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## ENG 100: Social Changes Promoted on Television

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### Social Changes Promoted on Television

Throughout the past ten years, television networks have begun to include more diversity and sexuality in their programming. Social changes are becoming more popular and more acceptable in our society. As society is changing, television series have to maintain the interest of their viewers. Certain television networks such as ABC, Freeform, and HBO have introduced shows such as *Grey's Anatomy*, *The Fosters*, and *True Blood* and offer these changes in their series. It was not an easy fight, but these shows are some of the top rated on their networks. Diversity and sexuality are both represented in shows like *Grey's Anatomy*, *The Fosters*, and *True Blood*, showing that social changes are starting to be accepted in scenes of pop culture.

One of the most celebrated shows that promotes social changes that include diversity and sexuality is the ABC show *Grey's Anatomy*. The creator, Shonda Rhimes, has been known to try to promote female lead roles and a diverse cast. Television used to be only black and white, but in the past ten years, diversity has really taken shape. Teddy Zee agrees, "Television is no longer black and white" (Zee). *Grey's Anatomy* features a number of different ethnicities ranging from white to Asian. Rhimes planned for a diverse cast, and this excited the audience. The Asian American population in the United States is growing, so with an Asian on the show, it would increase viewership and help reach out to the audience. Zee writes, "Including Asians and other ethnic groups on television is not only good for audiences; it's very good for business" (Zee).

While building the audience of the show, that helped Rhimes introduce other social changes in her series.

*Grey's Anatomy* did not have an easy start though. When the show first started, it was on a family friendly network, so most viewers did not like the fact that they had sex scenes. As the series progressed, lesbian couples were introduced, and this adds to the show's sexual influences. In this society, it is still hard for people to be okay with their sexuality. By showing it being accepted on television, it makes people feel more safe with "coming out." Pop culture is influencing more and more people sexually. In the article "Mass Media Influences on Sexuality," Jane Brown writes, "Does the sexual content in the media influence how people behave sexually? ... 'Yes'" (Brown). When portraying LGBT couples living normal lives with normal everyday drama, it helps the community realize that they are not outcast. Either by coming out or simply having sex before marriage, media has its way with persuading people, and that is okay in this society.

Not only is *Grey's Anatomy* an influential show that promotes both diversity and sexuality, but another great example that takes these social changes a bit further is *The Fosters*. The Freeform show *The Fosters* promotes sexuality for all people young and old. For those that have never seen this show, it is about a lesbian couple that fosters multiple children. These children, who eventually become adopted, grow up with a strange family in most people's eyes, but for the changing world, this will become more of a reality. *The Fosters* show one of the most diverse families on television. Television shows should reflect the world in which we live. Zee argues, "When we say diversity, what we are really saying is that the composition of faces on television (and behind the camera) should accurately reflect the world in which we live" (Zee). Not only does *The Fosters* have a diverse cast, but it promotes the growing LGBT community.

Not everyone agrees with this. Critics disagreed with the idea of the show before the pilot was even aired. In an article for the *New York Post*, Eric Hegedus confirms, “The organization has continued to call the show ‘unacceptable’ and ‘offensive,’ but Bredeweg says neither the network nor the showrunners have been swayed by criticism” (Hegedus). Although many do not like the fact that the show was released, it has had an amazing outcome. It is currently in its fourth season and has some of the top rankings on the Freeform network.

Not only is the show very diverse, but they showed the youngest same-sex kiss on television, opening the door for more young teens to come out. In the second season, Jude and his friend Connor decide to explore their sexuality (“Now Hear This”). This was the youngest same-sex kiss in television history. According to Lauren Duca, “‘The Fosters’ made history in March when the TV drama aired the youngest ever same-sex kiss on TV” (Duca). It is believed that this scene was placed into this series as a way to show the LGBT youth that it is okay to explore themselves. Co-creator Peter Paige states that these kids have to not only figure out how to be with each other, but have much more to figure out; “‘Gay adults start as gay kids. ... Now they’ve got to figure out how to be with each other and be with family, friends and the communities at school. So, there’s a lot for them to navigate this season’” (Duca). This show is a perfect combination of a diverse family. It promotes mixed-race families and the LGBT community to pursue a family and relationships.

Both *Grey’s Anatomy* and *The Fosters* promote sexuality and diversity, but the show that really took these ideas and showed them in a racy and sometimes violent aspect is the HBO show *True Blood*. Between humans and vampires, this show takes violence and sex and turns it into something audiences have not seen before. *True Blood* took sexuality and diversity to a whole new level. *True Blood* is one of the raciest show on television. John Arit confirms, “It might be

overly provocative, but they're all heading toward the same point. The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation recently came to the conclusion that ‘True Blood’ has the most lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) characters of any show on television” (Arit). Being the “gayest” show on television, *True Blood* sets the tone that sexuality is ok to express, no matter what the situation is.

*True Blood* also explores the LGBT world in a new way. As stated before, this show is about vampires and humans, but it throws LGBT characters into the mix. This racy series shows sexual contact between these characters like never seen before. It is said to have the most reoccurring LGBT characters on television. Arit writes, “As far as ‘True Blood’ is concerned, their words straight from the study are, ‘Thanks to its large cast (and often sexually ambiguous vampires), HBO's ‘True Blood’ is the most inclusive program currently on television, featuring six regular and recurring LGBT characters”” (Arit). It is said that media outlets promote topics in their shows that are hot on the news. *True Blood* promotes the LGBT community in a huge way. By doing this, it helps focus on sexuality verses the big problems happening in the real world. Brown confirms, “The media are in a unique position to get people thinking and talking about specific issues, while keeping other issues from the public eye” (Brown). *True Blood* really steps outside of the box when it comes to sexuality being promoted on television.

In our changing society, pop culture is promoting diversity and sexuality in shows like *Grey’s Anatomy*, *The Fosters*, and *True Blood*. In the end, the world is changing and people need to accept that. Sexuality and diversity are a growing topic in today’s society. These three shows explore these ideas and promote them to their viewers. Many disagree with the showing of these topics, but it is time for a change. All varieties of people should be accepted in our society. Without television networks promoting these social changes, different ethnic backgrounds and

the LGBT community might have a harder life than they already have. Showing their lives on television puts it into a more realistic picture, making viewers see that the world that we live in is changing. We all love, breathe, and live in a world where change is to be accepted.

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