

# "GETTIN' BI":

## Crazy Ex-Girlfriend's Darryl Whitefeather and Male Bisexuality in the Media

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### Background

#### **Bisexuality:**

In this research, I use the term bisexuality to refer to any sexual identity within the bisexual umbrella ("bisexual+"), meaning people with the "capacity to be attracted to more than one gender," including "people who identify as bisexual, pansexual, fluid, queer, and more" (GLAAD, 2019).

#### **Bisexual Representation in the Media:**

Bisexuals are severely underrepresented in media. While 52% of the LGBTQ+ population identifies as bisexual, **only 26% of regular or recurring LGBTQ+ characters on television claim the identity.**

And when characters do identify as bisexual, **they are usually restricted to a limited number of stereotypes:**

- The characters are usually restricted to plot devices for the leads and are quickly cut from the show when no longer useful for the story.
- They are usually already out, depriving bisexual characters of coming out narratives.
- They serve as a foil to test the strength of the relationship between the main characters.
- Their queerness is treated as a temporary plot device or stepping stone to homosexuality.
- They are promiscuous and untrustworthy, scheming, obsessive, or as having self-destructive behaviors.
- Their bisexual identity is erased by never using the word or any other label to describe their sexuality (even when they exhibit bisexual behavior). (GLAAD, 2019; Meyer, 2010)

The lack of representation and adherence to stereotypes of bisexuals have significant **negative impacts on the mental health of bisexual individuals as well as their acceptance in both queer and straight communities**, among other issues (Fejes & Petrich, 1993; Johnson, 2016).

### Method

When analyzing the representation of a bisexual character, it was important for me to choose a character with an **extensive and comprehensive bisexual narrative.**

Darryl Whitefeather was chosen because he is the first male series regular to come out as bisexual in the history of The CW - a channel that historically features more extensive and thorough bisexual representation.

**I explicitly studied Season 1 Episodes 10, 12, 13, and 14** because they feature Darryl's sexual exploration arc – from first suspicions through coming out.

**Bisexual behavior or language in the series was coded as follows:**

- Language which either explicitly states or implies that Darryl is questioning his sexuality and/or exhibiting bisexual behavior.
- Visual cues that imply the questioning of his sexuality or exhibition of bisexual behavior through deliberate acting decisions (i.e. eye movement, speech speed, etc.)

To track the character arc's development, **the coded bisexual behavior and language was categorized in the following categories:**

- Bisexual attraction
- Questioning of one's sexuality
- Feeling of queer shame
- Acceptance of the label and the sexuality

### Analysis and Conclusion

Darryl's extensive journey of finding his own sexuality is extremely uncommon in bi+ narratives and usually only afforded to gay and lesbian characters. It is even more uncommon because he is a regular character whose character arc is a major part of the show, as opposed to a guest star or a minor recurring character. **Darryl's journey of self-discovery is a big part of his character growth, but he is never reduced to it**, and, instead, has multiple stories revolving around his family, friends, and work-life throughout the series.

Over the course of his coming-out arc, Darryl acts in a way that

showcases the bisexual behavior being measured and slowly progresses from bisexual attraction to the acceptance of the label.

The final step in the character's coming out narrative is a song and dance number in which Darryl explicitly takes a jab at all bisexual stereotypes frequently present in the media and makes a point to claim the term "bisexual" for himself.

No shortcomings were identified in the representation of bisexuality in Darryl's story arc. The writers were extremely conscious of the stereotypes and pitfalls of traditional bisexual characters and made to avoid them when writing the show.

**Thus, through both his narrative and his coming out song, the character openly dismantles most bisexual+ media stereotypes and offers a thorough portrayal of a three-dimensional bisexual character that is never reduced to his sexuality or used solely for plot-advancement.**



#### References:

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