

SELLING A GAY IDENTITY: REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER, RACE, CLASS, AND
SEXUALITY IN *THE ADVOCATE* NEWSMAGAZINE

by

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(Under the Direction of Dwight E. Brooks)

ABSTRACT

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) individuals have enjoyed growing visibility and a resulting boost in economic and political clout since the early 1990s. Seizing on this trend, corporate advertisers began tailoring their appeals specifically for the consumption of LGBT audiences. Through a textual analysis of the 2005 “Pride” double issue of *The Advocate* newsmagazine, this study draws on cultural theories of representation and intersectionality to explore how the narratives in these advertisements forge a socially constructed image of LGBT identity. The study reveals that advertisers often create problematic and troubling representations that perpetuate stereotypes in their portrayals of LGBT gender, race, class, and sexuality.

INDEX WORDS: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, LGBT, *The Advocate*, Gay pride, Representation, Intersectionality, Critical cultural theory, Narrative, Stereotype, Gender, Race, Class, Sexuality, Homosexuality

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DEDICATION

This document is dedicated with love to Grant Brown, for always believing in me and for providing constant encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Once considered social pariahs, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered (LGBT)¹ people in the United States have enjoyed growing visibility and a resulting boost in economic and political clout since the early 1990s. Although the gay equality movement has suffered several highly charged and contentious political setbacks in the early years of the 21st century, many social scholars agree that the political and economic gains made by gays and lesbians will continue to advance.

Not surprisingly, this newfound visibility has brought to bear both opportunities and threats. While gay men and lesbians have gained a far more prominent place in the cultural milieu of motion pictures and television, their on-screen portrayals have been uneven at best and damning at worst. Gay images now permeate most of the mainstream media in the United States, and both print and broadcast media outlets targeted directly at LGBT citizens are growing in number. Although the first LGBT-themed television network is in its infancy, the gay print media have been thriving for decades. Major national advertisers are now viewing the LGBT press as a viable medium in which to promote their products and services (Buford 2000).

During the past decade, advertisers have been flocking to the so-called gay and lesbian press, those publications aimed directly at LGBT readers. As gay visibility, gay political power, and gay buying power grow in the United States, national advertisers are seeing new potential in

¹ The acronym LGBT is widely used as an amalgam descriptor for individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered. However, the term itself is in a state of flux and has become fluid, with many LGBT community leaders, activists, and journalists now adopting the acronym LGBTQA, adding those who are “questioning” their sexual orientation as well as those who identify themselves as asexual. Although this study uses the LGBT acronym exclusively, the term is problematic as a descriptor, as it obscures distinction among the many groups falling outside the heterosexual mainstream. For the purposes of this study, the terms “gay” or “gay and lesbian” may be used interchangeably with “LGBT.”

courting this largely overlooked market. Advertising industry insiders point to an increasing awareness that gay magazines and newspapers offer a relatively inexpensive and highly effective way to connect with gay consumers, who are widely if erroneously believed to have more disposable income than other members of the population.

According to a 2003 report from *American Demographics*, total advertising dollars spent in the gay and lesbian press more than doubled from \$100 million in 1997 to \$208 million in 2001. Despite a recession in the national economy, ad spending in gay and lesbian publications has remained relatively steady. While ad spending in all consumer print media fell 6.2 percent between 2000 and 2001, gay publications saw a far smaller decline of 1.7 percent during the same period. And although circulation numbers for the gay and lesbian press are relatively small, they are growing steadily. About 285 gay or lesbian publications boasted an estimated 3.7 million readers in the United States in 2003 (Yin 2003).

At the same time, niche marketing has evolved into a driving force behind corporate advertising. No longer willing to create generic ads to be distributed in shotgun fashion to an amorphous consumer mass, advertisers began to customize their messages to appeal directly to smaller audiences who share common attributes, beliefs, and, ostensibly, consumer needs. Armed with demographic and psychographic data, buyer-preference surveys, and focus group studies, advertisers have learned to tailor their messages to appeal to specific demographic groups and sub-markets within those groups (Kates 1999).

Critics charge that the machinery of marketing to gays and lesbians has gone into overdrive. Walters (2001) contends that the influx of marketing to gays has been predicated on two trends: the move toward appealing to niche markets and the increase in LGBT visibility, political power, and social inclusion. As gay men and lesbians become more visible than ever in

American popular culture, it is not surprising that they would also emerge from the shadows in the omnipresent world of advertising. Just as images in other media vacillate between depicting gays and lesbians as exotic “others” or as heterosexual clones, advertising often sells contradictory images of gays as either hypersexualized and chic arbiters of style or individuals sharing the same wants and needs as their heterosexual counterparts. With advertisers searching for new and more productive ways to approach LGBT audiences, these mixed messages have opened the door to problematic representations of the gay and lesbian demographic. These representations merit critical analysis and scrutiny as advertisers compete for the coveted “gay dollar.”

The textual analysis of advertising in *The Advocate* that follows reveals a network of gendered, racialized, and class-based stereotyping in the representations of LGBT individuals. As LGBT people continue to strive for political viability and social acceptance, it appears that the forces of consumerism may be painting a dramatically different portrait of gay life than members of the LGBT population would accept as fair and equitable. The world of the marketplace is promoting a view of LGBT people as largely male, upper-middle class, overwhelmingly White, and ready and willing to spend their disposable income with intense brand loyalty.

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters. Chapter Two presents a broad overview of LGBT representations in film, television, and print media from the early 20th century through the present, while Chapter Three examines the growth of gay media and the current state of print advertising targeting the LGBT population. I also consider how LGBT identities may be commodified in the name of consumer goals. Chapter Four includes a discussion of cultural theories informing textual analysis in advertising, including the concepts of intersectionality,

stereotyping, standpoint theory, and Stuart Hall's theories of representation. After outlining my methodology and research questions in Chapter Five, in Chapter Six, I analyze the advertisements according to four themes: domestic partnership, family life, and social interaction; health and wellness; finances, consumer spending, and discretionary income; and LGBT representations in the corporate workplace. The concluding chapter considers the implications of the analysis, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LGBT REPRESENTATIONS IN MEDIA

LGBT portrayals in advertising have come to prominence in gay-oriented publications as gays and lesbians have enjoyed growing visibility in entertainment programming and in the news media. Television remains the most conspicuous marker of the new era of gay and lesbian visibility. While there has been much discussion of the wave of gay films that began in the mid-1990s, it is the more pervasive medium of television that has brought gay life into millions of homes (Walters 2001). Hundreds of articles in newspapers and magazines across the country have documented the explosion of TV visibility for gays and lesbians.

But this new gay visibility is simply the latest chapter in a troubled history of LGBT representations in media. While film has long grappled with gay subject matter in stereotyped and often offensive manners, the television format traditionally insisted that lesbian and gay characters simply were not reflective of the families that comprise TV audiences. For lesbians and gays to appear in the intimate, personalized space of television is at once amazing to those who support LGBT equality and disconcerting to those who viewed television as a medium of mainstream heterosexual bliss (Battles & Hilton-Morrow 2002).

LGBT Representations in Film and Television

Before the widespread emergence of LGBT characters on film and television in the mid 1990s, portrayals of gays and lesbians were often considerably limited by the commercial demands of the mediums in which they appeared. In his book *The Celluloid Closet*, Vito Russo (1987) analyzes the representation of gays and lesbians in Hollywood films from the 1890s to the 1980s. He argues that Hollywood's portrayal of lesbians and gay men has often been cruel and

homophobic. Gay and lesbian characters have been defined by their status as “other.” They lack any complex character development and they are removed from any hint of sexual desire.

During Hollywood’s early years, from the 1890s to the 1930s, homosexuality was often presented as an object of ridicule and laughter. The character of the “sissy” was popular at the time, and Russo asserts that such a character was a source of amusement and reassurance for the audience. The sissy was not a threatening representation of homosexuality because he occupied a middle ground between masculinity and femininity, often serving in an insignificant supporting role to a leading lady, either as a personal assistant or a domestic worker (Russo 1987).

From the 1930s to the 1950s, religious and women’s groups criticized Hollywood films for contributing to public immorality. As a result, the industry introduced a self-censorship code that affected the portrayal of homosexuality. During these years, films could not feature overtly homosexual characters; as a result, homosexuality was suggested through a character’s mannerisms and behavior. This code was loosened in the 1960s and 1970s, coinciding with the dawn of the women’s movement and the gay equality movement. While gay and lesbian individuals were becoming more visible and vocal in public life, their representations in films were becoming increasingly more homophobic (Dyer 1977).

Since the 1990s, Hollywood has diversified its representation of gay and lesbian characters. The popularity and profitability of films such as *The Birdcage* (1996), *Philadelphia* (1993), *To Wong Foo Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar* (1995), and *In & Out* (1997) demonstrate that audiences can and do enjoy films with gay and lesbian characters. However, critics contend that these new representations have come at a price — that of narrowly defining LGBT characters based on stereotypes of overly feminine males, drag queens, desexualized sidekicks, and aggressive and/or butch lesbians (when gay women are featured at all).

Controversies over Hollywood's alleged negative depiction of homosexuality have also focused on how such portrayals often stereotype LGBT individuals as mentally deficient. Organizations such as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) argue that films like *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Basic Instinct* (1992) demonize gays and lesbians by portraying them as psychopaths (Walters 2001).

