the voice of trans people globally.

I AM CAIT (ABC: 2015-2016)

- Caitlyn, when you came out, it was so mixed, however, because it seems like you have these transgender women of color who are going out here. And we're basically saying the same thing you were doing and nobody wanted to hear it.

JEN RICHARDS

First of all, I will always argue that the show was a net positive. I remember going to pick up dog food at my local pet food store and the owner being like, "Oh, my gosh. You're Jen. You're on 'I Am Cait.'" I've been watching that with my wife and our two teenage sons. And it prompts us to have all these conversations about gender and sexuality."

I AM CAIT (ABC: 2015-2016)

- And so to see somebody on the cover of Vanity Fair, on the Diane Sawyer interview, that is changing it for the children, especially.

NARRATOR

Reality television shows portray transgender people who challenge the flattening stereotypes that have been a staple of television and film. Fictional shows too have begun to expand limiting gender and sexual binaries in a variety of shows.

MARI BRIGHE

I think narrative television is sort of where we're seeing at least some of the best, you know, best work. I think Sense8 is particularly groundbreaking. We've trans women who gets to exist largely outside of her transness and also is queer.

SENSE 8 (Netflix: 2015-2018)

- The Biologic Preservation.

JEN RICHARDS

Her role in this kind of group of people that she's a part of is as a hacker. That's the most important part of her. It's a trans writer and director. We've got a trans actress, Jamie Clayton, playing a trans part of Naomi and her transness is part of storylines. It's included. It creates drama, but she's not reduced to it.

SENSE 8 (Netflix: 2015-2018)

- Whatever you decide to do. Just know you won't have to do it alone.

JEN RICHARDS

Part of what's so remarkable about Sense8 is that these eight people are connected and so that they experience the same things as other. It's basically making empathy into a sci-fi concept. Once one of them becomes sexually aroused, they all become sexually aroused, and they're all experiencing what the others are experiencing. So if, you know, Wolfgang, who is as a straight man, is having the same experience as Leto, who is a gay man having sex with his boyfriend, what does that make him?

MADAM SECRETARY (CBS: 2014-2019)

- I'm bisexual. You can also say pansexual or fluid or not monosexual but yeah, I'm queer.

NARRATOR

Television shows are reflecting younger audiences loosening of rigid, binary gender identities whereas in the past when we saw lesbian characters at all, they were represented as feminine, the lipstick lesbian. Now we are seeing butch women in a variety of shows.

WORK IN PROGRESS (Showtime: 2019-2021)

- Excuse me. This is the women's room.

KATHERINE SENDER

In *Work in Progress*, Abby, who self-identifies as a fat queer dyke, has this very multi-layered, complex character. And she goes against the stereotype that butch women will always end up with femme women as romantic partners by getting involved in the first series with a trans man.

WORK IN PROGRESS (Showtime: 2019-2021)

- Hi.
- Hi.

NARRATOR

Television series have also begun to explore non-binary, gender fluid and very occasionally intersex characters. This reflects cultural challenges, especially among younger viewers, to fixed binary gender identifications.

BILLIONS (Showtime: 2016-present)

- Hello, I'm Taylor. My pronouns are they, theirs, and them?

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

On *Billions*, the second season introduced this character that's actually a graduate student who is gender non-binary and they enter the firm as this kind of mathematical genius who can understand all of these complex investment numbers. And even though they have these politics that are sort of anti-capitalist and specifically anti-patriarchal and this is an incredibly patriarchal space, they thrive in this environment and end up rising faster than any of the other cisgender men.

BILLIONS (Showtime: 2016-present)

- He made you CIO.
- He did.
- It's a good fucking call.

SCHITT'S CREEK (CBC: 2015-2020)

- I'm a red wine drinker.
- That's fine.
- I only drink red wine.

NARRATOR

Some shows have also explored non-binary sexuality. 29% of queer characters in contemporary shows are bisexual or pansexual and resist being compartmentalized as either gay or straight.

SCHITT'S CREEK (CBC: 2015-2020)

- I do drink red wine. But I also drink white wine, and I've been known to sample the occasional rosé. I like the wine and not the label. Does that make sense?

SHADOWHUNTERS (Freeform: 2016-2019)

- I'm not like that. I'm just not interested in sex.
- Being a vampire made you this way?
- No. I've always been like this.

KATHERINE SENDER

So as we know, television is obsessed with sexual relationships. So a new frontier of visibility is asexual people. And asexuality really challenges the idea that you have to be sexually involved and sexually interested in order to be human.

