

2015

## "Queer Media" Editor's Notes and Introduction

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### Recommended Citation

Elias, Liora. "'Queer Media' Editor's Notes and Introduction." *Teaching Media Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (2015). <http://pubs.lib.umn.edu/tmq/vol3/iss2/1>

*Teaching Media Quarterly* is published by the University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing.

*Teaching Media Quarterly*  
Volume 3, Edition 2 (Spring 2015): *Queer Media*

## Introduction: Queer Media

**Liora P. Elias**

In recent years, a number of television shows have had central characters who are queer, such as Mitchell and Cameron on ABC's *Modern Family*, Emily on ABC Family's *Pretty Little Liars*, Lauren and Amy on MTV's *Faking It*, and Kurt, Blaine and Unique on Fox's *Glee*. In addition, recent attention has been paid to straight showrunners' creation of queer characters, like Jill Soloway of Amazon's *Transparent* and Jenji Kohan of Netflix's *Orange is the New Black*. Out gay and lesbian showrunners are also garnering popular attention, such as Ryan Murphy, Peter Paige, Marlene King, Caroline Dries, and Carter Covington. Although the recent attention paid to queerness has scholarly appeal, there are still few teaching resources available for talking about queer television. Recent attention paid to televised queerness is not new, but is instead a continuation of the trend started in the 1990s that marked the increase of gay and lesbian visibility with the emergence of a queer market. Representations of queerness are abundant and significant for how we understand questions of identity, made more complex by the intersecting notions of class, race, gender, and nation, among others. With more niche media spaces available than years past, including LGBTQ-themed film festivals, television channels such as LOGO and Here TV, and diverse modes of distribution and consumption, such as streaming sites and web series, queer characters, actors, showrunners and producers have claimed a notable space in the entertainment industry. At the same time, the US has seen landmark shifts in cultural attitudes and (particular) legal rights for queer people.

In this issue of *Teaching Media Quarterly* we offer materials to be used in the classroom that critically investigate the intersection of queerness and television. Queerness is defined broadly here. It includes groups like transgender, bisexual, two-spirit, intersex, questioning and marginalized groups distinct from mainstream heteronormative culture.

**Ace Eckstein's** lesson lends much needed attention to issues of transgender visibility on the television talk-show. This lesson problematizes the assumed progressiveness of the increased appearance of transgender lives on television. By using examples such as Barbara Walters' interview with transgender teenager Jazz and Katie Couric's interview with Laverne Cox, this lesson unpacks both the problematic as well as potentially productive elements of these television talk-show interviews. In doing so, Eckstein's lesson asks students to critically engage with the stakes and ethics of transgender media representation.

**David Hennessee's** lesson begins with Vito Russo's foundational work on queer representation in U.S. cinema, but proceeds to call on students to develop their own examples of contemporary queer representations. Using *Brokeback Mountain* as an example, Hennessee's activity models the analysis of queer representation in popular culture. Using frameworks of homonormativity and internalized homophobia, students are asked to unpack contemporary media representations in order to understand how increased visibility is not always progressive.

In a contribution from **Ryan Lescure** and **Gust A. Yep**, “Queering Aging: Dialectical Analysis of Mediated Representations of Sexuality,” students bring queer theory and intersectional analysis to bear on representations of queerness and aging. While this lesson may be adapted to a range of media texts dealing with the topic, it offers a detailed plan for using the HBO made-for-TV movie, *Behind the Candelabra*—a biopic chronicling the relationship between an aging Liberace and a much younger Scott Thorson. Lescure and Yep include several variations on the lesson in order to accommodate longer (180-210 minutes) or shorter (90 minutes) timeframes.