



Hugs - Hope * Understanding * Giving * Support
To the Gay & Lesbian Community of Lake, Geauga, and
Ashtabula Counties.

Is Your TV Set Gay?

Did you happen to catch the Emmys on ABC last month? Did you happen to notice a certain—how to put it?—*subtext* to the evening, starting with host Garry Shandling's crack about removing the two r's from his first name? Did you notice that the most nominated comedy of the night—NBC's *Will & Grace*, the one that ended up taking home the best-comedy prize, as well as best supporting actor and actress—happened to be a sitcom about a gay man? Or that Vanessa Redgrave happened to pick up a statue for playing an elderly lesbian in *If These Walls Could Talk 2*? Or that the camera happened to catch another winner, *Malcolm in the Middle* director Todd Holland, kissing his boyfriend before bounding up to the podium?

Actually, you probably didn't notice—and that happens to be the point.

Only five years ago—well before Ellen DeGeneres rocked the nation by outing herself on her own sitcom—any of the above Emmy moments might have been seen as something shocking. Might have even triggered a protest or boycott. Might have at least been startling enough to keep some of the Emmys' 22 million viewers from nodding off as the ceremony stretched numbingly into its third hour.

But no, nobody cared. And that's because today, in 2000 A.D. (After DeGeneres), gay characters are so common on television, so unexotic, that their sexual orientation has become all but invisible to most viewers. It is, in a sense, the ultimate sign of acceptance: Gays, like blacks and single moms before them, are now allowed to be every bit as boring (or smart or stupid or ruthless or whatever) as anybody else on TV.

"Here's how far we've come in the last five years," says *Will & Grace*'s cocreator David Kohan, 36 (who happens to be straight), succinctly summing up the change on the airwaves. "The question networks used to ask was whether their shows had too many episodes with gay plotlines in them. Today, they ask whether they have to many gay *shows*."

The answer, apparently, is no. This year, as NBC rewards the two-year-old *Will & Grace* by moving it to its Must See Thursday-night lineup (at 9 p.m., replac-



ing *Frasier*), Fox will be introducing *Normal, Ohio* starring John Goodman as a gay dad. CBS, meanwhile, is working on two new gay-themed sitcoms—*Kiss Me, Guido*, based on the 1997 indie movie, and *Say Uncle*, a sort of gay update of *Family Affair*—as well as a series that will bring Ellen herself back to network TV. Expect more gay-themed shows on cable, too, from Showtime's adaptation of the British gay comedy-drama *Queer as Folk* to HBO's forthcoming version of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* and Moises Kaufman's *The Laramie Project*, about the Matthew Shepard murder.

Add all this to the number of gay characters that appear in ongoing roles on TV series this season—13 of them, according to the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation's most recent count—and you begin to see how much has changed. And changed not merely in quantity but in quality—or at least diversity.

Today, we have gay TV doctors (first on the recently departed *Chicago Hope*, and next on *ER*, in which Dr. Kerry Weaver will explore a relationship with a woman this season), gay police-precinct workers (*NYPD Blue*), gay killers (HBO's *OZ*), gay teens (*Dawson's Creek* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), gay parents (*Popular and Friends*), gay students (*Felicity*), gay political aides (*Spin City*), gay TV executives (Showtime's *Beggars and Choosers*), gay cartoon dogs (*South Park*), even gay game show winners (*Survivor*) and their partners (with *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*'s cameras zooming in on them as Regis Philbin greets them in the studio audience).

"Television is a pretty accurate reflection of society as a whole," believes *Will & Grace*'s other cocreator, 34-year-old Max Mutchnick (who happens to be gay). "And stereotypes just don't work anymore. Forget offensive—they're just not believable. They don't ring true. Gay stereotypes on TV today would be like black stereotypes. Nobody would buy it. The world has changed."

Well, *television* has certainly changed—but the world? Obviously Mutchnick hasn't tried to sign up as a Boy Scout troop leader lately.

