Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Television Characters

by David A. Wyatt
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For several years now I have been trying to compile a list of television programs that have included gay/lesbian/bisexual characters as a part of their regular (or semi-regular) casts. Many shows have `dealt' with sexual orientation in a single episode or story line, but just how many have included gay, lesbian or bisexual characters on a regular (or recurring) basis? This is the list I have. My intention is to keep the list to network and widely-syndicated entertainment shows in the English language.

To be listed a character should have appeared in at least three episodes and be explicitly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered. Effeminate (but not gay) male characters, manish (but not lesbian) female characters, and gender shifting science fiction characters are generally not listed. For the purposes of this list, a character is described as `recurring' if he or she has appeared in at least three (3) episodes.

If you can recall any other shows, or can correct errors or omissions in this list, please e-mail to: dawwg@shaw.ca

The latest version of this list is always available on the World Wide Web at the URL: http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~wyatt/tv-characters.html

1.1 The TV networks

- United States of America
  - ABC (American Broadcasting Companies, Inc.) 1948-present
  - Bravo 1980-present
  - CBS (Columbia Broadcasting System/CBS Inc.) 1948-present
  - Comedy Central 1991-present
  - CW 2006-present (merger of UPN and WB)
  - Fox (Fox Broadcasting Company) 1986-present
  - FX 1994-present
  - HBO (Home Box Office) 1975-present
  - here/tv
  - Lifetime Television 1984-present
  - Logo
  - MTV (Music Television) 1981-present
  - NBC (National Broadcasting Company) 1944-present
  - The N (Nickelodeon) 1997-present
  - PBS (Public Broadcasting System)
  - Showtime 1988-present
  - UPN (Universal Paramount Network) 1995-2006
  - USA (USA Cable Network) 1977-present
  - VH-1 1985-present
  - WB (Warner Brothers) 1995-2006

- Australia
  - ABCTV (Australian Broadcasting Corporation)
  - 9NA (Nine Network Australia)
  - TEN (Network Ten)
  - 7N (Seven Network)

- Canada
  - APTN (Aboriginal Peoples’ Television Network)
  - Bravo Canada
  - CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) 1953-present
  - CityTV
  - CTV (Canadian Television)
  - CGS (CanWest Global System), became "Global"
  - Life (Life Network)
  - The Movie Network
  - PrideVision, became "OutTV" circa 2005
  - Showcase
  - Teletoon

- United Kingdom
  - BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)
  - C4 (Channel 4)
  - C5 (Channel 5)
  - Granada
  - ITV (Independent Television)
  - LWT (London Weekend Television)
  - Sky One

- Ireland
  - RTE (Radio Telefis Eireann)

- South Africa
  - SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation)

- New Zealand
  - TVNZ (TV New Zealand)

1.2 Program Index

[version=10 September 2016 (overall)]

2.0 The Shows and Characters

2.1 1961 - 1970
The Roads to Freedom (drama) BBC 1970, seen on PBS 1971
- Daniel Sereno (Daniel Massey)

Paris on the eve of the Second World War. Based on the novel trilogy of the same name, by Jean-Paul Sartre.

2.2 1971 - 1980

2.3 1981 - 1990

2.4 1991 - 2000

2.5 2001 - present

3.0 Some Also Rans

Three's Company (sitcom) ABC 1977-1984. Archetype of the airhead sitcom. The premise of the living arrangements was that the landlord would only allow Jack to live with Janet and Chrissy if he was gay. [I guess some things were morally acceptable and others weren't.] No 'really' gay characters, though.

Days of Our Lives (daytime serial drama) NBC 1965-present. In 1977 the unhappily married Sharon Duval (Sally Stark) admitted to her dear friend Julie Williams that she was bisexual and was in love with her. The story line was quickly wrapped up when problems broke out backstage among head writer Pat Falken Smith and the NBC top brass.

Dallas (serial drama) CBS 1978-1991. Serial drama set among Texas oil barons. In 1978 J.R. Ewing (Larry Hagman) schemed to have his niece Lucy (Charlene Tilton) married to Kit Mainwaring (Mark Wheeler), the heir of the Mainwaring Oil Company. Lucy was smitten by the handsome young man but it was not to be... Kit had just broken up with his boyfriend. (2 episodes.)