In her article "Gay Activists and the Networks," Kathleen Montgomery (1980) examines the creation of a made-for-television movie featuring a gay character in a prominent role. Since the main objective of the movie was to reach as wide an audience as possible, various compromises were considered necessary. The story had to be told within the constraints of a popular television genre, the crime-drama; the narrative had to focus on the heterosexual lead character and his interactions with gay characters; and the movie could not depict any scenes of affection between characters of the same sex. Montgomery concluded that these requirements served as a filter through which the issue of homosexuality was processed, resulting in a televised picture of gay life designed to be acceptable to the gay population but still palatable to a mass audience.

In the past decade there has been a steady growth in the number of gay and lesbian characters on mainstream network and cable television. Many LGBT activists give credit for this increase to comedian Ellen Degeneres, whose television situation comedy character revealed she was a lesbian at the same time that Degeneres divulged her own sexual orientation in a 1997 *Time* magazine cover story (Walters 2001). Dow (2001) argues that the discourse generated by Degeneres' coming out represents only positive visibility for her individual lesbian identity and not political progress or awareness for the LGBT population. The politics of popular culture can serve as a masking function when representation is mistaken for social and political change. The

success of the sitcom *Ellen* indicated that certain segments of the mainstream population liked Ellen herself, not that discrimination against gays and lesbians had been erased (Dow 2001).

The more recent popularity of shows such as *Will & Grace* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* illustrates that television executives are willing to feature gay characters as long as the programs draw high ratings and generate profits for advertisers. This profit-motivation means that networks continue to be guarded in their portrayals of gay and lesbian characters (Gross 2005). While the recently ended *Will & Grace* featured two openly gay male characters, there was little or no discussion of their relationships or romances with other men. The primary relationship for both men was with the heterosexual female characters with whom they spent the majority of their free time (Schiappa 2006).

Although critics contend that mainstream television and movies continue to “sanitize” the portrayal of gay and lesbian life (Schiappa 2006, Anderson 1999), specialty and pay-TV channels have begun to show more controversial and critically acclaimed series about gays and lesbians. In 1999, for example, Britain’s Channel 4 made history when it broadcast a miniseries focusing on the lives and loves of three gay men living in Manchester, UK. The series, called *Queer as Folk*, appealed to LGBT audiences with its multifaceted representations of gay life, and it was widely lauded by the mainstream press. However, the series was not without controversy. Some people complained that the subject matter was inappropriate and some were upset that one of the gay characters was a teenager. Others worried that the program perpetuated a stereotype of gay men as over-sexed. Despite these criticisms, the series also enjoyed international success, airing in Canada and inspiring an American adaptation, which aired on the Showtime pay-TV channel from 2000-2005 (Raley 2006).

The success of *Queer as Folk* and the current lesbian-focused series *The L Word* (2004-present) indicates that LGBT programming can be both popular and profitable. However, advertisers and sponsors remain cautious about affiliating themselves with such potentially controversial programming. When the American version of *Queer as Folk* was in production, fashion houses such as Versace, Prada, Polo Ralph Lauren, and Abercrombie & Fitch refused to allow their brands to appear in the series. And although the show was set in Pittsburgh, the marketing director of the Pittsburgh Steelers professional football franchise wrote a letter to the producers demanding that all references to the team be removed (Gross 2005).

Raley (2006) contends that film and television producers continue to make gay male characters safe for mainstream consumption by pairing them in platonic relationships with heterosexual females. The relationship of the gay male and straight female has now become a dominant theme in film and on television. Television shows such as the aforementioned *Will & Grace* and films such as *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997), *The Object of My Affection* (1998), and *The Next Best Thing* (2000) all portray a gay man and straight woman as the “perfect couple.” While some critics have suggested that this trend represents an attempt to include gay male characters, others assert that such desexualized representations still marginalize and silence the experiences of gay men, removing them entirely from their sexual desire and forcing their identities to be defined by their platonic friendships (Gross 2005).

LGBT Representations in the News

While progress has been made with respect to the depiction of gays and lesbians in television and movies, critics argue that the news media still systematically ignore and distort the lives and experiences of gays and lesbians. A 1998 study that analyzed 50 years of coverage of gay and lesbian issues in *Time* and *Newsweek* found that the two publications reinforced

prejudice and discrimination against gays and lesbians. In the news articles under study, gays and lesbians were often linked to deviant or criminal behavior without sufficient evidence to support such claims; the two publications also reprinted what the authors called offensive and homophobic comments without providing opportunities for rebuttal by gay and lesbian scholars and other experts. The study concluded that such practices reinforced assumptions that gays and lesbians are inherently inferior (Bennett 1998).

Before the dawn of the gay equality movement in the 1970s, gay men and lesbians did not figure prominently into mainstream news media. But with the emergence of HIV/AIDS as a public health issue in the early 1980s, coverage became more intense, and simultaneously more negative. During this time, media coverage often portrayed gay men as a serious risk to society. Activists and academics such as Simon Watney (2001) and Douglas Crimp (2002) argue that news coverage of HIV/AIDS has consistently drawn on negative stereotypes about gay men specifically. In their view, the coverage of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s reflected mainstream society's fear of and dislike for gays and lesbians — and essentially blamed gay men for the introduction and spread of AIDS in the United States.

Media coverage of the HIV/AIDS epidemic improved in the 1990s, largely as a result of the efforts of activists fighting for gay and lesbian equality and fair representation. However, the mainstream media still tend to cover the gay population only when it is perceived to be in crisis. Many critics argue that since gays and lesbians comprise as much as ten percent of the population, their interests and perspectives should be more readily addressed (Crimp 2002). Organizations such as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) maintain that news media do not adequately address or reflect gay experiences and perspectives. Gays and lesbians tend to appear in both televised and print news only when there is a specific issue that

interests or directly affects the gay population. While heterosexual spouses and family members figure prominently into individual narratives in news accounts, gay and lesbian partners are largely hidden from view when LGBT individuals are featured in news (Walters 2001).

LGBT representations in mass media have evolved significantly since early depictions of ambiguously gay men in the Hollywood films of the 1930s. The frequency of appearances by gay male and lesbian characters on film and television has mirrored their growing visibility in other societal realms, but an alleged lack of variety and breadth in their portrayals has drawn critical ire. Gay men were thrust into the media spotlight with the spread of HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s and both gay men and lesbians faced scrutiny with the struggle for gay marriage and domestic partnership in the early 2000s. But despite these highly visible and charged representations of the LGBT population, the news media continue to hide individual homosexual identities from public view in their mainstream reporting.

CHAPTER 3

PRINT ADVERTISING AND LGBT CONSUMERS

Lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered (LGBT) consumers are “...trendsetters with the ability to boost advertisers’ bottom lines” (Buford 2005). They have been called educated and successful, and they are viewed by advertisers as being fiercely brand-loyal. And perhaps most significantly in the modern consumer culture of the United States, gays and lesbians are commonly reported to have significantly greater buying power than other so-called affinity groups in the realm of niche marketing (Wilke 1997).

A popularly held belief about gay men in particular is that they are “dream consumers” with more disposable income, higher levels of education, good taste, and a desire to purchase top quality products with reputations for enhancing image (Kates 1999). That stereotype is easily challenged when one considers that gay men living with AIDS, gay men of color, those with little formal education, and those with disabilities all may be economically disadvantaged. Therefore, the stereotype privileges an overall gay identity that is largely male, upper class, White, highly educated, and able-bodied.

What exactly is this extremely desirable, well-heeled target market? To some, the “gay consumer marketplace” may sound like a hip, trendy fashion boutique. In reality, it is one of the fastest-growing, most brand-conscious market segments in the country. According to a recent estimate published by Witech-Combs Communications and the web research firm MarketResearch.com, gay and lesbian adult consumer purchasing power has risen to \$485 billion annually (Wilke 2005).

Over the past two decades, gay and lesbian visibility has reached a critical mass both in corporate America and in the mainstream media. Reluctance by major national corporations to market directly to a demographic previously perceived as risky has eased considerably as more advertisers rush to court this highly attractive “new” target market (Buford 2000).

While alcohol producers like Seagram America’s Absolute Vodka have had a long-running presence in the gay market, a diverse and impressive roster of major advertisers has now jumped on the gay bandwagon. These advertisers include financial institutions like American Express, Wells-Fargo, and Chase Bank, travel firms such as Delta Airlines and Orbitz, automobile manufacturers Volvo, Ford, and Saturn, retailers Barnes and Noble and Target, and entertainment conglomerates Time-Warner and Virgin (Nicholson 1999).

A presumption of some LGBT activists is that magazines such as *The Advocate*, *Out*, *Genre*, and *Curve* serve a vital function in raising the profile of the LGBT population, both among gay individuals themselves and to the larger public. The prevalence of national publications designed for the gay market has expanded greatly in recent decades, with copies of *The Advocate* now appearing on newsstands throughout the nation.

A recent survey of 5,000 gay and lesbian consumers found that 41 percent of self-identified gay men and 28-percent of self-identified lesbians cited *The Advocate* as their most-read LGBT-themed publication. Other preferred publications fell well behind in popularity, with men identifying *Out* (32 percent), *Out Traveler* (19 percent), *Instinct* (17 percent) and *Genre* (13 percent). Women cited *Curve* (18 percent), *Girlfriends* (16 percent), *Out* (9 percent) and *Out Traveler* (5 percent) as their other preferred publications (“2006 Top Brands for Gay and Lesbian Consumers” 2006).

