

Media representation of the queer



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Representation of Queer in Media

The queer are the sexual and gender minority groups in the society. They may include the lesbians, gay, intersexual, and the transgender in the community. They form part of the larger LGBTQI communities. For a long time, this group of people had been denied access and representation in the media in most of the countries. The media owners and policy makers have often discriminated against their sexual orientation by having policies that keep them off the media dominance. The underrepresentation of this in the media has sparked controversy and heated debates across the world as the victims try to seek an end to these discriminatory practices and even attract the audience of the followers.

Before 1997, the queer in the US were not represented in the media. Also, the media did not identify with the queer and did not give them any airtime. Topics about homosexuality were avoided. This situation prompted Ellen DeGeneres to be the first media personality to publicly declare her sexuality as a lesbian in 1997. Her move triggered media corporations in America and across the world to begin acknowledging the queer among them. After her bold step, DeGeneres received several accolades from different media organizations including the Entertainment Weekly, the *Time* magazine, Oprah, and the ABC. *Time* Magazine honored her as the entertainer of the year while Oprah hosted her on one of her shows. ABC organised a program where DeGeneres would feature as the host for the talk show. DeGeneres even got a special invitation to the White House where the then Vice President-Al Gore appreciated her for initiating openness about sexual orientation in Hollywood.

DeGeneres had successfully made the media recognise the LGBTQI people and media personnel in a special way. She opened up avenues in the media where the queer could share about their lives and sexuality. Her bold move also attracted an audience that got interested in the issue. Initially, the few shows that dealt with issues of sexuality were only held at night as per the laws and policies regulating media activity. Holding any shows of that nature during the day was considered unprofessional and illegal. However, DeGeneres' move prompted Oprah to bring about the much needed changes in the media industry by hosting her during the day. This instance further depicted the media's readiness to embrace the idea of a society that does not discriminate against the queer.

DeGeneres' move also set the pace in the media as the various personalities adopted a new way of handling queer guests. Media moderators and persons seeking to interview her on air for example Oprah had to take on the role of therapists in an attempt to help such individuals discover themselves and appreciate their sexuality. For example, Oprah was tasked with the duty of helping DeGeneres discuss her sexuality by asking her relevant questions that also lead to her appreciation and openness during the session. These therapeutic sessions were helpful as they also provided an opportunity to the said persons to confess and get some relief during the sessions. The public confessions helped the victims achieve utmost honesty and even helped them live an honest public life that was satisfactory and led to personal authenticity. DeGeneres asserts that the sessions helped her get some relief as she was able to release the heavy burden of having to live with fear about her sexuality. Therefore, the media played an essential role in enhancing the

lives of the queer as they regain their self- esteem from sharing their experiences as they live in their sexuality.

The transformation in the media to accommodate the queer helped in changing the audience attitudes towards the queer. Traditionally, the audience was homophobic and could discriminate content from homosexual people. This led to a situation where the content about or by the queer failed to attain a desirable audience. Also, the queer had the fear of going public in the media and few would volunteer to have their stories published in the media. Some queer even reprimanded and promoted fear among the few fellow queer that were willing to share their experiences across the media.

The bad perception of the queer had immensely contributed to the politicization governing gay representation in the media since these politics would only allow popular sexuality like heterosexuality. Therefore the laws did not allow the media to showcase the beliefs and practices of the queer in the community. However, over time, the situation has been changing slowly as the gay people have had media that centers on their sexuality. Such include the *Curve* and the *Time* , which was made for the gay audience. These platforms have replaced the former low lying traditional media shows like *The Jack Benny Show* that presented homosexuality in a much hidden manner that an audience that was not keen enough could hardly notice.

The sections of the media that address queer sexuality help in campaigning for a society that is well informed and appreciates queer sexuality. It was also a platform for most gay persons to confess about their sexuality and

achieve personal satisfaction and fulfillment in opening up as a way of doing away with the burden of living the secretive life of homosexuality (Avila-Saavedra, 2009). The media publicity helped in enhancing a community that upholds diversity and further prompted the tolerance of the community to embrace the idea of queer sexuality. It further facilitated the control the prejudice ousted against the gay people. It is in such platforms that the conservative audience would protest against the media attention given to the queer claiming that it was against the traditions and family culture as seen with Ellen's case. However, it successfully made it possible for these sections of the community to appreciate and defend the queer. For instance, DeGeneres' mother eventually understands and defends her daughter's sexuality when she reprimands a person that tries to illusion DeGeneres as a sick person for choosing to be lesbian. These media sessions helped in making the larger heterosexual population embrace the homosexuals as an important part of the society.

In Thailand, the situation is very different from the US and other western countries since homosexuality is well accepted in the community. The audience and participants in the media bot mainstream and social have comfortably addressed the issues of homosexuality at length. Recently, there has been a festival in recognition of the pieces in media that recognize and talk about homosexuality. It features and awards movies, narratives and media pieces that are based on the issue. It attracts people that share the idea of appreciating the queer from all over the world.

Queer Teen's Media

Teen's media comprises of the part of media that deals with content concentrates on the lives of the teens as they transit to adulthood. Teen's media mainly revolves around the teenagers lives in respect to their self-discovery, physical changes and growth. Teens are at the epitome of the exploring life and often depict the characteristics of highly sexual behavior and drug use. An individual is likely to discover their sexual orientation, whether heterosexual or queer, during teenage. Therefore, media that focuses on this age group is likely to cover the issues of homosexuality and heterosexuality as experienced by teenagers. The coverage of the queer behavior has however been dismal and often bears the themes of discrimination, violence, coming up and integration within the society at large. *Skins* is a perfect example of a television series that covers the issue of sexuality as experienced by the characters of Maxxie, Dale, and the rest of the boys as well as Effy, the young teenage girl.