Clearly, there's more happening here than TV casting a cathode-ray reflection of society. Attitudes about gays have shifted in the past five years, but probably not so much as TV suggests—and certainly not without TV's help. In

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Contacting Hugs East

HUGS EAST
P.O. Box 253
Mentor, OH 44061-0253
(440) 974-8909

E-mail your questions or comments to:

HUGSEAST@HOTMAIL.COM

Calendar of Events

November, 2000

- 11/02 Computer Stories. — Virginia
- 11/09 Aging Parents. — Bob
- 11/16 Movie "Happy Texas." — Mark
- 11/23 No meeting due to the holiday.
Happy Thanksgiving!!!
- 11/30 Spirituality. — Terry



December, 2000

- 12/07 Gift Wrapping Party. — Terry
Help wrap gifts for the AIDS Taskforce of Lake County. The wrapping paper will be provided. Bring tape and scissors. Help feed Santa's helpers by bringing in chips, cookies, soda, etc... Also bring in Christmas music.
- 12/14 Planning Meeting. — Terry
- 12/21 Useless Gift Exchange & Holiday Stories. — Terry
Bring in a gift that you received and didn't want. We will exchange these gifts with each other. (Please wrap the gift.) Also needed is Christmas music, chips, cookies, soda, etc...
- 12/28 Past & Present Resolutions. — Mary

Social Activities for November & December

- 11/11 6:00 PM Dinner at Don Pablo's
36455 Euclid Ave., Willoughby, OH
Let Mark know by Thursday, 11/02/00 if you will attend.
- 12/31 7:30 PM New Years Eve Party. Bring a beverage and a dish to pass. Call Laura by Wednesday, 12/27/00 if you will attend.
Laura will provide directions.

For more details regarding any social event or meeting topic please call the information line at 440-974-8909.

The Thursday evening meeting begins at 7:00 PM and is located at: 8521 East Ave., Mentor, OH 44060

LAKE COUNTY, ISSUE 11 ON THE NOVEMBER BALLOT

Issue 11 is on the November Ballot in Lake County. Issue 11 would raise monies for Mental Health and Alcohol & Drug Abuse Services. It is a 1.4 mill levy to fund existing mental health services and support new programs to keep Lake County kids off drugs and alcohol. It would replace

the existing 0.9 mil levy, which will be discontinued, if it passes. More than 30,000 Lake County children and adults need mental health services each year. Issue 11 will be used to enhance mental health services such as counseling for physically and sexually abused children, shelter and counseling for battered women, treatment for emotionally disturbed children and teens, suicide prevention counseling and other mental health services. Issue 11 will also be used to expand and add new alcohol and drug abuse prevention and treatment services such as school based drug and alcohol prevention programs, working with elementary school teachers to identify and help children at risk of substance abuse, group and individual counseling and treatment services. This levy will cost the owner of a \$100,000 home \$1.64/month.

By Brenda

THANKS From the Center...

Thank you for supporting our Relocation Campaign with a rainbow tile purchase. You are helping to create a wonderful new home for the Center. We are really excited not only about our new space, but also about the Tile Project. I believe that we will be the first community center in the country to have a beautiful rainbow made of tiles. A rainbow expressing the names of our fabulously supportive community. A rainbow that demonstrates the beauty and diversity of Cleveland. Truly, the Tile Project is something of which you can be proud to be a part.

Thanks again for your **support!**

Linda Malicki, Executive Director.

Give a Child a Christmas

By the time you receive this newsletter HUGS East should have received from the Lake County AIDS Taskforce a list of items needed by the children.

If you would like to make a child's Christmas memorable, stop by or call HUGS East and sign up.

Please drop off your gift(s) (wrapped or unwrapped) to HUGS East by Thursday, December 7, 2000. If you wrap your gift, please attach a note to the outside of the package indicating what child it is for and what is inside the package.