Golden Girls (sitcom) NBC 1985-1992. Blanche's gay brother Clayton Farnsworth (Monte Markham) appeared twice. In another episode Dorothy's lesbian friend Jean appeared. The pilot for Golden Girls included a gay cook/houseboy as a regular cast member, but the character was eliminated when series production began.

Star Trek: The Next Generation (science fiction) Syndicated 1987-1994. Dr. Crusher's orderly in an unproduced first season script, Ensign Freeman, was supposed to be gay. A 1991 promise by series creator Gene Roddenberry to introduce minor regular gay characters during the 1991/92 season was reneged on by Paramount after Roddenberry's death. Two other episodes touched on orientation identity issues: "The Outcast" (1992) ("heterosexual" of the gender neutral J'naii people de-oriented by psychotherapy) and "The Host" (1991) (Trill object of affections of female crewmember changes hosts and therefore outward gender). Star Trek: Deep Space 9, in the episode "Rejoined," also used the Trill host-symbiot construct to portray love between two Trills, now both female.

Roc (sitcom) FOX 1991-1994 An interracial gay couple Russell Emerson (Richard Roundtree) and _______? ( ) appeared twice.

In the Life (talk/variety) PBS 1992-2012. Monthly, then quarterly show focusing on gay and lesbian life in the US. Some PBS stations elected not to broadcast it. No roles (therefore no gay characters). In the Life's website is http://inthelifetv.org.

Hope and Gloria (sitcom) NBC 1995-1996. Hair stylist Isaac (Eric Allan Kramer) appeared in the first few episodes but was quickly written out.

Babylon 5 (science fiction) syndicated 1993-present. Susan Ivanova (Claudia Christian) and Talia Winters (Andrea Thompson) had an implied lesbian relationship. In an episode after Talia's character was written out, Susan confesses that she loved Talia.

Murder One (legal drama) ABC 1995-1997. Publicity for this show included the news that one of the minor recurring characters was gay. Most watchers assumed that character would be the lead lawyer's legal assistant Louis Heinsbergen (John Fleck 1995-1996) but the revelation seemed never to occur. [One email correspondent reported having seen the "coming out" episode in Germany, but that it was never broadcast in the U.S.]

F Troop (sitcom) ABC 1965-1967. Before there were overt gay characters on television there were coded representations, manish women and effeminate men. One such character was Roaring Chicken (Edward Everett Horton), the Hekawi medicine man on Star Trek: Deep Space 9.

Saturday Night Live (sketch comedy/variety) NBC 1975-present. After more than twenty years of supposedly pushing the envelope of television conventions, SNL has yet to produce a regular or recurring gay, lesbian or bisexual character. (Although there have been many close encounters: Franz (Kevin Nealon 1986-1995) once experienced a moment of clarity about his affection for bodybuilding buddy Hans (Dana Carvey 1986-1992); androgynous Pat (Julia Sweeney 1990-1994) kept everyone guessing; and out actor Terry Sweeney 1985-1986 played several one-off gay characters but is probably best remembered for his Nancy Reagan). In the fall of 1996 an animated segment titled "The Ambiguously Gay Duo" began appearing irregularly, featuring Ace (Stephen Colbert [voice]) and Gary (Steve Carell [voice]), two superheroes battling evil and patting each other on the behind. In a 2011 appearance, Ace and Gary became unanimated, played by John Hamm and Jimmy Fallon. [Did Stuart Smalley, a member of several twelve step programs (Al Franken) ever discuss his sexual orientation? Further information requested.]

Keeping Up Appearances (sitcom) [U.K.] 1990-1993. We never saw Mrs. Bucket's son Sheridan (or even heard his voice), but he called his mummy regularly from college, usually to ask for money or talk about his very best friend Tarquin.
4.0 Some That Don't Belong

The Lone Ranger (western) ABC 1949-1957 (radio 1933-1955). What would you say if I told you 'kemo sabe' translated as "longtime companion"?

