

ABC Family Glorifies Transgenderism on Prime Time TV

Carly Lehwald, transitioning to life as a woman, is at ease shopping for lacy bras in new reality television show “Becoming Us,” while Ben Lehwald, her teenage son, tags along, squirming in embarrassment.

Carly tells Ben coolly: “Been there, done that, not a big deal.”

It may be hard for Ben, but the whole idea of bringing cameras into their homes belongs to this high school senior who felt “lost” when his father switched from “Charlie” to “Carly.”

He pitched the show to his family in hopes that putting their lives on TV would help other kids accept transgender parents.

The ABC Family “docuseries” premieres June 8, marking one of the first reality TV shows to broach transgender acceptance to a mainstream U.S. audience.

As it did in the late 1990s in gay-friendly shows such as “Will & Grace,” U.S. television is again playing a big part in the transgender community’s growing visibility, with scripted dramas such as “Orange is the New Black” and “Transparent” leading the way.

“Becoming Us” precedes the E! Entertainment documentary, due in late July, of Olympic gold medalist Bruce Jenner’s transition to life as a woman.

Jenner is photographed for the first time as a woman, Caitlyn Jenner, on the cover of the July edition of Vanity Fair magazine.

The TLC cable network is premiering a series about a transgender 14-year-old called "I am Jazz" on July 15, and in April this year, Discovery Life aired "New Girls on the Block" about a group of transgender friends in Kansas City.

While support for transgender rights might be snowballing in Hollywood, ABC Family, owned by Walt Disney Co, hopes "Becoming Us" will enhance wider public awareness.

"Becoming Us" chronicles the family's challenges through Ben's eyes – a similar set-up as "Transparent," the Amazon Prime drama that won two Golden Globes for its depiction of adult children struggling with their father's new female identity.

While praising the show's intent, transgender activists are challenging networks to go further, noting that current programs largely focus on straight white men who are becoming women. They are also pushing for television to look at issues such as bullying, suicide and homelessness that confront transgender people.

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