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LGBT Representation and Politics

Is representation in media influenced by our political climate? More specifically, has representation of the LGBT community been impacted by politics? Historically, LGBT people have been repressed in media. Though TV shows and movies have showcased gay characters in the past, their interpretations of gay representation was horribly simplified. Take, for example, the TV show FRIENDS. FRIENDS pokes fun at gay people, explaining that one of the characters, Chandler, might be gay because of how he acts more feminine than the other guys in the group. This representation without accuracy has contributed to the lack of care when promoting diversity in media. Part of this inaccuracy can be credited towards blatant homophobia in the society in which the media was produced. For example, FRIENDS was released in the 1990s, a time where people were just coming out of the Reagan administration. Since Reagan was against finding a cure for AIDS and blatantly homophobic, there's no wonder why the hit TV show was so insensitive towards LGBT people. Being produced in such an atmosphere that Reagan had created towards the LGBT community allowed it to be socially acceptable to present gay people in the light that FRIENDS did. However, a stark

contrast in representation boomed under the Obama administration around 20 years later. Part of this can be attributed to the phenomena of social progression and the fact that more and more people were becoming open to the idea of LGBT rights, but a much larger portion of the growing representation of the LGBT community can be credited towards the Obama administration. Under Obama, gay marriage was legalized throughout all 50 states and he preached equality for all. Being the first black man elected president was a major feat that had already sent society careening towards liberalism and equality, and Obama's policy reflected that in his administration. More TV shows and movies were being created with proper LGBT representation, some even selling out theaters worldwide. People became more and more aware of the fact that representation for all minority groups matters and actively tried to create more diverse casts and characters in their media.

Historically, LGBT people have faced oppression in day to day life as well as in media. According to an article written by The Daily Beast, the number of major studio releases in Hollywood skyrocketed to 23 films that showcased LGBT characters. However, in 2017, the number fell to just 14. Despite the amount of films being produced featuring LGBT characters, the actual significance of the queer representation has left something to be desired. Take, for example, the character Valkyrie in the major Marvel movie *Thor: Ragnarok*. Valkyrie was a bisexual character whose bisexuality was glossed over in the actual final cut of the movie. This kind of passive bisexual representation made it impossible for viewers to overlook. It's important to have LGBT representation in media be prominent and not able to be passed over if one isn't looking

for it. The fact that people had to actively search for Valkyrie's hidden sexuality is inherently problematic as people don't have to search for heterosexual representation as it's often upfront and in plain sight. Travel Pride argues that though the LGBT community has popular personalities frontlining the group such as Ellen DeGeneres and Neil Patrick Harris, the media does a bare bones job at actually portraying the accuracies of LGBT life. Shows that display gay characters, like Modern Family, have representation that is founded on stereotypes. The two characters, Cameron and Mitchell, are both very feminine in their actions and very dramatic in the way that they speak and dress. Though this type of expression does ring true for some gay men, this does not encompass a diverse range of the way that gay men can exist. The fact that the majority of media surrounding gay men depicts them as nothing but gossipy accessories to straight women is harmful to men who identify as a part of the LGBT community but don't find themselves identifying with the stereotypes forced down their throats. An article written by the Huffington Post argues that the lack of blatant LGBT representation is due to historic hypersexualization of the LGBT community. The Post writes, "the most commonly searched topic in the U.S. is lesbian porn, including in many states that have historically opposed issues such as gay marriage and refused to outlaw conversion therapy." It's no wonder that young members of the LGBT community feel uncomfortable coming to terms with their sexuality when people of their same identity are only depicted in overtly sexual contexts. The mix of faulty LGBT representation and hypersexualisation of the entire community and the conservative political climate walk hand in hand as most shows with inaccurate and insensitive representations of LGBT

people like FRIENDS in the early 90's, or Modern Family was created under or just after the Bush administration. Bush himself responded to the AIDS activist group, ACT UP, by saying that the gay people who contracted the disease should undergo "behavioral change." Though Bush signed the Americans With Disabilities Act which protected disabled people, along with those who had HIV, against discrimination. This attempt at allying himself with the LGBT community was a small step in the right direction, but was horribly overshadowed by his personal actions. Bush had said in an interview that if he ever had a grandchild who happened to be gay, he would love the child but would also tell them that they weren't normal. Bush's Cabinet was also filled to the brim with homophobic politicians, reflecting the Cabinet of his predecessor Reagan. The reign of Bush was arguably one of the most threatening for the LGBT community, so there's no wonder why the media reflected that fact with their poor and inaccurate representations of the entire group.