Batman (comic-book drama) ABC 1966-1968. This was the story of a bachelor millionaire named Bruce who kept house with a teenaged lad named Dick. Bruce and his young ward Dick went everywhere together and dressed in capes and tights to combat the villains of Gotham City. As Batman, Bruce was completely tongue-tied whenever villain Cat-Woman ever suggested anything remotely sexual. [There were, of course, no gay characters in Batman, but one might wonder about Louie the Lilac (Milton Berle).]

Sesame Street (children's education) PBS and worldwide syndication 1969-present. Just who are Ernie and Bert? Those two guys living together for all these years, sharing a bedroom... And why is it Bert is always so interested in Ernie's baths? [No children's show would depict a male couple among its menagerie of characters. Would it?]

It can also be said with some certainty that

- Peppermint Patty and Marcie [various Peanuts specials since 1965, CBS],
- Spin Evans (Tim Considine) and Marty Markham (David Stollery) [Spin and Marty and The Further Adventures of Spin and Marty (children's adventure) broadcast within Mickey Mouse Club, (children's anthology) ABC 1955-1959],
- Frank and Joe Hardy (Parker Stevenson and Shaun Cassidy) [Hardy Boys (detective drama) ABC 1977-1987?], and
- Xena (Lucy Lawless) and Gabrielle (Renée O'Connor) [Xena: Warrior Princess (adventure) [U.S.A. Syndication] 1995-2001] were not gay couples, no matter how fondly they may be remembered as such!

5.0 References

Individuals interested in current events and commentary about the depiction of GLBT characters in American mass culture are recommended to check out Logo's brother and sister sites: AfterElton (http://www.afterelton.com/) and AfterEllen (http://www.afterellen.com/).

Budd, Dave `DeaconBlu', ed., The Definitive UK Sitcom List, a compilation posted monthly to the USEnet newsgroups alt.comedy.british and rec.arts.tv.uk by zlslida@fs1.mcc.ac.uk (DeaconBlu), and hosted at the Internet gopher site gopher://info.mcc.ac.uk:70/11/miscellany/sitcom.


Frutkin, Alan, "The Best Fall Television," The Advocate, Number 742, 16 September 1997, p55.


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Mortimer, Carol, "Gay TV," 1996. A weekly article posted (and reposted) to several Internet locations, including the USEnet forum soc.motss and the World Wide Web URL: http://pages.prodigy.com/NJ/carol_mortimer/gay_tv_menu.html


The contributions and assistance of many helpful Internet Email correspondents, and USEnet and GayNet readers is gratefully acknowledged.
The number of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender characters in films released by the seven major Hollywood studios held steady in 2015, but many were included only to be the butt of a joke and an overwhelming majority of them were white or male, according to a new report by GLAAD, formerly known as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. While the overall percentage of such characters in films stayed the same, the advocacy group said in its fourth annual report that a closer look at the data revealed 2015 to have been a less inclusive year on the big screen by almost every other measure. Yet, lesbian and bisexual characters might be harder to find this upcoming season. Showtime had a better year in terms of representation with lesbian and bisexual characters on Masters of Sex, Episodes and Ray Donovan. They also featured the documentaries The L Word: Mississippi (which came out in 2014) and Knock, Knock, It’s Tig Notaro.Â Faking It received kudos for it’s multiple queer characters and its intersex storyline, which is exceedingly rare to find on television. Scream and Finding Carter both featured queer supporting characters and reality shows Real World Skeletons, Catfish, and Laverne Cox presents: The T Word also had stories that revolved around queer and trans people. THERE has never been a gay character in a WWE storyline, and McMahon says that they are working with organisation GLAAD. By James Orr. 11 Aug 2016, 14:40. Updated: 11 Aug 2016, 16:22. WWE have confirmed that they will soon start to have LGBT characters in their programming. WWE Chief Brand Officer Stephanie McMahon, daughter of owner Vince, said that they are speaking with organisation GLAAD about how to portray the storyline appropriately. 4.