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According to the recent GLAAD study on the 2007-08 television season, LGBT scripted characters represent only 1.1 percent of all series regular characters on the five broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, and CW). This is down from 1.3 in 2006 and 1.4 in 2005. However, while the LGBT presence on scripted broadcast network television shows has declined, the number of LGBT characters on scripted cable television shows has reached an all-time high.

This trend can be alarming because it creates a void for those individuals who do not have access to cable channels or those who can not openly watch such LGBT-specific programming networks. This can be especially troubling for gay youth who are looking for connections with other gays and lesbians since most are growing up in heterosexual environments.

Since cable channels are picking up the void left by broadcast networks when it comes to LGBT programming, along with the creation of LGBT content specific channels such as Logo and Here, it is possible that network television no longer feels the need to include LGBT characters in their programming. However, by not providing representations of LGBT characters in its programming, broadcast networks are failing to inclusively reflect the diversity of the television-watching audience. Therefore, the television industry is perpetuating mainstream norms rather than portraying the diverse population of American society. In addition to the fact those individuals who are looking for more diverse programming will continue to watch cable over the broadcast networks.

On a positive note, even though the number of LGBT characters has decreased on broadcast networks, the quality of the representations has improved over the past few years. Most notably is *Brothers and Sisters* on ABC, which features show regular Kevin Walker who is prominent in the plotlines. In fact, last year's season finale featured his wedding to his love interest, Scotty Wendell, on the show. The show also unabashedly shows his romantic moments with Scotty, including their more passionate ones. Other more diverse portrayals of LGBT characters can be found on ABC's *Ugly Betty*, which features mischievous administrative assistant Marc, the transgender Alexis Meade and the young gender-bending Latino teen Justin Suarez.

Even with the improved quality of LGBT depictions on the broadcast networks, they still can't compare to either the number of LGBT characters (and that is even excluding gay-specific content channels) or the diversity found on the cable networks. Currently there are over 30 cable shows that feature lead and/or recurring LGBT characters. Pay cable channels have long been the forerunner in this area with shows such as *Queer as Folk*, *The L Word*, *Six Feet Under*, and *Sex and the City*. However, the non-pay channels have definitely caught up with popular shows such as *Greek*, *Nip/Tuck*, *Dirt*, *The Riches* and *Torchwood*.

The one area where the networks do regularly include gay and lesbian characters is within reality programming. Gay personalities have been included

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on almost all of the most popular reality programming on broadcast television, including *Survivor*, *Amazing Race*, *Big Brother*, *America's Next Top Model*, etc. However, even with reality programming, it is still on cable networks where the standard of inclusiveness has been set, especially on Bravo which consistently features gay participants on their shows such as *Queer Eye*, *Project Runway*, *Top Chef*, *Welcome to the Parker*, *Million Dollar Listing*, *Work Out*, *Top Design*, *Shear Genius* and *Flipping Out*. Bravo is also not alone in this; other cable networks have followed suit, including Sci-Fi, HGTV and The Food Network.

So why are broadcast networks avoiding dramatic programming with LGBT characters? In the past they have shied away from programming with gay characters because they fear it could alienate the mainstream audience, thus reducing their advertising rates, which ultimately affects their bottom line. However, given the success of cable shows that feature LGBT characters, they should no longer be making such an assumption. Another factor is unlike cable networks with subscription fees, broadcast networks must completely survive on advertising so they just prefer not to take any risks. After all the religious right is quick to criticize such programming, yet oddly enough the networks are more inclined to take the risk with reality programming. And perhaps by doing this, they feel it serves as their contribution to featuring LGBT people on their networks, but is it enough?

Ultimately, broadcast networks have a responsibility to depict the diversity of American society and if they continuously fail to do so, it will only precipitate their own demise because viewers will only continue to gravitate toward cable television, thus reducing ratings, advertising, and their revenue. If they hope to keep a multicultural audience then they must have such characters portrayed within its programming.