SEX EDUCATION (Netflix: 2019-present)

- I don't want to have sex.
- Okay.

KATHERINE SENDER

And one of the most interesting shows, actually, is Sex Education with the character of Florence.

SEX EDUCATION (Netflix: 2019-present)

- Do you know what asexuality is? It's when someone has no sexual attraction to any sex or gender.
- But still want to fall in love.

KATHERINE SENDER

And she was interesting because she sought out romantic relationships, even though she wasn't interested in the sexuality part that we normally assume would go along with that.

BOJACK HORSEMAN (Netflix: 2014-2020)

- I'm going back to my job. But if anything happens here and you need me, or if you just want to hang out again, grab a drink. You should call me sometime.
- Oh, yeah. I should tell you, I'm actually asexual.
- Yeah, I know. So am I.

KATHERINE SENDER

Shows like Game of Thrones, Sirens and BoJack Horseman all offer characters that are asexual as a self-affirming identity.

NARRATOR

One interesting way to compare queer, trans and non-binary representations over the decades is to look at reboots. When shows are revived, their producer get a second chance to make roles more complex and interesting.

THE CONNERS (ABC: 2018-present)

- So Austin's your boyfriend. How come you didn't tell me?
- I don't know. I guess he's my boyfriend.

LISA HENDERSON

As we move into streaming services, there is just a race for content that I think some will be new, but also everyone is scrounging in the vault for what can be brought back.

QUEER EYE (Netflix: 2018-present)

- The original show was fighting for tolerance. Our fight is for acceptance.

LISA HENDERSON

I'd be very curious to go behind the scenes of the deal making at Netflix for the Queer Eye reboot. The producers have listened to their teachers on the subject of intersectionality. Some of the subjects of makeover are themselves gay, which tells us that style, like gayness itself, is not genetically coded.

QUEER EYE (Netflix: 2018-present)

- I went from being like this lost teenager who lost her whole family and didn't know where to go to being like a fierce queen.

EVE NG

Several remakes, the queer content has been increased. Partly, I guess, because that's seen as a way to reflect contemporary conditions of diversity. So to make white characters nonwhite, to make straight characters queer.

SHE-RA AND THE PRINCESSES OF POWER (Netflix: 2018-2020)

- Adora, Glimmer meet my dads.

NARRATOR

Children's shows are perhaps a surprising place to find more generous portrayals of race, gender and sexuality.

VINCENT DOYLE: It used to be that the only kids shows that might count on some level as LGBTQ representations were shows that could be read ironically, often by adult audiences.

SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS (Nickelodeon: 1999-present)

- Squidward, can you scoot over a little?

- Yeah, sure.

VINCENT DOYLE

We now have some kids shows that are giving us more than just subtext.

SHE-RA AND THE PRINCESSES OF POWER (Netflix: 2018-2020)

- I love you too.

MARI BRIGHE

Now we're starting to see shows that actually are subversive or just directly playing against the sort of paradigms of what is acceptable for children's television. I think the best known example right now is Steven Universe sort of breaks down this binary-ist notion that is often entrenched on children, that there are boys and there are girls, and that's all there is.

STEVEN UNIVERSE (Cartoon Network: 2013-2019)

- Oh, my gosh. Look at you now. I'm a fusion.

MARI BRIGHE

But then we come to Danger & Eggs. And it is as queer as I've ever seen a children's television show. There's an explicitly non-binary character who uses they/them pronouns, who is a person of color. The last episode of the show, everyone from this little town is at Pride. Mayor of the town is played by Angelica Ross, who's a fabulous transwoman of color actress.

DANGER & EGGS (Amazon Prime: 2017)

- I see one strategy here. Re-wish.
- What? Really? That could work?
- It better. How do you think I got my helicopter license?

BRIGHE: And though they don't explicitly note that she's a trans woman, they also don't go out of their way to make her more straight or cisgender than she should be.

DANGER & EGGS (Amazon Prime: 2017)

- Each of us has to wish together.

MARI BRIGHE

Kids shows are a little bit different from sort of the way we do mainstream television because the models of how they're produced are different. It just doesn't have the same overt production costs as you know, a large scale, TV drama. So you're not working in these sort of large studio systems where you have to navigate these complexities. They're really focused more on individual creators.