National publications aimed at specific demographic populations serve a number of purposes in building community among members of their target markets. In the case of magazines and newspapers aimed at the LGBT community, these publications exist to foster communication between and among the many facets of the LGBT public, to legitimize gay and lesbian identity, and to mobilize an overall consumer identity. These publications, and the advertisements that appear in them, create an illusion of cohesive community and financial strength that stands in contrast to the belief in modern society that sexual minorities are a destabilizing social force.

Growth of Gay Media and Advertising to the LGBT Population

For years, gay media was limited to periodicals published in local markets in the major American cities that served as centers of gay life, including New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Even *The Advocate*, now considered to be the publication of record for the LGBT population and the most widely read of the national LGBT publications, was distributed surreptitiously only in gay bars and other locations frequented by LGBT persons (Chasin 2000).

Current research has well documented the growth and validity of a national gay media (Wilke 1997; Nicholson 1999). At the moment when such research is trumpeting the inroads of success of a gay-focused press, it may be opportune to ask some critical questions about the nature of this publishing phenomenon as well as *The Advocate's* public persona.

The first marketers to target gay men and lesbians through gay media were not only those with the most to gain from the relationship, but also those with the most to lose. Gay culture has traditionally centered around gay bars, so companies with products consumed in bars, such as beer, liquor, and cigarettes, saw the unique marketing opportunity early on. However, these products had little to lose from a conservative consumer backlash by openly courting gay

customers. Since conservatives and those on the religious right already viewed these products as morally questionable, marketers had little to fear from an association with the LGBT population (Fine 2001).

The next marketers to target gay and lesbian consumers were those that provided products and services of specific need to gay men and lesbians. Initially, financial and legal service companies learned that LGBT people have different financial needs. While the general population is most likely to search for guidance in retirement savings and financing children's educations, lesbians and gay men seek help in managing shared finances, powers of attorney, and inheritance rights. In the absence of domestic partnership laws and similar legal bindings, LGBT couples must seek the services of lawyers and financial advisers in order to secure basic protections that are readily available to married heterosexual couples (Buford 2000).

The highly specialized nature of the gay male market has also resulted in a wealth of advertisements by pharmaceutical companies promoting HIV/AIDS drugs to gay men. This trend picked up considerably in the mid-1990s as life-extending drug "cocktails" made their way into the marketplace. Today, these advertisements promote an image of HIV/AIDS not as a deadly disease, but as a manageable chronic illness that need not have significant impact on daily life.

As one brand makes inroads into the LGBT marketplace, rival brands respond to the pressure by entering the market as well. Automobile manufacturers and airlines have been particularly visible in the gay media due to this growing competitive environment. According to Howard Buford (2005), where advertisements once teased about homosexuality, gayness has risen from subtext to text in marketing:

If the 1970s were about hedonism, the 80s about activism, and the 90s about visibility, the early 2000 years are all about equal participation. The implications of that social shift are immense for marketers seeking gay "mindshare." I would argue that because of the

social and political developments of the last few years, we're about to see the most profound shifts in gay-themed advertising since the first gay-focused ads appeared in the early 80s.

Gay and lesbian depictions in advertising can be expected to follow the same path of African American representation, which has a much longer history. While the first marketing efforts traded on broad stereotypes of African Americans, today's advertisements have largely moved beyond those stereotypes, portraying these individuals in virtually the same range of activities and situations as any other social group. Similarly, marketers will likely continue to grow more adept at portraying LGBT people as plausible experts in a wider range of fields than fashion and home decorating (Buford 2005).

The Advocate: A Brief History

The Advocate currently enjoys a reputation as the news magazine of national record for the gay and lesbian population (Thompson 1994). The first issue of *The Advocate* was published in the summer of 1967, and released under the September 1967 cover date. An offshoot of the Los Angeles Personal Rights in Defense and Education (PRIDE) newsletter, *The Advocate's* inspiration came from co-founder Richard Mitch's 1966 arrest in a police raid at a Los Angeles gay bar. The mission of *The Advocate* was clear and straightforward: It was to be a written record for the LGBT population of what was happening and impacting their world. The first copy, titled *The Los Angeles Advocate*, was 12 pages long and sold for 25 cents in gay bars and shops in the gay neighborhoods of Los Angeles. A first run of 500 copies was covertly produced late at night in the basement of ABC Television's Los Angeles office (Ridinger 1987).

The following year, co-founders Bill Rau and Sam Winston purchased the publishing rights for *The Advocate* from the PRIDE organization for one dollar. Gay activist and author Jim

Kepner joined the staff with a goal of securing the magazine's place as the first nationally distributed publication of the gay liberation era. Within two years *The Advocate* had captured enough readership to move from a bimonthly to monthly publishing schedule. To mirror the magazine's national focus, the title was shortened from *The Los Angeles Advocate* to *The Advocate* in April 1970. Five years later, lawyer and activist David B. Goodstein purchased *The Advocate* and maintained control until his death in 1985 (Thompson 1994).

While Goodstein's wealth bolstered the stature of the magazine, he often proved to be a troublesome leader. When he moved the magazine's home base from Los Angeles to the gay mecca of San Francisco, the publication lost its political edge and adopted more of a commercial tabloid format. When gay author John Preston joined the staff as editor and Niles Merton assumed the role of publisher, however, *The Advocate* was transformed and reemerged as a "journal of record" for the LGBT population. Many other publications, both gay and mainstream, began citing the news magazine as their source for information about happenings in the LGBT population (Thompson 1994).

Near the end of Goodstein's tenure in 1984, *The Advocate* returned to its original home of Los Angeles. The magazine was quickly redesigned as a glossy news magazine, a move that met with some animosity from longtime readers and staff. For the next decade, a succession of editors each sought to bring a fresh spin to the publication with little success. At this point, *The Advocate* was facing challenges from other publications in the burgeoning gay and lesbian magazine industry. In 1992, the magazine moved to a more mainstream glossy design and attempted to bolster its credibility by spinning off its explicit personal and classified advertisements into a separate publication (Fine 2001).

In November, 2005, *The Advocate* was snapped up as part of a portfolio of magazines acquired by PlanetOut, a conglomerate of gay-focused websites and magazines that initially went public in 2004. The impact of this acquisition on both the magazine's editorial and advertising content will likely become obvious in the next few years (Buhl 2005).

During its first three decades, *The Advocate* has faced ongoing criticism on a number of fronts. In the 1970s, it was condemned for a dearth of stories about lesbians and people of color. The early 1980s saw gay activists and medical personnel deriding the magazine's editors for a perceived lethargic response to the impending AIDS crisis. The magazine had also been condemned that its stories focused predominately on urban gay white males. Indeed, it was not until 1990 that the word "lesbian" was added to the magazine's cover and more lesbian writers were added to the editorial board and the staff (Chasin 2000).

Despite its many incarnations and reinventions over the decades, *The Advocate* has produced an impressive national chronicle of the progression of the LGBT population in the United States. An influential text during the formative years of the gay equality movement, *The Advocate* has built a solid reputation of credibility in gay journalism.

Current State of LGBT Print Advertising

Current estimates indicate that American corporations now spend about \$200 million annually in gay media, both online and in print (2004 Gay Press Report). Advertising spending in gay and lesbian publications reached \$207 million in 2004, an increase of 28 percent over 2003, according to the 2004 edition of the Gay Press Report, the annual survey from marketing firms Rivendell Marketing and Prime Access, which tracks 284 gay press publications. The report also found a significant jump in ads with gay-specific content through their copy or art direction, with a 241.9 percent increase over the previous year (Gay Press Report 2004).

Like the general advertising market, most of the growth in gay print was experienced by local publications instead of national ones. Local gay newspapers, for instance, experienced a 53.9 percent increase in ad revenues, while national gay magazines generally saw a 2.5 percent increase. According to the Gay Press Report, *The Advocate* trailed its sister publication, *Out*, with a seven-percent growth in advertising pages as compared with *Out*'s 26 percent growth (2004 Gay Press Report).

According to the 2004 Gay Press Report, new companies entering the American gay market in 2003 more often started off with gay-specific print ads rather than replications of mainstream ads as they did in the past. The report indicates that major corporations such as Delta, IBM, L'Oreal, Orbitz, and others revised their advertising campaigns to feature prominent portrayals of gay and lesbian consumers, contributing to the broad jump in gay-specific advertisements.

Basic advertising principles dictate that any advertisement that avoids stereotype in its representations of the group it targets will usually pull better response than one that does not (Chasin 2000). Even in light of rapidly evolving social advancements for LGBT persons, there remains little imagery of gay men and women in advertisements. Hence, those ads that do feature these individuals stand out dramatically. Additionally, because the LGBT population so rarely sees itself reflected in advertising, those ads can receive disproportionately positive consumer responses if crafted properly.

LGBT Identities as Commodities

Regardless of their gender, race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, or disability status, people are given personalities or identities through the American commercial marketplace (Frith, 1997). In most of their consumer choices (clothing worn, automobiles driven, food eaten,

entertainment consumed), Americans “purchase” the personalities they wish from the array of options in the culture of commodity (Buford, 2000). These consumer purchases and habits ultimately help to contribute to the construction of personal identity.