Maxxie begins manifesting his traits as a homosexual and the rest of the boys soon realize it. He often lives in isolation as everyone avoids his company for fear of being associated with gays. This instance explains the community's perception and homophobic behavior. Maxxie's isolation is also representative of the common attitudes of the community against the homosexuals. The media associates homosexuality especially of the teen boys to femininity and often takes away the gender identity of an individual. For instance, Maxxie is shown to be wearing pink outfit, normally associated with girls and women. Such instances further show that the media producers are biased in the selection of their cast and the props they use on the characters.

Besides the victimization and the isolation that Maxxie has to deal with, there is more eminent danger of harassment and violence that he encounters from the gang of the boys. These boys, who are mostly his age mates, in one of the harassment escapades see him at their compound. The cinematography techniques used in the scene further shows the discrimination among the media producers as the framing isolates Maxxie even though his father was in the same vicinity, yet the other boys, believed to be heterosexuals are presented as a group. The boys are all dressed in similar outfits depicting their unity and uniform behavior as well as the sexual orientation. They hide with the hedges as they hurl homophobic insults and statements at Maxxie and one of them ridicules Maxxie by openly describing how homosexuals have sex. All these culminate to the media activity of demonizing homosexuality and even promoting a homophobic society.

Physical violence is also prominent in queer teen's media as scenes of homosexual scenes are presented. For example, in *Skin*, Maxxie is referred to by a name that is attributable to his sexual orientation. The name is provocative and often annoys him. In addition to irritating him by calling him by this name, the boys go ahead and run after him when still calling him names associated with his sexual orientation. As he tries to run, they catch up with him and they whip him as they overpower him. Such scenes in queer teen media showcase instances when the queer teens are beaten up for professing their homosexuality. The same scenarios may still occur in adulthood although they are minimal and may never reach the media or will be covered up with other stories.

There are distinct differences in how the media presents violence against heterosexuals and homosexual teens regarding the approach and resolution. In most homosexuals' cases, as seen in Maxxie's, the victims remain defenseless and are vulnerable to attacks at any time. However, for the heterosexuals, the violence is mainly blamed on other factors such as drugging and inappropriate dressing as seen in the case of Effy. She is sexually assaulted but it is blamed on her dressing and the drugs she had taken but Maxxie was attacked for no good reason. The two resolve their situations differently with the perpetrators in Maxxie's case trying to appeal to him by giving him sexual confidence that he was not the only gay person in the group as Dale kisses him. He easily gets over the fact of being harassed for his sexuality and even engages the perpetrator in a consented kiss that covers up for the violence. However, in the case of the heterosexuals, Effy gets convinced that she was drugged and even adds some more drugs to get over the guilt and trauma of being assaulted.

Coming out is the Issue of Teen's Media

Teen's queer media mostly portrays the teens as having difficulties in coming out. In most cases they do not know how they can handle the discovery that they are homosexual since they can barely disclose such status with anyone around them for fear of victimization. They, therefore, try as much to keep hiding their sexuality status and only keep it known among their partners. More fear is promoted in the sense that the few that try to publicize their sexuality are extremely victimized by those that come to know of this facts. As witnessed in Maxxie's case where his friends harass him both verbally and physically, queer media is seen to discourage the

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teenage audience from coming out and exposing information about their sexuality since people will use the information against them. Dale in *Skins* seems to be living harmoniously and in peace with the rest of his crew of teenage boys, yet he was gay. Holding the information made the rest of the crew involve him in their endeavors since they all believed that he was homosexual until when he forced a kiss on Maxxie. From such scenarios, teenagers are encouraged to keep low about their sexuality to ensure that they do not attract the attention of the peers and the fellow members of the community.

The media also does not present the teens with chances of coming out as even teen media focus on the topics and issues that are appealing to the majority of the audience. Homosexuality is not among the attractive topics in teen media. Therefore, any content that seems to be encouraging the practice is withheld.

Narratives of teens' coming out to non-normative sexuality

There has been efforts across by various bodies and literary authors as well as the other artists to address the issue of coming out among the teens.

Narratives have been the most popular forms with several authors creating stories with themes of homosexuality and the issues of coming out.

Homosexuality and other queer sexual behaviors have often been taken to be offensive and only a few authors wish to present plots of teens coming out as they would be encouraging homosexuality in real life. In most cases, some of the authors present the teen characters as they explore their sexual lives and once they discover that they have non normative sexuality, their

participation in the plots is significantly reduced as most characters are presented to be against the idea. In some works, the characters disappear completely and their roles taken over by other characters that are mostly heterosexual and disregard the homosexuals. In other cases, the characters that try to come out face a lot of resistance and may even be forced to change their orientation especially when the author wants to show that it is easy to transform to normative sexuality. These transformative characters are mostly well received and cope better with their new heterosexual partners.

Authors are always writing to attract as many readers as possible and have their books capture the market in the most magnificent way possible. Therefore, they must appeal to the readership by presenting stories that align to their customs and beliefs. In most cases, only a readership that practices homosexuality and one that appreciates diversity shall agree to read content that talks about homosexuality. Such populations are not common in the world unless in societies where homosexuality is welcome and well appreciated like in Thai. In Thai, especially Bangkok, the culture appreciates literature and any art that deals in queer sexual behavior since the customs allow the practice and the people are comfortable with it. Such narratives are likely to be well received in these settings. In light of this, there is likely to be more narratives published featuring these themes and the author must ensure he makes his perspective and story as interesting as possible.

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