DANGER & EGGS (Amazon Prime: 2017)

- ♪ It's the same old me / It's the same old school / Just the girl who's new / To you ♪♪

NEWS CLIP

- Fallout surrounding a popular children's show, Arthur. Alabama Public Television, refusing to air a recent episode featuring a same sex marriage. Paula Faris has more on that story for us. Good morning, Paula.
- Good morning, Robin.

NARRATOR

There has been some resistance to the introduction of LGBTQ characters into children's programming. Conservative groups and public television station managers are attempting to keep images of sexual and gender diversity from young viewers. Yet parents and media activists have pushed back on this censorship and are campaigning for inclusive programming.

In the past decade, we have seen a wave of gender and sexual fluidities as more complex characters come of age. Older viewers revisit favorite shows with expanded LGBTQ possibilities. And young audiences can now enjoy television worlds that include gay, non-binary, and transgender characters. Producers have responded to industrial opportunities and cultural shifts toward more flexible and varied identities.

COMPLICATED CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

As we see an expansion of who LGBTQ characters are allowed to be, we also see more flexibility in what they're allowed to do. Gay saints were only included in narratives because they were virtuous. They were rarely allowed to have a sex life, and if they did, it was never represented on screen. Newer, queer, non-binary and trans characters can be just as complex as the heterosexual, cisgender roles that have existed for decades.

QUEER AS FOLK (Peacock: 2022)

- What up, sluts? I know you're all dying to tear each other's clothes off. Or have you're attendant take them off for you. But I want to remind everyone that we're not just fucking for fun. Okay, we're fucking for charity.

KATHERINE SENDER

I've been pretty amazed by how explicit some of the sex has become on mainstream television, and queer and trans sex has been part of that. And we can make sense of this in part because streaming services are not regulated by the Federal Communications Commission. But even network television has really begun to explore more sexually explicit queer content.

HOW TO GET AWAY WITH MURDER (ABC: 2014-2020)

- So, you know, your coworkers seem to want a show. So just say the word and we can start making out.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

On How to Get Away with Murder, one of the law students on that legal show is a gay character who is very focused on the law school stuff and also kind of promiscuous. And so he finds himself having feelings for someone reluctantly which was really interesting. And then that character ends up being HIV positive.

HOW TO GET AWAY WITH MURDER (ABC: 2014-2020)

- I'm not going to be able to enjoy any sex if I'm worried I'm putting you in danger.
- I'm on Prep.
- You have two more weeks before it works.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

In the ways in which there are serodiscordant couples, couples where one character is HIV positive and one is not. And how in today's medical industrial complex, that's actually not such a big deal. If you have access to Prep.

EVERYTHING'S GONNA BE OKAY (Freeform: 2020-2021)

- Can Jeremy and Drea come over for a threesome?
- Yeah, like over here.
- They're waiting.
- Drea I saw coming, but Jeremy?
- They're both autistic.
- Okay.

KATHERINE SENDER

A few shows have begun to explore queer sexuality through the lens of neurodivergence and physical ability.

EVERYTHING'S GONNA BE OKAY (Freeform: 2020-2021)

- You try?

KATHERINE SENDER

The show *Special*, which is based on showrunner and writer Ryan O'Connell's own experience of navigating queer sexuality as a person with cerebral palsy, has offered us probably one of the most tender sex scenes that I've ever seen when he goes to visit a sex worker.

SPECIAL (Netflix: 2021-2022)

- Oh, my God. Oh, my God.

MARI BRIGHE

In contemporary television, we're really seeing a new dichotomy evolve where we see a division between trans women who are portrayed as desirable, whether romantically, sexually, or sensually, and those who are not desired. I think one of the most interesting examples is Laverne Cox, and you can pick two show that she stars in, *Doubt*, which was on CBS and her ongoing role in *Orange Is the New Black*. In *Orange Is the New Black*, you know, desirable, attractive trans women of color on the show and then completely remove her from romantic context. Contrast that to *Doubt* where she plays an attorney who has a lengthy romantic plot, of course, for the entire season of the show, the one season that was made.

DOUBT (CBS: 2017)

- What does 10% a date mean?
- It means it's a date.
- It doesn't matter. I'm going to cancel.
- Why?
- Because I don't know what he's after. I mean, it's just a field trip.
- Maybe he wants to study the transgender flora and fauna and then go back home.

MARI BRIGHE

Portraying trans women as legitimate objects of desire, attraction and sensuality is sort of the new breaking front in trans representation.

