



TV - THE ERASURE OF BISEXUALITY IN FAKING IT

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I will openly admit how sceptical I was of MTV's *Faking It* when I first heard the premise of the show, premiering last April I was ready for it to be terrible. I expected lazy writing, out of date tropes, stereotypes and just a generally offensive show. I watched the first episode out spite, ready to slate it the first chance I got but I found myself pleasantly surprised. The writing was good, the show was funny and the characters not entirely unlikable, two seasons down the line and the show has a huge fan base.

I do enjoy *Faking It*, however, it cannot be ignored that the show has its issues, some of which are extremely problematic. One particular bone of contention is the blatant biphobic attitude the show has, even with the recent introduction of Wade; the show's first openly bisexual character.

If you have never heard of *Faking It*, the romantic comedy series is set at Hester High in Austin, Texas. The show flips the typical school social structure upside down, where the 'outcasts' are the in-crowd and being different makes you popular; a 'kumbaya, socialist freak show' as Lauren (Bailey De Young) calls it. *Faking It* follows best friends

Amy (Rita Volk) and Karma (Katie Stevens) who are mistaken as a couple and outed to the school. The duo decide to continue the ruse to keep their new found popularity and celebrity status.

One of the main plots that recurs throughout the show is Amy questioning her sexuality. The way *Faking It* presents Amy's sexuality is what makes the show more than the trope ridden, fetishizing train wreck it appears to be on the surface. Such a topic is often presented in the media in a divided manner, where each character changes from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual with nothing in-between apparently existing. For Amy to be shown actively engaging in relationships, sexual and romantic, with both genders is refreshing when representations of bisexual and questioning people is thin on the ground.

GLAAD's 2014 'Where We Are On TV' report documented that of the 105 LGBT+ characters appearing on cable television in the 2014/15 broadcast year only 31 of those characters were bisexual.

Amy's exploration of her sexuality is an important recurring plot in the series, it also having been present from the very first episode. Where, at the end of the pilot Amy and Karma

kiss to prove their legitimacy as a couple after being accused by Amy's stepsister Lauren of, for use of a better phrase, 'faking it'. They pull away and Amy's face is a picture worth a thousand words, realising her feelings for her best friends might have just become a little more complex.

For a show that seems to have an endeavour to represent the LGBT+ community, Lauren actually making history in the second season as the first intersex character to appear on television, I find it perplexing and offensive how biphobic the show can be. For a majority of the show the writers were quite happy showing Amy engaging in relationships with both genders, but to actually present visible, self-identifying bisexual characters? That was a different story.

Often referred to as the 'silenced sexuality' because of the erasure exists in the media, where the attraction to two genders is passed off as a phrase rather than recognised as a legitimate sexuality. Even in the LGBT+ community a small minority believe that bisexual people should not attend LGBT+ events, because if they are in an opposite gender relationship then they are 'effectively' heterosexual.

Which is ridiculous because they are not. That is erasure.

When bisexuality is presented in the show it is often done so with negative stereotypes and tropes. In the third episode of the first season the following exchange takes place between Amy and her confidant Shane (Michael Willett):

Shane: 'Wait, wait so you knew she's also into guys?'

Amy: 'I had a clue.'

Shane: 'Ah, the elusive bisexual. They are a tricky beast. [...] I've been down this yellow brick road before. Dating someone bi is a lesson in insecurity.'

The language Shane uses paints an all too common misrepresenting picture of bisexuality, where bisexual people are promiscuous and apparently more likely to cheat because they happen to be attracted to more than one gender.

This ideology is only made further problematic in the second season where Reagan (Yvette Monreal), Amy's first girlfriend and a firm fan favourite, breaks up with Amy because she finds out she still has an attraction to men. Earlier in the season Reagan confessed to Amy that her ex-girlfriend left her for a man, this being the reason for her anxiety that their relationship was a

'phase' to Amy.

Following this the character of Wade is introduced, an open and self-identifying bisexual and shouldn't that solve the problem? Not quite. Wade is introduced as a crush of both Shane and Karma, neither of them realising the other likes him too. When they confront him to ask if he is 'gay or straight' he tells them he likes them both and cannot decide between the two of them who he likes more. While Shane and Karma fight for his attention, they all decide to go to prom as a three-people couple or 'thruple', this outing then ending the night in a threesome. This only further perpetuating the stereotype of promiscuity mentioned earlier. It's lazy, tiring and completely offensive.

Faking It is a show where a number of the characters fall into the LGBT+ spectrum; from professional MMA Fighter Duke to Lauren and her dance partner Pablo. Laverne Cox of *Orange Is The New Black* even appears as Drama teacher Margot. For a show with so much potential, and with such a large fan base, it does worry me that it is so much a part of the problem. In terms of problematic writing *Faking It* might just end up like post-second season *Glee*; something any writer with a shred of dignity would like to avoid.