A unique cultural dissonance is forming in the United States’ political and social landscape as it pertains to the integration of LGBT identities into the country’s cultural mix. As activist groups, fundamental religious sects, and state and federal governments continually challenge minor political advances made by LGBT persons, major corporate entities are embracing the gay market with vigor (Skover & Testy, 2002).

Whether focusing on advertising, mass entertainment films and television, or corporate competition for employees, LGBT individuals have become favorite targets of the commercial marketplace. They have been dubbed “an untapped goldmine,” a “dream market” and “the best workers” (Walters, 2001). Former *Advertising Age* editor Rogier Van Bakel has been quoted that “...companies are jumping on the bandwagon” to embrace the market and to court LGBT capital.

Scholars have examined how power systems use languages of sexuality to naturalize oppression based on race, class, and gender. Typical racist understandings include notions of Black women as sexually voracious, Asian women as sexually exotic, Black men as sexually predatory, and White women as sexually innocent (Gamson & Moon, 2004). These assumptions have influenced a broad range of policies in the realms of marriage and family, welfare law, healthcare, and education. Societal perceptions of sexuality also dominate the mass media, and the commercial marketplace is quick to utilize sexuality in the promotion of goods and services.

Sexuality is commerce in modern society. The two are linked in the American mindset, so much so that popular metaphors bear out the relationship. Single individuals are said to be “on

the market.” A couple enters into a “marriage contract,” and as parents they “produce offspring.” But the link between sexuality and commerce extends far beyond the metaphorical. In our capitalistic culture, portrayals of sexual pleasure drive profits and sexuality sells commodities. Depictions of erotic life become more bold and daring with each new wave of marketing strategy. According to Skover and Testy (2002),

Images of women and men that capture their bodies, their sexual mystique, and the sexualized encounters are commercially exploited to sell everything from cars to cologne. In a real sense, commerce pimps its products. The modern mass advertising process models perfectly the symbiosis between sexuality and commerce. Advertising seizes upon sexuality and imaginistically associates it with products and services.

Skover and Testy (2002) further assert that American consumers express their private identities and lifestyles through material purchases and they are therefore accustomed to viewing their own identities as commodities. Douglas Kellner (1983) wrote that “...our very images of our own body, our own selves, our own personal self-worth (or lack of it) is mediated by the omnipresent images of mass culture.”

If sexualities generally have in fact come to be viewed as commodities, LGBT identities may also be constituted as commodities. While it seems odd that a counter-cultural identity might exist as a function of mainstream cultural commerce, LGBT identities are largely formed within bonds of sexual imagery, and they cannot easily be divorced from commerce. LGBT identity owes much of its historical origin and current state to the capitalist economy and the commercial marketplace (Chasin 2000).

The consumer market’s impact on gay male identity may be most evident. As gay men have increasingly staked out their own leisure and lifestyle markets in the past three decades, the commercial marketplace has staked them out in turn, often exploiting their sexuality and offering

commercialized images of a happy, productive, physically fit “gay” life. The gay male image of the effeminate social outcast as depicted in the 1950s and 1960s metamorphosized into an identity of physical prowess and erotically charged manliness. Sociologist David Evans (1993) argues that “...the potency of the modern homosexual male’s virilization is as much economic as it is sexual, as he is allowed to exercise his rights as consumer.”

Commercial capitalism’s impact on modern lesbian identity is equally pronounced if less evident. As women began to liberate themselves from dependency on men and to forge their own independent identities, they gained a newfound freedom of sexual expression. Initially, lesbian pioneers turned their backs on commercialism’s appeals to their gender. In recent decades, however, mainstream marketers have cast a wide net, appealing to a range of lesbian identities, from overly feminine (the so-called “lipstick lesbian”) on one extreme to the more masculine (“butch”) on the other. Advertising executives rely on the notion that the modern lesbian will pay for a commercially cultivated identity of her own (Johnson, 1993).

In the study of LGBT-specific texts in commercial advertising, it is essential to recognize that a commodified identity means much more than simply buying and selling. For members of a marginalized group, it can also serve to reinforce a sense of social acceptance and validation.

CHAPTER 4

CULTURAL THEORIES INFORMING ADVERTISING ANALYSIS

The notion that advertising serves as a mirror of society is frequently used in the business world to argue that advertising cannot be held responsible for adverse social trends (Leymore 1975; Wernick 1991). This argument asserts that, in order for advertising to be effective, it must reflect a social reality that is already present. There are two straightforward arguments that may be presented to challenge this assertion.

First, despite the fact that advertising serves to prompt sales and not to further social equality, the powerful medium itself has a fiduciary responsibility not to perpetuate aspects of social life that some might find oppressive. Second, advertising does not reflect social life but contributes to its construction, selectively depicting it in ways that conform to and serve the interests of businesses. This selectivity may lead to problematic representations of the identities of those who are members of marginalized social groups, including women, racial minorities, and LGBT persons (Evans 1993).

Michael Wilke (1997) argues that advertising is a “delayed mirror of society,” lagging behind more politically progressive media. He contends that advertising narratives perpetuate a continuum of acceptance for marginalized groups – where African Americans are today, gays and lesbians may be tomorrow. He also acknowledges that advertising will always deal in idealized visions of social life and that responsible depictions of social groups are of low consequence to advertisers.

This chapter will consider two cultural theories informing the advertising analysis to follow: the feminist theory of intersectionality and its importance to identity construction and

Stuart Hall's theories of representation and stereotyping, which have for years influenced the study of social identity in media.

Intersectionality and Identity Construction

The development of intersectional approaches to the study of gender and race is based in the work of postmodern scholars studying women of color. The work of these scholars is largely classified as "multiracial feminism" or "multicultural feminism" (Browne and Misra 2003). Multiracial feminist scholars argue that race and gender are social constructs, influencing individual identities as well as contributing significantly to social power structures. Collins (1999) refers to "interlocking systems of race, class, and gender" as comprising a "matrix of domination" in which an individual can simultaneously experience disadvantage and privilege through "combined statuses of gender, race, and class." Intersectional approaches recognize that gender, race, class, and sexuality coming together to create distinctive opportunities for all groups (Browne and Misra 2003). These approaches provide a powerful tool with which to understand the construction of identity.

Interest in intersectionality arose from a critique of gender- and race-based research that failed to account for lived experience at neglected points of intersection – ones that "tended to reflect multiple subordinate locations as opposed to dominant and mixed locations (McCall 2005). For example, it was difficult to extrapolate accurate information from the lived experiences of Black women when previous studies of gender and race primarily focused on White women and Black men. A new paradigm was needed to address the highly distinct experiences of those individuals at these neglected points of social intersection.

In a 1997 review of feminist theorizing in sociology, Saltzman Chafetz asserted that a "hot topic" among feminist scholars is "the intersection of race, class, and gender." Chafetz went

on to assert that any analysis of women that ignores race will be incomplete and will most likely refer to the experiences of White women only. At the same time, theories of racial inequality that fail to incorporate gender into their frameworks are also insufficient for understanding the lives of women of color (Reskin 1999).

Intersectional approaches maintain that gender and race are not independent analytic categories, but rather are interdependent, the cumulative affects of which construct identity. According to feminist scholars, particularly those whose studies focus on race, gender is “racialized” and race is “gendered,” so that race and gender fuse to create unique experiences and opportunities for all groups, not just women of color (Collins 1999). In her book *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*, Weber (2001) asserts that race and gender intersect as “social systems” that operate “at all times and in all places.” She goes on to argue that, given their interdependent nature, no one social category will ever eclipse the other(s).

Scholars Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill (1996) add sexual identity to the equation when they contend that, from a multiracial feminist perspective, race, gender and sexuality are not reducible to individual measurable attributes to be assessed for their separate contributions to the construction of identity. Rather, it is the intersection of race, gender, nationality, religion, sexuality, and a multitude of other social constructs that forms identity and contributes to the assignment of position within the social order.

Feminist intersectional theories assume that race and gender are socially constructed categories that contain inherent power differentials (Collins 1999). These differentials are infused into all aspects of life, from individual identities and self-concepts to interpersonal

interactions, the organization of the social order, and the construction of our economic and legal systems (Weber 2001).

When studying representations of gender, race, and class in LGBT-targeted advertisements, we must acknowledge an intersectional approach to identity construction and account for the different experiences among varying intersections of gender, race, and class. Analysis of advertisements with representations of Black men must account for the unique experiences and life challenges faced by gay men of color in addition to the experiences of their White counterparts. At the same time, advertisements targeting lesbians must be analyzed in light of the variety of identity constructions among lesbians based upon race and class.

The Study of Intersectionality

Social scholar and feminist author Leslie McCall (2005) calls intersectionality the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made to date. She argues, however, that little has been done to identify how intersectionality may be accurately studied and what methodology may be applied. In her contribution to this purported dearth of methodology, McCall has identified three approaches that either use or reject analytical categories to explore the complexity of intersectionality in social life. She asserts that any study that applies an intersectional approach must satisfy a demand for "complexity" to accurately reflect multiple, intersecting, and complex social relations.

Her first approach, known as anticategorical complexity, is based on a methodology that deconstructs and rejects analytical categories. McCall claims that social life is too irreducibly complex to make fixed categories like race, gender, or sexuality anything but "simplifying social fictions" that produce inequalities simultaneously as they produce difference.

A second approach, intercategory complexity, also known as a “category approach,” observes that there are relationships of inequality among social groups and takes those relationships as the center of analysis. This approach strategically documents relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions. Focusing on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytic categories, the intercategory approach does not address complexities within single social groups or single categories.