FEEL GOOD (Netflix: 2020-2021)

- Where'd you get this?
- In jail.
- Do you still feel like an addict?
- Nope.

NARRATOR

As audiences have come to demand richer storylines, queer characters have more freedom to be complicated. We now see queer protagonists who are morally compromised, charismatic anti-heroes.

SCANDAL (ABC: 2012-2018)

- I've never been in here before.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

Scandal's Cyrus really gives us a kind of gay anti-hero who's not the lead of the show and not the clear villain, which is the historical stereotype, but in some ways a really complex character. He is loud and angry and conniving and eventually criminal.

SCANDAL (ABC: 2012-2018)

- Hello, Mr. President. What do you need?

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

Who at the same time the show manages to give him at key moments a kind of life outside of his villainous, plot driven character. So he gets a partner, he has a child, and you see how his own struggle and desire for power ends up sabotaging the very kind of normal life that he might lead if he wasn't working in the White House.

SCANDAL (ABC: 2012-2018)

- Yes. Yes. Yes.

EUPHORIA (HBO: 2019-present)

- I don't want to deal with all the fucking questions.

KATHERINE SENDER

HBO's Euphoria probably pushes furthest into this idea of complex, messy, morally ambiguous characters.

EUPHORIA (HBO: 2019-present)

- ♪ Feel the morning on my face ♪ ♪

KATHERINE SENDER

So the central character is Rue, who's a queer woman who struggles with addiction. And another central character is Jules, who is a trans woman.

EUPHORIA (HBO: 2019-present)

- You're a mess. You know that?

- So are you.

KATHERINE SENDER

The show gives us this really interesting narrative about intergenerational differences. So on the one hand, the older characters, we can see how they've been shaped by growing up in a culture of homophobia.

EUPHORIA (HBO: 2019-present)

- I spent my whole life trying to keep this part of me separate. I thought that I was doing what was best for everybody.

KATHERINE SENDER

And we see this particularly in the relationship between Cal, who's a closeted gay dad, and his son Nate, who exhibits this toxic masculinity in part because he's wrestling with his own sexual identification.

EUPHORIA (HBO: 2019-present)

- You need to take a step back, Nate.

NEWS CLIP

I need to get this warning out about this latest HBO show. Yeah, well, it's called Euphoria, Laura, and it's targeted to teens.

NARRATOR

Conservative commentators have taken issue with these challenging queer and trans representations however, feeding debates about what should be seen on screen.

NEWS CLIP

- You're pushing boundaries and you're establishing as normative these deviant sexual behaviors, transgenderism, gender fluidity, ridiculous drug use.

NARRATOR

Queer, trans and non-binary characters are part of the complex storylines we now often find on television. Conservative challenges to queer sexual expression, moral dilemmas and dark storylines reflect contemporary cultural struggles over LGBTQ inclusion. Even with such opposition, how have these more diverse and three dimensional images come about?

AGENTS OF CHANGE

NARRATOR

These more complex characters are often created by LGBTQ professionals who bring their own experience to queer and trans narratives. Showrunners, writers and actors push for more progressive representations than were possible in earlier decades.

YEIDY RIVERO

The more complex characters, you see some difference because their creators behind the scene, their writers from that specific community which actually help in the creation of the character.

THE FOSTERS (Showrunner: Peter Paige)

- And a lot of queer kids don't even go to prom. I mean, when your school can stop a boy from wearing a dress or two girls from going as dates, what's the point?

VINCENT DOYLE

One of the things that's interesting about the Fosters to me is that one of the creators is Peter Paige, who was Emmet on Queer as Folk.

QUEER AS FOLK (Showtime: 2000-2005)

- Have you ever seen anything more beautiful?

VINCENT DOYLE

And so I can't help but read The Fosters as a kind of second iteration of Queer as Folk for a younger audience. The arc of the first season of The Fosters includes the discovery of Jude's sexuality. And Jude is quite young and he discovers his attraction for his best friend. And they share a kiss, which is, I think, a first of its kind kiss on television.

THE FOSTERS (Showrunner: Peter Paige)

- ♪ There's a light sound that comes around ♪♪

LARRY GROSS

There are a number of showrunners who have amassed significant power in the industry for the usual reason, which is success. And that group are all either openly queer, openly lesbian or gay or very gay friendly and have been able to overcome resistance that one has to assume they encountered.