Thank you in advance for your generous gifts.



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fact, television today seems to be championing gay rights in much the same way it fostered civil rights in the 1960s and 1970s, when it tried to change America's hearts and minds about race by presenting more positive black characters on its shows.

In other words, it's beginning to look like all these new gay characters suddenly springing up on the airwaves aren't entirely accidentally. It's beginning to look like TV has an agenda. A gay agenda.

Um, not that there's anything wrong with that.

"I remember the first time I was exposed to gay people on TV," recalls Kevin Williamson, creator of the teen drama *Dawson's Creek*, which earlier this year became the first network TV series in history to show two teenage boys romantically kissing. "It was *Family*, with Kristy McNichol. Willie's best friend came out. Or was it Wally? Whatever his name was. It was a big thing back then. Pretty amazing. We've come a long way since I was a kid."

Actually, it was Willie, but never mind. TV has come a long way, and in more ways than one. While Hollywood has always been accepting of gay talent—at least behind the camera—it's never before been so enthusiastically embracing. "I've never had any sort of homophobia directed at me," says Williamson. "And I work predominantly among hugely straight men. Good ol' boys. I've gone on double dates with them. It's never been an issue."

On the contrary, for a whole new generation of openly gay writers, producers, and directors—the generation who, like Williamson, 35, grew up watching TV take its first tentative steps out of the closet with programs like *Soap* and *Family*—television offers opportunities to alter the cultural climate that gays have never had before. Like the chance to run their own shows—or even networks. Which may be one reason we're seeing so much gay programming these days.

As it happens, TV is the ideal medium for pushing things, even more so than feature films. After all, except for a few rare big-screen breakthroughs—studio hits like *In & Out*, indie hits like *Boys Don't Cry*—the cinema landscape hasn't changed all that much over the past decade. Certainly not as much as television has. "There's less risk on TV, so you have more freedom," explains Emmy winner Holland, 41. "A gay character in 22 hours [of a television show] is not as important as a gay character in a two-hour movie. You aren't risking your entire box office by having a gay character."

Of course, even on TV the pushing isn't always easy. When creator Joss Whedon, 36, decided to introduce a lesbian subplot for the popular character Willow (Alyson Hannigan) on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* last season, he took hits from both The WB, which was worried he'd go too far, and gay fans, who were worried he wouldn't go far enough. Ultimately, the story line unfurled without any major controversy, but there were nerve-racking moments. "The network called up and was like, 'Is she going to be gay... a lot?' There was a little trepidation," says Whedon. "But then we

also got a lot of negative response from people who wanted her to be gayer. People were like, 'Why isn't she butch-er?' You can't please everybody."

Oddly enough, the one group that's *never* pleased to see gay people on TV—or anywhere else, for that matter—has—been conspicuously quite lately. The conservative American Family Association, which noisily threatened boycotts before Ellen announced her coming-out episode in 1997, appears to have toned down its crusade to straighten up TV (it's also stopped returning phone calls, at least to Entertainment Weekly). In fact, the most adamant groups we could find threatening boycotts against a TV show right now were *gay* organizations trying to persuade advertisers to shun Dr. Laura Schlessinger's new show (and, ironically, they've been a lot more effective than the AFA ever was: So far Procter & Gamble and several other major advertisers have decided not to run ads on *Dr. Laura*).

So there's another possible explanation for all the gay-themed entertainment on the tube nowadays: Nobody seems all that interested in stopping it. Or even griping about it.

Take, for instance, MTV's late-night soap *Undressed*. For two years, its pretty, young cast has been pairing off—if *pairing* is even the word for the group gropes these kids seen to favor—in a breathtaking array of pan-sexual combinations. To date, the music network has received fewer than 10 complaints about the show. "Probably no more than two or three," calculated Graden.