The third approach, intracategory complexity, falls conceptually between the other approaches, which either reject categories altogether or use them strategically. This approach deconstructs the boundary-defining process itself and tends to focus on specific social groups at neglected points of intersection, or “people whose identity crosses the boundaries of traditionally constructed groups” (Dill 2002).

A key tenet of the intracategory approach is the use of personal narratives to deconstruct and study the lived experiences of individuals (McCall 2005). The study of narratives allows researchers to provide accounts of specific experiences at the intersections of multiple categories of identity. According to McCall, personal narratives situate subjects within a full network of relationships that define their social positions; however, a shortcoming is that they may only be situated from the partial perspective of the particular group under study. For instance, if an African American lesbian is the subject of study, issues of race and sexuality are more fully examined from the perspective of the African American female experience (vs. the African American male perspective) and the lesbian experience (at the expense of the heterosexual female perspective).

Ragan (2000) asserts that the most effective method of studying intersectionality is through the use of case studies, or in-depth analyses of a single group or culture or site of social intersection. Case studies have long been associated with qualitative research in the social sciences, and have generally been distinguished by their ability to probe the complexities of social life, revealing diversity, variation, and heterogeneity. Quantitative researchers, by contrast, seek singularity, sameness, and homogeneity.

Many feminists who adopt social science methodologies to study intersectionality use the case study method to identify a new or invisible group at the intersection of multiple categories of identity (McCall 2005). The methodology allows them to uncover the differences and complexities of experience at the intersecting social locations that are under scrutiny.

Limitations of Intersectional Approaches

Intersectional approaches cannot account for all possible interconnections of identity markers that comprise an individual (Wilkinson 2003). Quantitative research's reliance on large sample sizes and limited variables make its use in the study of intersectionality impractical. Qualitative research methodologies, particularly in-depth textual analysis, are better able to handle multiple identity marker combinations, but they too have limitations. Since they cannot undertake a study of more than a few intersections at one time, qualitative approaches are not easily generalizable to the larger population (Wilkinson 2003).

Intersectionality and Stereotyping

Social-psychological research (Fiske and Taylor 1991) suggests that stereotyping is a cognitive strategy used by all individuals to classify and to process the wide range of information to which they are routinely exposed. Fiske and Taylor go on to explain that stereotyping

“involves cognitively situating others in relation to oneself based on socially relevant characteristics such as gender and race.” By being selective in their processing of information about others and seeking to fit others into pre-existing categories, individuals often form biased perceptions.

An intersectional perspective on stereotyping suggests that there is no perception of gender that is blind to race, and no study of race that does not account for gender (Browne and Misra 2003). Similarly, studies of sexual orientation, including studies of media portrayals, that do not account for individual identity and experience based on the intersections of gender, race, and class, are likely to be inherently problematic, to fall back on stereotypes, and to offer only a partial view of LGBT life. For example, ads for HIV/AIDS medications that feature African American men offer a narrow depiction of the gay Black male experience, relying on a stereotypical portrayal of the Black male as suffering the consequences of sexual irresponsibility.

Intersectionality and LGBT Advertising

In the burgeoning world of LGBT advertising, critics have long contended that the marketplace promotes a view of gays as largely male, highly wealthy, overwhelmingly White, and perpetually ready to spend their considerable disposable income on a range of luxury items (Wilke 1997; Buford 2000; Walters 2001). To these critics and to many LGBT activists, this portrayal of a male, White, upper-class LGBT population serves to further marginalize those already deemed to be outside the range of typical marketing segments. The questionable portrayals also threaten the more “radical potential of the gay movement” (Walters 2001). Many gay activists argue that gays have become neither more accepted nor more integrated, but rather have become the latest commodity darlings for Madison Avenue.

Pastrana, Jr. (2004) writes that the examination of race in the United States has traditionally been dominated by notions of an African American identity framed in class, status, and sexuality. He argues that Black identities should be viewed through “intersectional lenses” that make an attempt to illustrate how various factors converge to affect the identities of groups, of individuals, and of institutions. The same may be said of the study of LGBT identities, particularly as they are depicted in the commercial marketplace, where big business may attempt to manipulate identity in order to ultimately produce sales.

Advertising does not sell products alone, but rather, it has the potential to sell a way of life, a set of common values and beliefs, and “the idea that emancipation could be achieved through the market” (Chasin 2000). Advertisers create personal narratives for consumer consumption in their depictions of individuals and their identities across lines of gender, race, sexual orientation, and class.

When studying advertisements that target LGBT consumers, we should observe these ads from an intracategorical intersectional viewpoint, assuring that gendered and racial perspectives are continually acknowledged. To account for intersectional perspectives, the narratives of models appearing in advertisements should be examined in light of gender, race, and class. These intersectional portrayals shape both the literal and the implied messages about the LGBT population.

Stuart Hall and Types of Representational Theories

Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between the members of a culture or among various cultures. Writing about cultural identity and representations of racial minorities as “other” in the American and British cinema, scholar Stuart Hall notes:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, we should think instead of identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation. (Hall 1989)

Hall has written frequently about the relationship between politics and representation and the systems representing both. He takes up the politics of representation in his text

Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices (1997), approaching representation as the medium or channel through which meaning production happens. Hall asserts that objects, including people, do not have stable, true meanings, but rather that the meanings are produced by human beings, participants in a culture, who have the power to make things mean or signify something. For Hall, representation involves understanding how language and systems of knowledge production work together to produce and circulate meanings.

At its basic level, representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the "real" world of objects, people, or events, or to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people, and events. Representation connects meaning and language to culture. It uses language to say something meaningful about, or to represent the world meaningfully.

Hall (1997) has identified three types of theories of representation: reflective, intentional, and constructionist. The reflective theory asks if language simply reflects a meaning which already exists in the world of objects, people and events. Language functions like a mirror, reflecting the true meaning as it already exists in the world. Ancient Greeks referred to mimesis to explain how language, even drawing and painting, mirrored or imitated nature (Williamson 1978). The theory that language imitates or reflects a fixed truth is "mimetic."

The intentional theory posits that language expresses only the speaker's or writer's personal intended meaning. The individual imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language. Words mean what the author intends them to mean and little else. We cannot be the sole or unique source of meanings in language; such an assertion would allow us to express ourselves in entirely private languages. The intentional theory also stresses that the essence of language is communication and that language, in turn, depends on shared linguistic conventions and shared codes.

Constructionist (or constructivist) theory asserts that meaning is in fact constructed through language. The constructionist theory has had the most significant impact on cultural studies. As consumers of messages and language, we must not confuse the material world, where things and people exist, and the symbolic practices and processes through which representation, meaning, and language operate. It is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts.

Hall (1980) also stresses the role of social positioning in the interpretation of mass media texts by different social groups. In a model derived from Frank Parkin's (1972) "meaning systems," Hall suggested three hypothetical interpretative codes or positions for the reader of a text: the dominant or hegemonic (preferred) reading, the negotiated reading, and the oppositional or counter-hegemonic reading.

When interpreting texts through the dominant or hegemonic reading, the reader fully shares the text's message and accepts and reproduces the preferred reading. The dominant reading may or may not be the conscious intent of the author. With negotiated reading, the reader partly shares the text's message and broadly accepts the preferred reading, but sometimes resists and modifies it in a way that reflects his or her own position, experiences, and interests. Finally,

in the oppositional or counter-hegemonic reading, the reader, whose social situation places them in a directly oppositional relation to the dominant code, understands the preferred reading but does not share the text's meaning and rejects this reading, bringing to bear an alternative frame of reference.

LGBT individuals exposed to advertisements prepared specifically for their consumption may adopt any of the three interpretive positions. For the purpose of critical study, the negotiated and oppositional readings are most likely to be employed for deconstructing the texts when the author is self-identified as a member of the LGBT community. As a gay man and critic of popular media, I intend to eschew the dominant reading and employ negotiated and oppositional readings whenever possible.

Representation, Meaning, Ideology, and Power

In his video presentation titled *Representation and the Media*, Stuart Hall (1997) discusses the constitutive nature of representation – that objects and events don't have one essential, fixed, or true meaning against which any media-based accuracy or distortion can be measured. As events occur, their meaning is created by the manner in which they are represented. Since reality does not exist outside the process of representation itself, representation is constitutive of the event. Through culture, we make sense of and give meaning to the world around us. Shared culture allows us to interact and create "maps of meaning."

Hall points out that the capacity to classify is a basic genetic feature of human beings and that our system of classification is learned within our culture. Language and communication are the tools with which we externalize or give "sign" to the meanings we create through the practice of "signification." According to Hall, nothing meaningful exists outside of discourse, as it is only through discourse that meaning is assigned and that function, purpose, and use are determined. It

should also be noted that absence may signify as much as that which is present. Every image that we see and interpret is being read, consciously or subconsciously, against what is not present. For example, if gay White males are the predominant demographic in travel advertisements appearing in *The Advocate*, a subtextual stereotype may be reinforced that lesbians or gay Black men are disinterested or cannot afford to travel.

Central to the theory of representation is the concept of “other,” against which we position our own identities as well as our perceptions about those who do not share our traits. Difference is an essential component of cultural meaning. However, difference and ambiguity often engender negative feelings.