HOW TO GET AWAY WITH MURDER (Showrunner: Shonda Rhimes)

- It was good with you. And real.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

Shonda Rhimes is one of the most powerful showrunners in Hollywood and has really made a name for herself on representing diversity. But in a way that isn't overdetermined. Her big innovation was colorblind casting. She came up in the industry in the 2000s when it's very difficult to have characters of color leading a show. And so her way around that was to just write the characters race neutral in the script and have casting directors cast people as diverse. She's done this a little bit with gay characters as well. She's always had gay characters in her show, and her general orientation towards gay characters has been the same thing, that gay people are like everybody else. They just want love. They just want to have a relationship.

ARROW (Showrunner: Greg Berlanti)

- I wasn't with you because you saved me. I was with you because I loved you.

EVE NG

All of the DC superhero shows have queer characters, and I don't think it's an accident that they're all executive produced by Greg Berlanti. So Greg Berlanti is gay, and although some of the characters are sourced from comic book material, where the character already was gay, that's no guarantee that when it transfers to television that that will follow.

CRISIS ON EARTH-X (Creator: Greg Berlanti)

- These heroes would risk everything for the people they love, just like I would for you.

EVE NG

He, to my knowledge, hasn't spoken out the same way that Ryan Murphy has about how he's, you know, his own sexual orientation informs his production. But given the outcome, I can't help but think that that's the case.

BATWOMAN (Executive Producer: Greg Berlanti)

- Why didn't you say you were super gay?

- Kind of still trying to figure out how much to tell people.

KATHERINE SENDER

Openly gay showrunner Ryan Murphy has used his influence to explore a lot of queer and trans themes. And one of the things that I'm really kind of moved by in his work is that he often tells

stories in the past that revive a history of queer and trans experience that couldn't be told at the time.

POSE (Showrunner: Ryan Murphy)

- Prayer won't cure AIDS. Prayer won't stop the spread of HIV. Only condoms will.

EVE NG

American Horror Story is an anthology series. One season, which is set in the 1950s, Sarah Paulson plays a lesbian who is sent to conversion therapy. And so part of the horror of that season, which was called Asylum, is depicting what gay and lesbian people actually went through in this country. So it's using the genre of horror, which often deals with the unreal to deal with very real horrors.

AMERICAN HORROR STORY: ASYLUM (Showrunner: Ryan Murphy)

- We're going to slay that monster together, you and I.
- No, let me out of here.

NARRATOR

The increasing acceptance, even celebration of queer and occasionally transgender professionals behind the camera opens up space for LGBTQ actors to embody the characters they create.

SENSE 8 (Showrunners: Lana and Lilly Wachowski)

- A notch up from "serial killer who talks with a soft lisp and wears mascara."
- I've been typecast. This is prison for an actor.

LARRY GROSS

One of the really interesting challenges and questions now is who gets to play the gay roles that are now becoming available? As the possibilities expand there's a natural expectation and assumption that actors should be able to benefit from that. But we still see straight actors to a great extent, playing the gay roles that are becoming available.

KATHERINE SENDER

There's an increasing expectation from audiences and people in the business that when there are queer and trans roles, these roles should be played by queer and trans actors. And the assumption is that they bring more authenticity to those roles. And also it's an economic issue. They deserve to get the work.

MARI BRIGHE

We're still really struggling to get trans actresses and trans actors to play trans roles. And I think that remains one of the biggest struggles in really getting authenticity to trans representation.

AMERICAN HORROR STORY: HOTEL (Showrunner: Ryan Murphy)

- Why is it so good with you?
- Because you're an orphan. Orphans love girls like me because it's like Mommy and Daddy are both in the room.

JEN RICHARDS

I believe there's a direct link between cis men playing trans women and violence against trans women. The situation is typically that a man who is straight gets involved with a trans woman and then is anxious about his friends finding out that he's with a trans woman because he knows his friends are going to think he's either gay or somehow less masculine. But that is, to me, a causal link that can be addressed by simply stopping the practice of casting cis men as trans women.

MARI BRIGHE

If you're going to continue to place cisgender men in the role of trans women, what you're continually reinforcing is that trans women aren't really women. We are just cis men in disguise.

JEN RICHARDS

There's been a lot of talk in Hollywood about the trans moment. For me, it's incredibly disingenuous. Certainly trans issues are being discussed. It's certainly part of the public discourse. But if you look in Hollywood at the number of trans people who actually have full time employment in the industry or who have any kind of power in the industry, we're looking at a laughable number of people.