Mutchnick reports pretty much the same lack of outrage over *Will & Grace*. "The story behind the story is that there's been absolutely no controversy about our show," he says. "People seem to be responding to the characters, not their sexual orientations." Although *how* people respond to those characters does tend to differ, sometimes heatedly. To some viewers, for instance, Sean Hayes' Jack is an annoying swishy stereotype; others (including, apparently, lots of Emmy voters) see him as the most refreshing uncensored gay character on TV. Some see Eric McCormack's strait-laced Will as a cop-out, so blandly gay as to seem almost asexual; others think he's a breakthrough, a gay sitcom character whose sexuality doesn't overwhelm his personality.

There were similarly mixed feelings among gays, interestingly enough, about another recent breakthrough TV personality: Richard Hatch, the spectacularly conniving nudist who won a million bucks on *Survivor*. While there were certainly reasons to celebrate the fact that the summer's most popular TV star was openly—and more or less incidentally—gay, he wasn't exactly everyone's idea of a GLAAD poster boy. "Some gay-community members felt that even though Richard had broken the stereotype, they weren't sure he's what they wanted," says *Survivor* executive Mark Burnett.

No matter. The important point here is that people are watching—and in huge numbers. Even in summer reruns *Will & Grace*—which NBC sometimes aired twice a week—regularly attracted about 10 million viewers. *Surviv-*

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vor, of course, pulled in even bigger numbers (but then the gay guy on *that* show ate rates). And there you have it—the *real* reason for the increasing number of gay shows on TV: They're starting to make money.

After decades of being marginalized, demonized, or completely ignored, gays have finally found their way onto mainstream TV by becoming that most powerful of special interest groups: an audience demographic. Or at least a coveted part of that most coveted demographic—18- to 49-year-olds with lots of disposable income.

Already gay TV commercials are beginning to pop up on the airwaves. Like that oh-so-subtle Volkswagen ad with the two trendy young males stopping curbside to pick up a discarded kitschy old armchair. Or the spot you may have seen during the Olympics for John Hancock insurance featuring a female couple adopting a baby (filmed, incidentally, by *American History X* director Tony Kaye, with his unusual flair for controversy: "I had them give each other a peck on the cheek—it wasn't like they had their tongues down each other's throats—but they made me take it out," he grouses).

How much further can all this go? A gay cable channel? (Actually, one is in the works.) An openly gay network news anchor? (Steve Kmetko, anchor of E! News Daily, is openly gay.) Bruce Willis doing a guest spot in Eric McCormack's bed on *Will & Grace*? (Don't get your hopes up.)

The truth is, the economics of television impose their own natural laws and limitations. No show can long survive on just one demographic; to thrive on the airways a program must appeal to all sorts of viewers. Even straight ones.

"We never really set out to make a *gay* show," as David Kohen puts it. "We were just trying to come up with something original, to mine a dynamic that hadn't already been mined on TV. And we came up with the idea of a gay man and his relationship with a straight women. It was something we hadn't seen on TV before, a fresh approach to romantic comedy."

"I don't know a single gay guy who *doesn't* watch *Will & Grace*," adds Mutchnick, "but that's not why the show is a hit. It's the crossover audience. People who like the characters because they're likable, not because they're gay. It's our *lack* of agenda that's helped make the show a success. We never sit down and say, 'Okay, how can we teach the world about gay marriage?' The minute we start doing that, we fail."

That, ultimately, may be the most lasting legacy of *Ellen*, the show first kicked open the door for gay TV—and then almost slammed it shut again. DeGeneres' coming-out episode was her highest-rated ever (36.2 million viewers tuned in to watch her announce her sexual orientation) and arguably her best—it won the series a writing Emmy. But what happened to *Ellen* afterward is one of the most hotly debated debacles of recent TV history. To some, it's a cautionary tale, a warning of what befalls a show if it becomes

too gay for its own good. To others, the show's failure was entirely creative, a warning of what befalls a sitcom if it simply stops being funny.