Stable cultures require things to stay in their appointed place. Symbolic boundaries keep the categories ‘pure,’ giving cultures their unique meaning and identity. What unsettles culture is ‘matter out of place’ – the breaking of our unwritten rules and codes. Dirt in the garden is fine, but dirt in one’s bedroom is ‘matter out of place’ – a sign of pollution, of symbolic boundaries being transgressed, of taboos broken (Hall 1997).

Every image makes an identity claim, and because of our innate propensity to classify, we seek to either identify with or to distance ourselves from each image. Advertising in particular attempts to construct a position of identification for the viewer or consumer in relation to what is depicted in its images. The consumer is implicated in the production of meaning and the meaning is created through the engagement between the image and the viewer. As we are constantly barraged with messages and images, we care less about their number than whether or not we actually become engaged in them and identify with them (Hall 1989).

Hall (1997) also asserts that power and ideology are external factors that attempt to fix or to solidify meaning through the manipulation of images and language. Because meaning cannot be permanently and irreversibly set, it can be unfixed or “loosened and frayed.” Therefore, there

is a continuous struggle between a hegemonically based crafting of meaning and the very fluidity of meaning itself, with the consumer of images and language ultimately setting meaning for himself. When examining advertising texts in any media publication, the reader must recognize the societal power structures and mass-marketing strategies that play into their creation.

Type and Stereotype

Stuart Hall (1997) draws a distinction between types and stereotypes based on earlier work by Richard Dyer (1977). Citing Dyer, Hall advances his assertions regarding the human desire to classify by arguing that without the use of “types,” humans would have little ability to make sense of the world. We understand our world by placing individual objects, into broad categories or schemes into which – according to cultural dictates – they fit. Typing therefore is essential to the production of meaning.

Dyer (1977) applies the concept of typification directly to the ways in which people view others, whether similar to or unlike themselves. He maintains that a type is a simple, memorable, and widely recognized characterization in which a few traits are privileged.

We come to “know” something about a person by thinking of the roles which he or she performs: is he/she a parent, a child, a worker, a lover, boss, or an old age pensioner? We assign him/her to the membership of different groups, according to class, gender, age group, nationality, race, linguistic group, sexual preference and so on. Our picture of who the person “is” is built up out of the information we accumulate from positioning him/her within these different orders of typification (Dyer 1977).

Typifications for gay men and lesbians are perpetuated in popular culture and within social relations within the “gay community”² itself. Gay men typify each other according to a range of physical and class-based characteristics, including age, body size, race, object of sexual

² The term “gay community” has been widely used to refer to the overall cultural group composed of LGBT persons. The term is problematic in its implication of shared interests and/or similarity of identity and may actually have a marginalizing effect in failing to account for the diversity within the LGBT population. For the purpose of this study, the term “gay population” or “LGBT population” will be used.

desire, income, and preference for specific sexual acts. Typification within the lesbian population is often based on body type, fashion style, temperament, assignment of gender identity, and preference of sexual act. Based on these typifications, both gay men and lesbians make sense of their place within the larger LGBT population. Those who self identify as bisexual or transgendered are faced with the difficult task of assigning typifications in their marginalized position outside the categories already established within the gay male and lesbian populations.

Stereotyping adopts the few, simple, and memorable traits that typify and identifies the person within the framework of those traits alone, often exaggerating and simplifying them and rejecting difference. In this manner, stereotyping promotes closure and exclusion. According to Hall (1997), stereotyping is an outgrowth of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. Stereotyping establishes that which is “normal” and distinguishes it from the “abnormal.” The “other” is positioned against “us” and the “insider” against the “outsider.” Where hegemony and inequalities of power exist, stereotyping is most likely to occur. Stereotyping classifies people based on their adherence to, or separation from, the established norm. Those groups or individuals who fall outside the norm are classified as “other.”

Stereotypes and the LGBT Population

Social science research on gay and lesbian individuals dates mainly from the mid-1970's. Most of that work has been largely descriptive, seeking to test the accuracy of prevailing social stereotypes about gay and lesbian relationships and to provide more reliable information (Walters 2001). Much of this research has uncovered data that stands in sharp contrast to many of the stereotypes being perpetuated about gays and lesbians.

One common stereotype asserts that homosexuals are unhappy individuals who are unsuccessful in developing enduring same-sex ties. Drifting from one sexual liaison to another,

they end up old and alone. But studies of gay male and lesbian attitudes about relationships find that most lesbians and gay men say they strongly desire enduring close relationships (Bell & Weinberg 1978; Jay & Young 1997). Other studies have investigated the extent to which lesbians and gay men are successful in establishing intimate relationships. In surveys of gay men, between 40 and 60 percent of the participants indicated they were currently involved in a steady relationship (Jay & Young, 1997). In studies of lesbians, between 45 and 80 percent of the women surveyed were currently in a steady relationship. These estimates are not completely representative of all gay men and lesbians in the United States. They do indicate, however, that a large proportion of homosexuals have stable close relationships. Research also suggests that a slightly higher proportion of lesbians than gay men may be in steady relationships (Bell & Weinberg 1978).

An additional question concerns the longevity of these partnerships. Lacking marriage records and representative samples, it is difficult to make even ballpark estimates about how long “typical” LGBT relationships last. Most studies have focused on younger adults whose relationships have lasted for a few years, and the same would be true for heterosexuals in their twenties. The few studies that have included older gay men and lesbians have found that relationships lasting twenty years or longer are not uncommon (McWhirter & Mattison 1984).

Another common stereotype holds that gay and lesbian relationships are inferior to those of heterosexuals. A 1987 study of heterosexual college students by Testa, Kinder, and Ironson found that the students expected gay and lesbian relationships to be less satisfying, more prone to discord, and “less in love” than heterosexual relationships. But a study conducted by Susan Cochran and Letitia Anne Peplau (1981) that selected matched samples of 50 lesbians, 50 gay men, 50 heterosexual men, and 50 heterosexual women found that 60 percent of the participants

said they were “in love” with their partners; most of the rest indicated they were “uncertain.”

Lesbians and gay men generally reported very positive feelings for their partners. They also rated their current relationships as highly satisfying and very close. No significant differences were found among lesbians, gay men, and heterosexuals on any of these measures of relationship satisfaction. Other studies have revealed similar findings and have extended the range of relationship measures used (Jay & Young 1997).

Traditional heterosexual gender roles have often been stereotypically assigned to members of LGBT couples. C.A. Tripp (1975) notes that “when people who are not familiar with homosexual relationships try to picture one, they almost invariably resort to a heterosexual frame of reference, raising questions about which partner is ‘the man’ and which is the ‘woman.’” However, research shows that most lesbians and gay men actively reject traditional husband-wife or masculine-feminine roles as a model for enduring relationships. Most lesbian and gay male couples operate within “dual-worker” relationships, so that neither partner is the exclusive income-earner and each partner has some measure of economic independence. Further, examination of the division of household tasks, sexual behavior, and decision making in homosexual couples finds that clear-cut and consistent husband-wife roles are uncommon. In many relationships, there is some specialization of activities with one partner doing more of some jobs and less of others (McWhirter & Mattison 1994).

Several other more egregious stereotypes are assigned to the LGBT population. These include the belief that homosexuality can be “cured”; that gay people recruit others to be gay; that gay men wish to be women and lesbians wish to be men; that individuals become gay or lesbian as result of childhood sexual abuse; and that gay men in particular cannot control their sexual urges. A number of insidious stereotypes center on LGBT individuals and children,

including the belief that gay men are more likely than heterosexuals to sexually molest children; that gay men and lesbians cannot or should not be parents; and that children raised in households headed by a same sex couples are more likely to be gay or lesbian themselves (Jay & Young 1997).

While LGBT stereotypes as created by the general population continue to evolve, stereotyping within the LGBT population itself runs rampant. One need only peruse web-based and print-published personals columns to see how gay men stereotype each other based on a variety of physical and lifestyle factors. From the young, appearance-obsessed “twink” to the older, lecherous, sex-obsessed “daddy,” gay men often pigeonhole each other with little regard for individual variety and character. Lesbians assign the stereotypes of the manly, gruff “butch” or “bull dyke” against the ultra-feminine “lipstick lesbian” or “femme.” These “internal stereotypes” serve to further divide a population already deemed as “other.” When studying media messages that target the LGBT population, it is appropriate to ponder whether advertisers who court LGBT consumers are perpetuating these internal stereotypes as well as the external stereotypes assigned to LGBT persons by the larger population. This may be a question of production, as the sexual orientations of members of the advertising teams would likely influence the use of coded language. This language may in turn reinforce internal stereotyping (Walters 2001).

Standpoint Theory and Cultural Studies

At its basic level, a standpoint is a place from which individuals view the world – a place that determines what they focus on as well as what is obscured from view. Standpoint epistemology argues that knowledge is the product of our active engagement with the world around us (Pohlhaus 2002). The relationship between the self and the world is dialectical: human

beings transform their environments that in turn transform them. Thus, we come to know our world by shaping it to our own needs and then adapting ourselves to the altered world that we have created.

Standpoint theorists also suggest that societal inequalities generate distinctive accounts of nature and social relationships. According to Sandra Harding (1991), the social groups to which we belong shape what we know and how we communicate. She argues that objectivity is optimized to starting at specific “lived locations.” These locations should be those of people and groups who have traditionally been excluded from the production of knowledge. For already privileged groups, she calls for self-reflective theorizing which critically interrogates their roles within power structures.