NARRATOR

As streaming services increase the demand for original content, more roles became available for LGBTQ creators, both behind and in front of the camera. Outside the mainstream, queer, non-binary and trans creatives have greater freedom to produce innovative content on YouTube and other online video sharing platforms.

THESE THEMES (Showrunner: Gretchen Wylder)

- Queer Identities 101.
- Ready.

KATHERINE SENDER

Actors, writers and showrunners have a great deal more creative freedom when it comes to web series. These are low-budget, independent, self-financed productions that are distributed online, and they're usually made both by and for niche audiences who are not seeing themselves represented in mainstream television.

THESE THEMES (Showrunner: Gretchen Wylder)

- Feminine, butches, old school butches, dykes, diesel dykes, lesbians.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

And so when we talk about representation in television, we usually talk about representation in front of the camera. Who do we see? In web series representation, behind the camera is super important. So the people writing these series, producing the series, sometimes even down to the below the line crew in terms of camera operators and boom operators genuinely tend to be more diverse because there are people who have been excluded from the industry and are looking for a way in.

HER STORY (Showrunners: Jen Richards and Laura Zak)

- He can't take his eyes off you.
- Really? Is he cute?
- Oh, yeah. Even by your standards.

MARI BRIGHE

Her Story has the most amount of trans experience I think I've ever seen packed into a really short 45-minute or an hour package.

JEN RICHARDS

Here is a project that that was about two trans women with trans actors playing those parts and a script written by a trans woman and directed by another trans woman that kind of buy in from across the community had just never occurred before in a major media project.

HER STORY (Showrunners: Jen Richards and Laura Zak)

- Where have you been?
- Out.
- I wonder if she would still like you if she knew who you were.
- Don't start that.

JEN RICHARDS

When we finally released it for free on YouTube, we were shocked at how quickly it grew an audience, how excited and enthusiastic that audience was. And then it went on to-- it just kept winning awards. It won a Peabody and a Gotham Award and was eventually nominated for an Emmy.

BROWN GIRLS (Showrunners: Fatima Asghar and Sam Bailey)

- I've been sleeping with women. I'm queer.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

Most people on the web series market are really looking for a bigger development deal, right? They're putting the show online as almost like their pilot, and they're hoping that a network will pick it up. And of course, if the network does, it can be hugely beneficial.

BROWN GIRLS (Showrunners: Fatima Asghar and Sam Bailey)

- I've known that since you were a kid, since you would have all your Barbies have orgies and fuck each other.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

Brown Girls is a show that really celebrates friendship between women of color. It follows a queer Muslim woman and her best friend who is a Black woman and a singer. And they both have their own individual struggles.

BROWN GIRLS (Showrunners: Fatima Asghar and Sam Bailey)

- Guys, I think I messed everything up.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

So within a few months of the show, they were meeting with networks to pitch it. And this is something that's happened in the web series market where it is a space for new talent. So if you can show that you have an audience and a voice, the networks will pay attention.

COUPLE-ISH (Showrunner: K Alexander)

- This is Rachel. She's my girl.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

So because web series don't have a network behind them marketing the show creators end up marketing their own shows, and they have to do that through social media.

COUPLE-ISH (Showrunner: K Alexander)

- Well, I have this one kind of famous follower, and she has like 30,000 followers and she re-blogged it.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

The challenge with social media is that these are platforms that are run by corporations. They are now all driven by algorithms, and algorithms are inherently discriminatory. So you will hear creators sometimes talk about their tweets or their posts about their show getting taken down, censored, because the content is deemed unacceptable.

NARRATOR

The mainstream television industry is increasingly valuing queer, non-binary and transgender actors, writers and showrunners and when talented creatives have not been given access to that industry, they've made their own content, often hoping that their distinctive stories will be taken up by a major distributor. This diversifies the narratives and the labor force at the center of the television industry.

FANS TALK BACK

NARRATOR

Social media platforms encourage audiences to share their love for programs with LGBTQ content. Fans upload their favorite shows to informal streaming services to spread queer and trans content across the globe.

RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE (Logo, VH1, MTV: 2009-present)

- Now, this season, our mission is simple. To take over the mothertuckin' world.