"I don't know what happened, why people stopped watching," muses Joely Fisher, who played DeGeneres' (straight best friend on *Ellen*—and who will be playing John Goodman's (straight) sister on *Normal, Ohio*. "I guess [the writers] felt they had to explore Ellen's lesbian relationship which left less room for the rest of the cast. But that's me just being selfish. I like to think people stopped watching because there was less of *me*."

Ellen's failure, as much as *Will & Grace's* success, is clearly on the minds of those who would follow in their paths. "[Homosexuality] is not the subject of our shows," insists Bonnie Turner, who's producing *Normal, Ohio*, along with her husband, Terry. "It's an element of his character. He's gay, but he's also a father, an ex-husband, a son, a brother. It's a *family* comedy. It just happens that one of the members of that family happens to be gay."

Great. Just so long as he happens to be funny. Svetkey, Benjamin "Is Your TV Set Gay?" *Entertainment Weekly* Oct. 6, 2000: pp. 25 - 28.

What Do Angels Look Like?

- Like the little old lady who returned your wallet yesterday.
- Like the taxi driver who told you your eyes light up the world when you smile
- Like the small child who showed you the wonder in simple things.
- Like the poor man who offered to share his lunch with you.
- Like the rich man who showed you that it really is all possible, if only you believe.
- Like the stranger who just happened to come along, when you had lost your way.
- Like the friend who touched your heart, when you didn't think you had one to touch.
- Angels come in all sizes, all ages and skin types. Some with freckles, some with dimples, some with wrinkles, some without.
- They come disguised as friends, enemies, teachers, students, lovers and fools.
- They don't take life too seriously; they travel light.
- They leave no forwarding address; they ask nothing in return.
- They wear sneakers with gossamer wings.
- They are hard to find when your eyes are closed.
- But they are everywhere when you look, when you choose to see.

From Libbey

FAVORITE POTLUCK RECIPIES

For Dinner we have:

Linguine Salad

Ingredients: 2 Pounds (32 ounces) Linguine Noodles – Cooked
2 Small Tomatoes Chopped
1 Cucumber Chopped
1 16 oz Bottle of Zesty Italian Dressing
1 Bottle of McCormick's Salad Supreme

Directions: Mix all ingredients together and chill before serving.

Now for Dessert!

Vanilla Banana Pudding Treat

Ingredients: 2 Packages of Vanilla Pudding
1 14oz Can of Condensed Milk
1 8oz Whipped Topping
6 Bananas
1 Box Vanilla Wafers

Directions: Prepare pudding as directed. Let stand for 5 minutes. Then add condensed milk & whipped topping. Layer wafers in Dish then add 3 Bananas. Add some pudding then layer again with the remainder of the ingredients

From Brenda

SCOUTS' DISHONOR

When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled this summer that the Boy Scouts of America may discriminate against gay members, it ignited a national furor.

"The Boy Scouts of America is discovering just how out of step it is," said Tony Varona, the Human Rights Campaign's general counsel and legal director. "By insisting that it is a private organization that must have the right to discriminate against gay members, it shattered its image as an inclusive, public institution at the core of American life."

BSA lawyers argued successfully before the Supreme Court that allowing gay boys and men to join as members and troop leaders would burden the organization's First Amendment right of free association. The Boy Scouts' message, they said, includes a view that "an avowed homosexual is not a role model for the values espoused in the

Scout Oath and Law."

Led by Chief Justice William Rehnquist, a five-member majority agreed, ignoring the BSA's membership policy requiring admission of "any boy," and that the organization's message has never addressed homosexuality. The high court overturned a unanimous New Jersey Supreme Court decision and ended a 10-year legal battle by James Dale, a highly decorated Eagle Scout. HRC helped coordinate an *amicus* brief in the case, and fielded numerous media calls for reaction immediately after the court ruled.

Eleven Members of Congress led by Rep. Lynn Woolsey, D-Calif., urged President Clinton to resign his honorary presidency of the Boy Scouts. Woolsey also introduced legislation that would revoke the Boy Scouts' congressional charter.

