

How queer American theatre helps solve systemic oppression.

“80% of respondents who had been exposed to LGBTQ people in the media say they are more supportive of equal rights for LGBTQ people when compared to the respondents who had not recently seen LGBTQ people in the media (70%).” *glaad.org*

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A History of Queer American Theatre in Performance

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INTRODUCTION

- Queer American theatre began to emerge, starting with *The Children’s Hour* by Lilian Hellman, written in 1934. The play was subtle in its queer themes and sparked controversy.
- 27 years later, La MaMa was founded by Ellen Stewart, which was an off-Broadway theatre club. It became a place for queer people to be themselves and have agency over how the community was portrayed in America.
- Early queer American theatre was a form of activism since it gave people a way to learn about their queer identity through representation at a time when queerphobia was acceptable in society.

METHODS

- Reading queer American theatre from the 1930s to 2022 was done for this study.
- References to historical events, people, and the plays' relationships to one another were evaluated to understand the effect queer American theatre had on society at the time it was written.
- Assessing the type of stories told by queer authors led to developing the following questions: How does the story intersect with the author's background? What does the story reveal about current society today, and how does it compare to society before LGBTQ+ rights?
- Viewing queer American Theatre through this lens measures societal changes for marginalized groups with and without a queer identity.

INTERSECTIONALITY

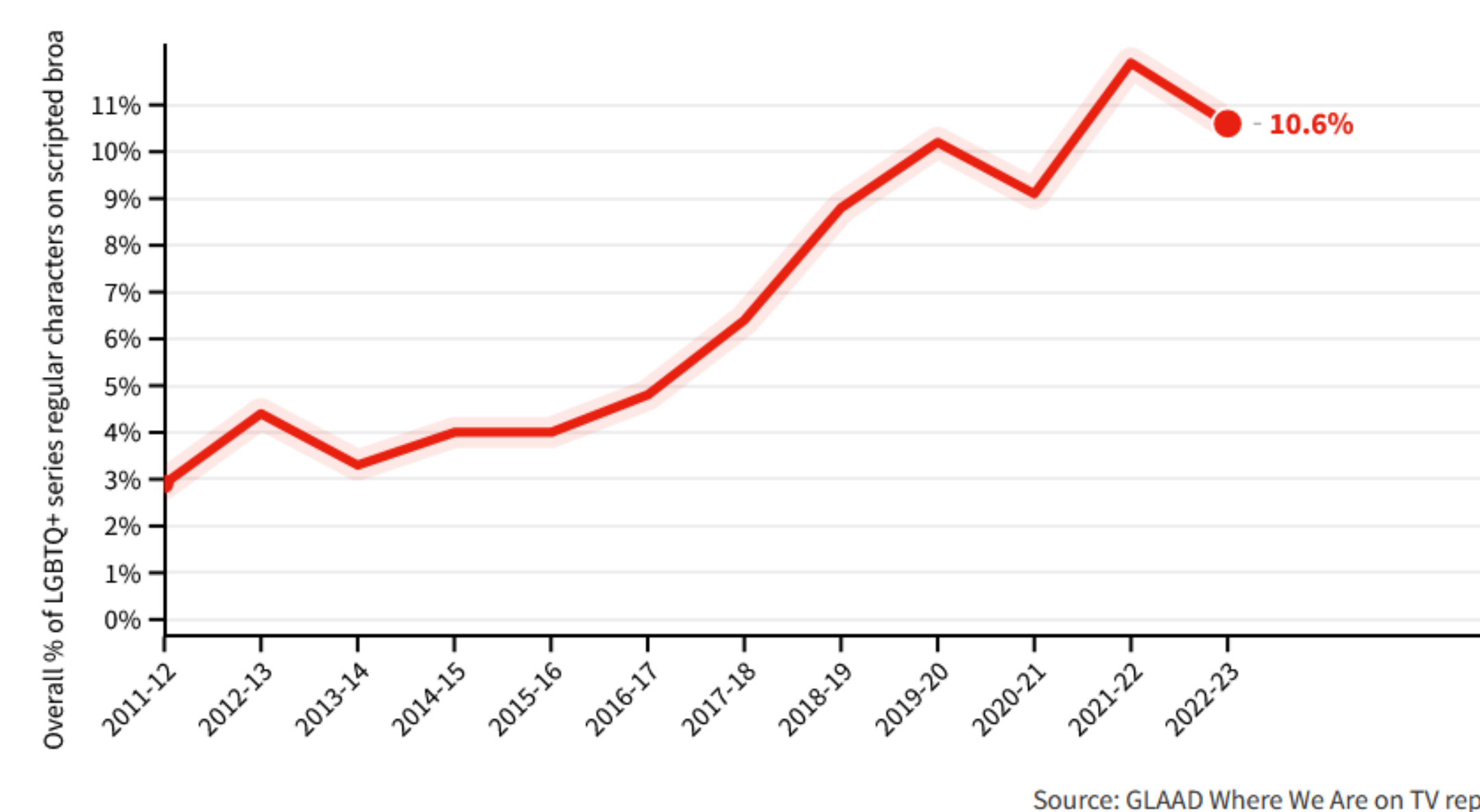
- Acceptance of differences leads to fewer instances of discrimination and makes society safer for everyone. Queer American Theatre contributed to this by showing diverse forms of expression while also allowing straight actors to perform alongside queer actors. This normalizes interactions between queer people and straight people.
- Queer rights also benefit straight people by destigmatizing platonic bonds between people of the same gender.
- The freedom to express yourself and decide what happens to your body affects everyone, regardless of sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation.
- Queer American theatre also gives representation to people of color and some of the systemic challenges they may face.
- Queer visibility normalizes other bodies and neurodivergence, which would otherwise be subjected to ableism.

CONCLUSION

- This research is more of a study and does not have definitive results. It is left open to continue evolving.
- Queer American theatre extends beyond entertainment by documenting history from the perspective of an oppressed group. Each play reflects the era it was written in, making the social changes in American society observable as queer theatre and storytelling change with each generation.
- The theme of queer happiness and liberation means to find acceptance within yourself while striving for a more equal and better society. It is concluded by examining the ways queer American theatre challenges the social norms in society.
- Queer American theatre normalizes the LGBTQ+ community being seen in public while exposing the audience to ways marginalized people are discriminated against.

Visibility

The last 10 years has seen an increase in the amount of LGBTQ+ regular series characters on TV



“Gen Z adults are significantly more likely than older generations to identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or something else, with 28% identifying as LGBTQ, compared with 16% of millennials, 7% of Generation X, 4% of baby boomers, and 4% of the Silent Generation. Gen Z teens were not asked about LGBTQ identification.”