VINCENT DOYLE

I think it's fair to say that the producers of RuPaul's Drag Race were on some level aware of the fact and perhaps even designed the show in such a way that it could be distributed by less than legal means, shall we say, by fans taking it up, recirculating that content, making it available on streaming services through file downloads. In the first episode of Season 10, he makes a comment that the mission that year on the show is to take over the mothertuckin' world. And so I thought the comment was, if not disingenuous, maybe a kind of winking acknowledgment of the fact that the audience for RuPaul's Drag Race at this stage is already global, at that global reach of the show has been driven by networked culture that people encountered it through digital media and recirculated it themselves.

RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE HOLLAND

- Hello, ladies. Welcome to Drag Race Holland.

KATHERINE SENDER

We can see the informal distribution of shows as a way that producers can kind of gauge the interest in having local adaptations. So with RuPaul's Drag Race, we now see locally produced versions in a dozen countries.

RUPAL'S DRAG RACE PROMO

- You're watching the BBC.

NARRATOR

Television distributors and showrunners have used social media as a promotion device, boosting audience interest in new shows.

EVE NG

One of the first shows that incorporated social media very successfully and had queer content that it hyped up on social media was Pretty Little Liars.

PRETTY LITTLE LIARS (Freeform: 2010-2017)

- Dinner and a movie. I think there's a word for that. What's it called?

EVE NG: Before the series began, fans were excited because it was based on a book series by Sara Shepard, and one of the characters Emily Fields was bisexual in the book series. And before the first season, it was clear that that would be part of the series in some way.

PRETTY LITTLE LIARS (Freeform: 2010-2017)

- Are you Emily Fields?

- Yes.

EVE NG

A male character was introduced who seemed like he might be a love interest for Emily. Fans were pretty vocal about the fact that, yes, maybe she was bisexual in the books but she seemed to be a lesbian all through season one. So giving her a male love interest would be kind of a betrayal.

NARRATOR

Fans also mobilized to critique shallow and disappointing representations that they consider queer baiting.

RIZZOLI & ISLES (TNT: 2010-2016)

- I like Tommy a lot, but I love you.

EVE NG

Queer baiting means accusations that show producers, the showrunners, the writers, the actors, anyone in the creative team were intentionally showing two characters of the same sex interacting in emotional and physically intimate ways.

SHERLOCK (PBS: 2010-2017)

- For the table, it's more romantic.

- I'm not his date.

EVE NG

But either not delivering it or giving us queer characters, but killing one of them.

BLACK LIGHTNING (THE CW: 2018-2021)

- I'm Jamillah Olsen, reporting from--

NARRATOR

Fans pay close attention to an extreme version of queer baiting. The Bury Your Gays strategy. Here writers introduce queer characters and then kill them off for a cheap plot point, usually just after they've had sex for the first time.

THE 100 (THE CW: 2014-2020)

- When do you leave?

- Now.

KATHERINE SENDER

2016 was a Bury Your Gays bloodbath and particularly with lesbian characters. And one notorious example was with the show *The 100* where one of the fan favorites, Lexa, was killed off just after she had sex with Clarke, another character for the first time. This created a social media storm where fans were outraged about this plot turn. The writers tried to respond to the fans in the last episode, but it really was not very satisfactory.

THE 100 (THE CW: 2014-2020)

- I'm not her, Clarke.
- I know.

LA REINA DEL SUR (Telemundo: 2011-present)

- Sorry, I mistook you for someone else.
- What a shame, a woman as beautiful as you making mistaking me for another.

YEIDY RIVERO

In 2011, Telemundo produced *La Reina del Sur*. That show, you had a very important lesbian character. At the end, the potential love relationship disappears because one of the main lovers was killed. But what is important? Number one, it was very popular with the audience. Number two, I was paying attention online and there were a lot of discussions. And they created like this final, like love story scene between these two characters with the possibility of having a happy ending.

NARRATOR

LGBTQ fans use social media to engage with content that they find frustrating and sad. They hold writers accountable for the fate of their queer and trans characters, and they do their own reparative work by editing scenes together in new ways to give disappointing storylines a happy ending.

COMPLEXITY IN CONTEXT

THIRTEEN REASONS WHY (Netflix: 2017-2020)

- Holy shit. Your prom royalty. Alex Standall and Charlie St. George.

NARRATOR

With the advent of streaming services, intense competition for global audiences and advocacy from television industry professionals and fans, today's television landscape features LGBTQ representations like never before. Many shows offer a sustained, complex and often intersectional queer, non-binary and transgender narratives. But as LGBTQ visibility has grown, we are also witnessing a backlash in our courts, our legislatures and on our streets. Violence and political exclusion mark resistance to the increased presence of LGBTQ people in everyday life.