A growing body of knowledge from a feminist standpoint is rooted in works of philosophy and literature. Early feminist standpoint theorists were influenced by the notions of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that the poor can be society’s “ideal knowers.” Standpoint theory is also influenced by symbolic interactionism, which suggests that gender is socially constructed and by postmodern theories that call for a critique of male-centered epistemologies. Although Harding draws from these outwardly conflicting influences, her theory is rooted by the central belief that all scholarly inquiry should start from the lives of women and others who are marginalized.

Standpoint theorists also believe that the individuals who define a field of study shape the view of the world that emerges from that field. Harding (1991) asserts that each person only achieves a partial view of reality from the perspective of his or her own position in the overall social hierarchy. Although this partial or “situated” knowledge is incomplete, she and other standpoint theorists believe that the absence of privilege of subordinate or marginalized groups

allows their standpoints to be more complete and thus more reliable than those of privileged groups. By virtue of their privilege and hegemonic position, those in the dominant culture have an innately limited perspective.

The concept of “strong objectivity” (Harding 2004) indicates that a perspective generalized from the lives of women or other marginalized groups is the preferred standpoint from which to begin research. Its oppositional theory, “weak objectivity,” holds that knowledge generated from the standpoint of dominant groups is less reliable and less valid. Julia Wood (2005) has identified two reasons why the standpoints of women and other marginalized groups are less partial, distorted, and false than those of men in dominant positions. First, marginalized people have more motivation to understand the perspective of the powerful than vice versa; and second, marginalized people are less likely to have any clear motivation for defending the status quo. Wood’s work on communication research based on women’s lived experiences suggests that a standpoint approach is practical to the extent that it generates an effective critique of unjust practices.

Standpoint theory is not without its detractors. While Wood (2005) asserts that the concept of women as a single social group is useful, some critics argue that specific standpoints of women’s experiences must account for issues of race, class, religion, sexual orientation, and other social factors. Some feminist scholars contend that Harding’s version of standpoint theory underestimates the role of language, which is influenced by culture and cannot be removed from a standpoint. Other critics consider the concept of strong objectivity to be inherently flawed and contradictory, arguing that marginalized groups have no greater capacity to understand the lives of the privileged than vice versa. Wood (2005) herself has acknowledged that it may be difficult

to identify varying degrees of marginalization among social groups, a valid challenge to the concept of strong objectivity.

This study of advertisements intended for consumption by the LGBT population is informed by standpoint theory in that I am a self-identified member of the target population. At the same time, if intersectional perspectives are to be honored in the study, I must acknowledge that I approach the study from a position of racial and gender-based privilege as a White male. However, by definition, all standpoints are partial.

Bringing to bear various cultural theories in the study of LGBT advertisements presents a challenge. In order to honor an intracategorical approach, I must attempt to decode the narratives for models appearing in the ads from neglected intersections of gender, race, and class. In many cases, my racial and gendered privilege may make that a difficult task. However, my membership in the LGBT demographic lends a higher level of credibility to the negotiated and oppositional readings I intend to present. Therefore, I admit that there may be a high degree of subjectivity in my readings of these texts, despite the fact that standpoint theory offers me a more authoritative position from which to decipher the hegemonic codes. I have made every attempt to draw rational conclusions supported by the cultural theories I have cited.

CHAPTER 5

PURPOSE OF STUDY, METHODOLOGY, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to examine gay-themed advertisements placed by major national corporate advertisers in the 2005 “Pride” double issue of *The Advocate*, a well-established national gay and lesbian newsmagazine. The study will attempt to illuminate the ways in which gender, race, class, and sexuality intersect in the advertising of products and services to LGBT people, ultimately contributing to the formation of a privileged gay/lesbian identity. The analysis will also examine how these advertisements may challenge or perpetuate stereotypes about LGBT people. Although many national advertisers simply replicate their mainstream advertisements in the gay and lesbian press, this study will focus on those ads that contain appeals tailored specifically for LGBT consumers. Standpoint theory asserts that individuals who are members of marginalized groups have a keener ability to understand the social inequities and power differentials affecting their groups than are those in dominant positions of social hierarchy (Wood, 2005). As a gay man and a 15-year subscriber to *The Advocate*, I will draw upon my own experience and my accumulated knowledge when interpreting the imagery and representations in the text.

This advertising analysis will draw on two cultural theories: Stuart Hall’s types of representational theories and the representational practice of stereotyping; and theories of intersectionality rooted in African American feminist research. Specifically, I will incorporate Hall’s (1973) negotiated and oppositional readings of the advertising texts. When appropriate, I will attempt to challenge the dominant reading being set forth for LGBT readers and will impose my own frame of reference as a gay man. In addition, I will use the work of LGBT advertising

analyst and critic Michael Wilke to inform the analytical framework, examining LGBT identity in the advertisements' depictions of human subjects as well as text.

In the realm of marketing consumer goods and services, advertising does not serve egalitarian ends. Past research into the consumer depictions of women and racial minorities has revealed that advertisers often utilize stereotypes and myths when creating appeals to target niche audiences. It is expected that this study of LGBT depictions will mirror that research, indicating that portrayals of gay men and lesbians in *The Advocate* are largely in synch with the wider societal perceptions that exist about them.

I have chosen to use textual analysis as the method for examining the ads. As a central methodology of cultural studies, textual analysis is useful in that it allows for considerable freedom of interpretation. A basic assumption of textual analysis is that there is no simple, single representation of reality against which to measure media texts or to judge how "accurate" a representation it is. Every version of "reality" against which a text is measured is always, inescapably, simply another representation. It is often tempting to interpret a text as being either "accurate," reflecting some universal truth, or "inaccurate" – stereotyped or negative in some way or not indicative of truth (Storey 2001).

There is a philosophical underpinning to textual analysis which suggests that even simple words and descriptions of the world are necessarily "texts" – there is never one, single, "correct" way to describe anything in the world. There are always many ways in which the same "truth" can be accurately described. We can see this fact at its most extreme when we look at different languages, and the different way in which they describe the same phenomena (Ragin 2000).

This textual analysis of advertisements appearing in the 2005 "Pride" double-issue of *The Advocate* suggests that the images of LGBT individuals in the magazine's national

advertisements present a construction of LGBT life that is open to numerous interpretations. I have chosen to focus the study on this double issue of *The Advocate* for two reasons. First, due to its size alone, the double issue provides an image-rich text for analysis. Second, by virtue of its title as the “Pride” issue, the publication is promoted to the LGBT population as being representative of the purported sense of community and worth experienced by gay men and lesbians throughout the nation. If we accept, as Judith Williamson (1978) suggests, that advertising merits “de-coding,” we can assert the significance of examining advertising in an important cultural product such as *The Advocate*.

Selection and Classification of Advertisements

A total of 67 display advertisements appear in this issue of *The Advocate*.³ Of these, 41 ads feature human subjects. I have chosen to incorporate 32 of these ads into the study. The remaining nine ads were omitted for one of three reasons: the human subjects appeared within the context of a product itself (for example, actors in a movie ad); the ads featured celebrity endorsements (Ellen Degeneres for American Express); or the prominence of the human subjects was so small that they were rendered indistinct and impossible to identify.

In the advertising industry, models are positioned in ads in order to appeal directly to readers. For example, in publications targeting African Americans, the presence of African American models allows readers to relate directly to the subjects and the products or services they represent. Likewise, females appearing in advertisements run in women’s publications allow for literal and psychological connections with female readers. However, in publications targeting the LGBT population, the gay or lesbian orientation of the model must be inferred from

³ Ninety-five classified advertisements appear in the “MarketSpace” pages at the end of the publication. I have chosen to focus my analysis on display advertisements only, as they are larger, they have more impact, and they are more likely to be viewed by readers as they peruse the publication. There may be value in an analysis of classified ads as part of a separate study.

his or her mere presence in the text. Therefore, the representations and narratives offered in *The Advocate* for these individuals are all relevant to this study.

The remaining 26 advertisements make their appeals through text only, without the presence of human subjects. I have chosen to include six of those ads in this analysis based on the fact that they make bold statements about LGBT identity through their copy, tone, and visuals. When considering the construction of identity through advertising, it is beneficial to observe texts that feature human subjects as well as those texts that make their appeals through copy and tone exclusive of human presence. If we consider these texts as narratives that help to create racialized, gender-based, and class-based social constructions of LGBT identity, copy and tone are just as significant to the interpretation as is human imagery. In many cases the mere presence of a given advertisement may be indicative of assumptions made about its target audience.

Rather than classifying the advertisements under scrutiny according to the products and services being sold, I have clustered them based on four general themes: domestic partnership, family life, and social interaction (15 ads); health and wellness (7 ads); finances, consumer spending, and discretionary income (12 ads); and LGBT representation in the workplace (4 ads).

I believe each of these categories contributes significantly to the formation of identity, not just for LGBT individuals but for all people. Social and familial relationships, financial stature, and job/career achievement all have significant impact on self worth and the development of personal identity. The category of health and wellness has particular relevance to the gay male population due to the ongoing prevalence of HIV/AIDS as a health concern. In addition, nearly all advertisements for HIV/AIDS medications contain representations of gay men, and they should not be omitted from the study.

In some cases, a single advertisement could be interpreted in multiple ways and thus be classified under more than one theme. In these instances, I chose to classify the ad according to its dominant message or the product represented; however, I have made references to these alternative classifications within the analysis itself.