After the Bush administration ended, Obama quickly shifted the political climate towards a more inclusive environment. Under Obama, an executive order was signed that banned LGBT discrimination in the workplace and federal government. He also repealed the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" act which banned openly gay people from entering the military in 2010. Most notable, however, nationwide same-sex marriage became legal in all 50 states. The LGBT community was represented in politics but also media, with many documentaries, dramas, and comedy movies being made featuring LGBT people. The biographical drama film "Milk," based off of the life of Harvey Milk who was the first gay politician, to was released in 2008, just as Obama stepped up to

presidency. However, the Trump administration proved to be a harsh contrast to the inclusive atmosphere Obama had created. Quickly after his inauguration, Trump tweeted about wanting to ban transgender people from the military, to cut funding for HIV/AIDS research, lift protections on transgender youth in school, and erase the LGBT community from the National Survey of Older Americans. On January 23 in 2019, Trump went through on his claim to restrict transgender people from the military, an action detrimental to the LGBT community. It's natural for a political atmosphere to swing between conservative and liberal control as seen with the rise of counterculture in the 1960's as a response to the restrictive Eisenhower presidency. So as a response to Obama's drive for equality and support of the LGBT community, Trump rose to power as a retaliation from the right bringing with him a distaste for the LGBT community. Despite the attempts to silence the LGBT community, more young voices are emerging to discuss representation and why it matters. An article written by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) expresses that in a survey of more than 10,000 youth who identify as LGBT, 42% of those youth feel as though the community they live in doesn't accept LGBT people. The fact that nearly half of LGBT youth between the ages of 13 and 17 feel as though the environment they exist in doesn't accept their identity is horribly troubling for the people who are LGBT and their families. This kind of hostility surrounding LGBT people directly correlates to the fact that people of older generations and people with a more conservative mindset aren't exposed to LGBT lives. The normalization of LGBT lives is important so that people can see that being queer doesn't inherently mean that one is hypersexual or a deviant. The HRC also reports that

"92% of LGBT youth say they hear negative messages about being LGBT. The top sources are school, the Internet, and their peers." The fact that the Internet and media on the Internet are main perpetrators of homophobia and negativity towards the LGBT community is detrimental to the community itself. The Internet exists to spread messages quickly, no matter what kind of message it actually is. When hate towards such a large population of the world is spread on the Internet, it's hard to escape. The most shocking statistic that the HRC offers, however, is one that reads "68% of LGBT youth say they hear negative messages about being LGBT from elected leaders." Elected leaders can refer to any level of leadership on the political spectrum, but seeing as this article was published in the span of the Trump presidency, the correlation is hard to overlook. Since Trump has a streak of being homophobic, there's no wonder that LGBT people feel unsafe under his presidency. An interview with Henry Wright, a LGBT identified 17 year old in the Bay Area, reveals that he feels unsafe with our current presidential administration. "I feel like [Trump] doesn't care about the quality of my life," Wright says. When asked about his experiences with coming to terms with his sexuality under the Obama administration, Wright explains that, "I came out in 2014 and my family was super accepting of me and so were my friends and classmates. I think that after Trump was elected, my classmates felt more comfortable being rude or homophobic towards me because Trump also hates the gays." Wright echoes the opinion of many LGBT youth who feel as though the current political administration allows for homophobic actions to slide because the example that Trump sets for our country does not discourage that behavior.

LGBT representation has taken a natural curve towards the positive from gay people from Henry VIII outlawing homosexual activity and deeming it punishable by death. Though representation has come up significantly throughout the years, people currently are still trying to stifle casual LGBT representation. Take, for instance, the characters Bert and Ernie from the children's show *Sesame Street*. The writer of the two characters, Mark Saltzman, said in an interview with the blog "Queerty" that he wrote the pair as a couple and based their interactions off of his own experiences of him and his own partner. However, the producers of the show immediately denied that the two characters were romantically involved and that they just existed as best friends. This raises questions of why Sesame Street was so adamant against there being a gay couple in their show. As are most of the arguments against LGBT representation in children's media, some families and parents are concerned about the media converting their children to be gay. The concept of the homosexual agenda (or the "gay agenda") was created surrounding this issue where social conservatives believe that LGBT people actively try and convert/recruit heterosexuals to become gay. The homosexual agenda idea is well outdated, but still rings true to those who are of a more conservative viewpoint. Paranoia against the homosexual agenda is the same kind of force that drives people to refuse LGBT representation in media, especially media that is geared towards children.