KATHERINE SENDER

When we look at television, things seem fairly rosy, particularly for gay and lesbian people, perhaps less so for trans, non-binary, pansexual people. But I'm wondering sometimes whether there's a bit of a lag between what's happening on television and what's happening in real life. Television isn't really talking about the ways that LGBT people are still struggling, and I'm thinking particularly around anti-gay violence, which we're still seeing.

NEWS CLIPS

- Over my left shoulder, you can see the Pulse nightclub. It's about a block from where...
- 49 people were murdered in cold blood early Sunday morning.

RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE (Logo, VH1, MTV: 2009-present)

- It was a very traumatic situation for everybody.
- We never expected a tragedy like this would happen in our community or happen in our clubs because we thought that we finally built a safe place for our community.

NEWS CLIPS

- This is not the only community searching for justice.
- Seven reported transgender murders in the first two months of this year. Louisiana, South Dakota.

JEN RICHARDS

A lot of us have discussed the backlash to the advance of trans rights and to the rapid increase in trans visibility in media. I will say that those of us who were a pivotal part of making that moment happen, we all knew that the backlash was inevitable. That's just part of the way that things unfold. But because the moment happens so much quicker and was so much bigger than we thought, none of us was really prepared for how vicious the backlash was. But in terms of actually measuring that backlash and taking account for it, it becomes a little bit more complicated. We did see an increase in the number of what we call bathroom laws, which tried to legislate trans people out of public space, essentially by not allowing them to use public facilities that corresponded with their gender.

NEWS CLIP

- The appeals court upheld U.S. Education Department regulations that require public schools to treat transgender students consistent with their gender identity.

NARRATOR

We have seen a restriction on transgender people's rights to participate in public life through bathroom laws, in athletics and in the military. And the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v Wade*, which guaranteed access to abortion, suggests that the right to privacy that underpins LGBTQ rights cannot be taken for granted. Local and state elected officials are banning LGBTQ content in libraries and preventing teachers from acknowledging same sex relationships. But the business of television has little commitment to LGBTQ civil rights. And once the streaming

services have used queer and trans images to attract new subscribers, there are no guarantees of ongoing LGBTQ representations.

KATHERINE SENDER

Well, we still need to keep an eye on things as we go forward, and one of my concerns is with so much competition between streamers right now, I'm just wondering whether they're just going to go back to needing the largest single audiences and then turning their back on material that's considered too niche to get those audience sizes.

I LOVE DICK (Amazon Prime: 2016-2017)

- The truth is, I just wish that you'd come and sleep in my bed with me tonight.

EVE NG

Amazon had also, I think, really interesting shows. I Love Dick and One Mississippi, which is not just a show that has a lesbian lead but a butch lesbian. So if we're talking about continuing deficiencies of representations, that's one and both of those shows were just canceled with the reasoning that Amazon is aiming for like, you know, broader audiences.

NARRATOR

We've recently seen the cancelation of a quarter of all programs with central LGBTQ characters. Programmers have abandoned queer, non-binary and trans narratives when their PR work is done.

AYMAR JEAN CHRISTIAN

They're sort of baiting queer fans by saying, hey, we're going to give you this really exciting queer show like House of Cards with this queer president that's polyamorous or Orange is the New Black with all these intersectional women. And then once they have that audience and they have the critical legibility, they're like, Okay, we're going to do everything else right now. History tells us that eventually they're going to go towards a much broader audience and we will again be marginalized on these platforms and have to seek new platforms to get our stories out there.

POSE (FX: 2018-2021)

- Every generation thinks that they're going to be the ones that are finally invited to the party. Put your glass slippers away, Transerella. It ain't never going to happen.
- Really?

LISA HENDERSON

So with the expansion, with this new more-ness comes different kinds of characters. But we still have to keep pushing. Getting more makes us want more. And I think that's as it should be.

NARRATOR

The visibility and contours of LGBTQ images on U.S. television are shaped by three powerful forces. The changing demands of the television industry, cultural struggles over the presence of LGBTQ people in public life, and producers, audiences and activists who want to see a rich and

diverse world that resembles their everyday experience. Business, politics and publics are in an ongoing struggle to define who is America on television screens across the globe.

BLACK MIRROR: SAN JUNIPERO (Netflix: 2016)

- ♪ Ooh, baby, do you know what that's worth? / Ooh, Heaven is a place on Earth ♪

[END]