Meanwhile, many major newspapers published editorials condemning the decision. Some encouraged parents, charitable groups and troop sponsors, including churches and schools, to consider dropping their support.

And the Boy Scouts' extensive public funding could be in jeopardy. Several major cities, including San Francisco, Chicago, Washington and New York, have cut, or are considering cutting, ties with the organization. The United Way of Southern New England and six other United Way chapters have already done so. If the trend continues, tens of thousands of troops could be affected.

In addition, Connecticut no longer allows state employees to earmark payroll deductions for the Boy Scouts. In the corporate world, Levi-Strauss and the CVS drugstore chain announced they would stop donating to the Boy Scouts.

The United Methodist Board of Church and Society is calling on local churches to discontinue sponsorship of 420,000 of the BSA's 6.2 million scouts.

"For now, we will continue to monitor developments," said Varona. "The Dale decision is a hollow victory for the Boy Scouts that has prompted fair-minded Americans to come forward to fight."

ACT NOW!

Contact the Boy Scouts' top official and urge a change in policy: Roy L. Williams, Chief Executive Scout, National Headquarters, BSA, P.O. Box 152079, Irving, TX 75015-2079. Call or fax them, too — 972/580-2000 (tel.) 972/580-2502 (fax)

- Encourage corporate funders and the United Way to deny funding to the Boy Scouts.
- Write opinion pieces for local newspapers, urging the Boy Scouts to allow gay people to serve as scoutmasters. Organize protest at leaders' meetings.
- Return scouting awards. Refuse to give money to the organization.

Sandman, R. (9/2000). Scouts' Dishonor. Washington D.C.: Human Rights Campaign

~ POETRY PAGE ~

The Pimples That Came to a Head

Perhaps his face used to be clear,
But it certainly wasn't that year;
For his face looked a fright,
Due to large pustules white.
(A young teenagers nightmare I fear).

Though I do not remember his name,
I have mem'ries of him just the same;
Endless pimples he'd pop,
From his bountiful crop -
Till his zits were all bruised and inflamed.

As his blemishes flowed just like wine,
It was then, on his face he would dine;
Ev'ry slurp I would hear,
(For he sat very near),
Much too close - in the desk behind mine.

By Terry V.

Be a part of HUGS EAST

Due to the increased cost of the mailing of our newsletter we can no longer afford to continue our current mailing to non-paying members. This will be the last to those not currently with paid dues or who do not mail their dues prior to the next newsletter mailing in March.

Please send your dues to Hugs East P.O. Box 253, Mentor, Ohio 44060. If your not currently paid and would like to remain on the mailing list, please submit your dues by the next scheduled newsletter. Current newsletters will still be available on Thursday nights at the Mentor site for those who are not on the mailing list.

2000 HUGS EAST MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME: _____
 ADDRESS: _____
 CITY & STATE _____
 ZIP CODE: _____
 PHONE #(optional) _____
 EMAIL (optional) _____
 AMOUNT ENCLOSED: _____

<u>Membership</u>	
Individual:	\$8.00
Student:	\$5.00
Household:	\$10.00
Supporter:	\$25.00
Contributor:	\$50.00
Benefactor:	\$100.00

*Dues run from January thru December.

To update our membership list we ask that you complete the above information. Even if you were a current member, we would like to update our records to show current information. This will ensure your copy of the newsletter. Membership dues are suggested amounts. Please feel free to pay more if you can, less if you cannot. All members share the same privileges. Make check or money order payable to: HUGS EAST P.O. Box 253 Mentor, Ohio 44061-0253, or bring to the Mentor site any Thursday evening (7pm to 9pm).

_____ Do not send HUGS EAST newsletter to my home.

**\$8.00-\$10.00 dues are not tax deductible; amounts paid over said dues are considered contributions and are tax deductible.