Accurate LGBT representation in media is an important factor to normalizing minority lives. Existing within a homophobic environment that is perpetuated by the government is detrimental to the mental health and mindsets of LGBT youth, as people

feel outcasted and not accepted by their community. With such powerful figures preaching hate and homophobia, it's hard for people to feel safe within their own communities, no matter how accepting their immediate environments might be. LGBT life is prominent but isn't treated as such. Though representation does exist, it's not nearly enough, and LGBT people often find themselves tearing apart media in a desperate attempt to find characters that they can identify with. The current political climate not foster the most positive environment for LGBT youth, but the community is making powerful strides.

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	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Focus	There is little or no sense of argument, and the paper wanders as a result. Generalizations and inconsistencies disorient the reader.	Central question(s) and thesis statement are present but fairly obvious. Argumentative focus is not consistently maintained or suffers from generalizations. The purpose and relevance of the discussion are not consistently clear for the audience.	Writer establishes central question(s) about the topic and a clear thesis (although it could be more complex). Writer typically maintains this argumentative focus throughout the paper. The audience gets a sense of purpose and relevance, although the argumentative structure could be better defined.	Writer establishes compelling central question(s) about the topic and a clear, argumentative thesis; this argumentative focus is honed throughout the paper. Writer communicates a clear purpose, making the relevance of the argument distinct for the audience.
Content / Organization	Introduction neither hooks the reader nor establishes appropriate context for the thesis. Body paragraphs are underdeveloped or lacking. Conclusion is missing or does not clearly bring	A hook is attempted, but ineffective. Context for the thesis is either thin or overdone. Body paragraphs might show some of the writer's original thinking about the topic, but they are	Introduction hooks the reader and establishes context for the thesis, although these elements could work more effectively. Body paragraphs develop the writer's thinking about	Introduction hooks the reader powerfully and efficiently establishes context for the thesis. Body paragraphs demonstrate depth of thought about the research topic.

	closure to the paper. Transitions are incorrect or missing. Quotations are missing or are dropped into the text. Sentence structure and vocabulary are in need of serious improvement.	underdeveloped or inconsistent. Conclusion basically restates the main argument but does not bring a meaningful sense of closure to the discussion or leave a lasting impression. Transitions are effective sometimes, but in other places they are incorrect or missing. Quotations are mostly dropped into the text or are not integrated smoothly. Sentence structure and vocabulary clearly need more development.	<mark>the topic, but discussion lacks some depth. Conclusion makes clear how the central question has been resolved, but could do more to add closure to the discussion and leave a lasting impression. Transitions are used effectively most of the time and most quotations are integrated smoothly into the text. Sentences tend to demonstrate sophistication in a couple of the following areas: variation, flow, creativity, mature vocabulary.</mark>	Conclusion is memorable, leaving the reader with a distinct sense of how the central question has been resolved. Transitions link sentences and paragraphs smoothly and quotations are smoothly integrated into the text. Sentences are consistently sophisticated (varied, smooth, creative, mature vocabulary).
Use of Sources / MLA Citation	Research sources are lacking or off-topic. Writer may string together quotations	<mark>Research sources are fairly one-dimensional, focusing on a single perspective.</mark>	Research sources establish a couple of perspectives on the topic, but could be more	Research sources are thorough and varied, establishing different perspectives on the topic.

	without taking time to paraphrase, comment, or analyze. MLA in-text citation is not followed, or there are inaccuracies in citations or missing citations. Works Cited page is missing or shows no attention to MLA format.	Writer's own words are not consistently balanced with quoted material. MLA in-text citation has multiple errors. Works Cited does not include all required sources and/or it has multiple errors in MLA format.	thorough/varied. Writer does a good job of maintaining a balance of own words and quoted material. MLA in-text citation is nearly perfect. Works Cited page includes all required sources and is close to meeting MLA standards, with only a few errors.	Writer balances own words (paraphrasing, commentary, analysis) and quoted material compellingly. MLA in-text citation is perfect. Works Cited page includes all required sources and is perfect by MLA standards.
Mechanics	Writing is seriously obscured by spelling, grammar, and	Writing contains many errors. Errors affect reader's understanding.	Writing contains some errors, but not at the expense of	Writing is polished, free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation

	punctuation errors.		understanding.	<mark>errors.</mark>

Grade: Temporary incomplete 65%

Self-eval; B-/C+

My ideas aren't super cohesive and bounce around a lot, so if you could help me organize them that would be super helpful