The advertisements in this study represent the marketing of an eclectic variety of products and services, including automobiles, HIV/AIDS medications, financial services, alcoholic beverages, television and movie programs, home furnishings, and travel and recreational opportunities. When all 67 advertisements appearing in this issue of *The Advocate* are viewed in totality, however, it is obvious that many categories are largely missing, including fast food operations, packaged goods, electronics, personal hygiene products, and household goods. Also absent from the mix are the major national retailers, including the department stores and so-called “super centers” who are well represented in most major national publications. Executives of large retail chains may shun the gay media, believing they have the most to lose by aligning themselves with a marginalized population still deemed to be “controversial.”

Many of the advertisements under study mirror similar texts found in mainstream national publications, but often with “gay vague” angles that are designed to appeal subtly to the LGBT population (Wilke, 1997). With suggestive, homoerotic, or coded imagery, these texts play on gay knowledge and insider language that is not easily interpreted by those who are not “in the know.”

Research Questions

This analysis seeks to answer three broad questions about the construction of identity through the portrayals of LGBT individuals in advertisements:

1. How are power and privilege as it relates to gender, race, and class constructed in the narratives presented?
2. How are stereotypes about LGBT individuals perpetuated or challenged in the narratives of these advertisements?
3. Who is being portrayed as “other” within the context of the LGBT population?

Organization of the Analysis

The analysis is organized into four general topics that represent significant realms of LGBT life. In the first portion of the analysis, I examine the ways in which gender and racial privilege is illustrated in LGBT representations of intimate, familial, and fraternal relationships. The second section uncovers a number of disconcerting portrayals of the health issues and challenges faced by gay men, including a problematic racial dichotomy in representations of gay men with HIV/AIDS. The third section addresses common overestimations of LGBT wealth and explores how some advertisers may be co-opting the notion of gay pride for profit. In this section I also investigate the ways in which advertisers use images of the White male body to market a variety of products and services. The final portion of the analysis explores LGBT representation in the corporate workplace by examining advertisements run by four companies who attempt to show their commitment to LGBT diversity. I also question whether these corporations are actually marginalizing certain identities within the LGBT population even as they attempt to demonstrate their commitment to diversity through the inclusion of LGBT workers. In my concluding chapter, I discuss the study’s limitations, make recommendations for future research, and consider the impact of commodified LGBT identities on the future of the gay and lesbian struggle for equality.

I hope that this study will provide a broad base of knowledge upon which future research may observe LGBT representations from multiple intersections of gender, race, class, and expression of gay sexuality. I also believe there is value in employing a negotiated reading on advertisements for specific products and services to discover how stereotypes are challenged or perpetuated in advertisers' depictions of LGBT identity. Through these types of research initiatives, we can expose the ways in which power and privilege are used by market forces to contribute to liberation or suppression of the LGBT population.

CHAPTER 6

SELLING A GAY IDENTITY: REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER, RACE, CLASS, AND SEXUALITY IN *THE ADVOCATE* NEWSMAGAZINE

DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP, FAMILY LIFE, AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

Fifteen of the 38 advertisements under study feature two or more human subjects in social settings or in familial surroundings. Models are depicted in domestic scenarios with same-sex partners (or so we are led to believe), participating in leisure-time activities with friends, vacationing together on cruises to exotic locales, and enjoying the consumption of consumer goods and services.

White Men in Love: Intimacy and Vigor

A dominant theme running through advertisements is the depiction of White male coupling and youthful exuberance. The majority of the models are White, appear to be under 40 years of age, and are physically attractive and athletically fit. Intimacy is portrayed through physical contact, although in some cases readers may interpret the narratives as representing intimacy through the proximity of the human subjects rather than by direct contact.

The centrality of physical intimacy to gay male identity is illustrated in advertisements placed by the Avis Rent-a-Car System, Inc. (Figure 1) and the Luxor Las Vegas hotel (Figure 2). Both ads feature photographs of White male couples in recreational settings. In the Avis text, the laughing couple lays arm-in-arm in a hammock, one man reclining back against his partner. The adjacent headline and the body copy assure the reader that Avis has been including domestic partners as additional drivers for “more than a decade.” This aligning of the company with LGBT equality is reinforced by the headline, “You’re A-list to us.” In this case, the “you” in

question is young, male, and White. With the privileging of that demographic, gay male couples of other races and all lesbians must identify with these men in order to be associated with the elite status ostensibly being offered to LGBT couples overall. Unfortunately, the image and copy work in tandem to define the so-called “A-list” in a narrow and unrepresentative manner. The personal narratives of these men indicate power and privilege in both their gender and race. They are “A-list” to Avis in addition to being in a premier hierarchical position in the LGBT population. Avis further highlights its association with the LGBT population by means of an adaptation of its “We try harder” logo to include the rainbow banner, a common signifier of the gay and lesbian population since 1978.

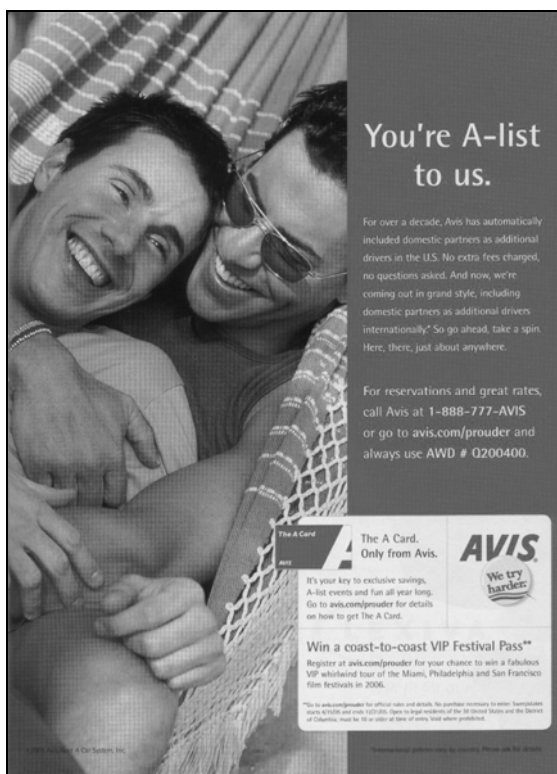


Figure 1

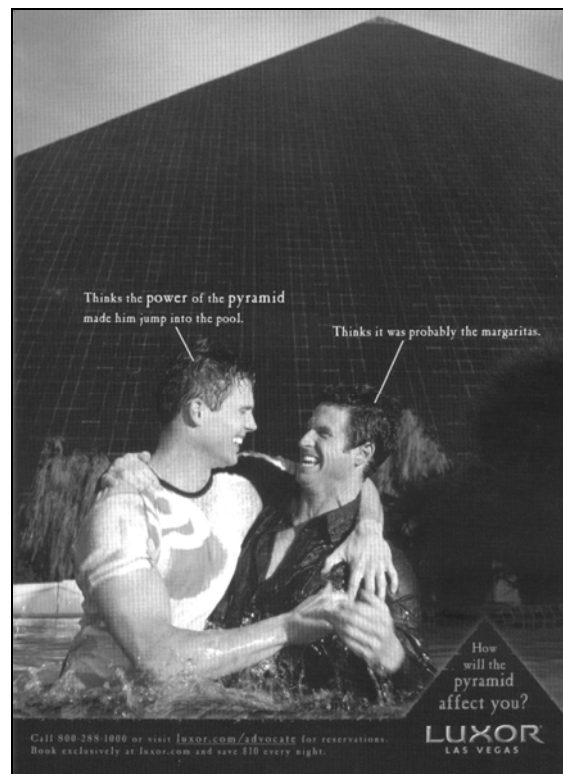


Figure 2

Gay male relationships are more stereotypically represented in the advertisement for Luxor Las Vegas. In the shadow of the hotel's massive pyramid structure, a male couple is shown frolicking in the hotel pool, fully clothed and in a passionate embrace. A line of expository copy hovers above each of the men's heads – "Thinks the power of the pyramid made him jump into the pool" and "Thinks it was probably the margaritas." The copy further poses the question, "How will the pyramid affect you?" The model whom we are led to believe is intoxicated appears to be significantly younger than his mate, and he is wearing a tight t-shirt and squeezing his partner's pectoral muscle as they embrace.

Two significant stereotypical representations are put forth in the imagery. The first involves the older man-younger man coupling, sometimes referred to with negative and incestuous subtext in the LGBT population as the "daddy-son" relationship. The underlying assumption of this stereotype is that the older of the two men is economically and sexually dominant over the younger partner, who makes himself sexually available in exchange for financial security. A second stereotype, centered on the role of alcohol in the behavior of gay men, is further supported in the narrative. The sober, older man is clearly propping up his drunken partner. Since both men are wearing clothing, the reader can assume that the sober man has entered the water in order to "rescue" or provide support for his tipsy mate. These references, intentional or not, may be interpreted as alluding to the roles each man fills in their relationship.

Consumption of alcoholic beverages among members of the LGBT population has been a topic of study and debate for decades. In the 1980s, as the AIDS epidemic swept through the gay male demographic in major American cities, unsafe sexual activity as a result of alcohol consumption and lowered inhibitions was identified as a major source of growing infection rates. The nature of the couple's relationship as presented in the Luxor Las Vegas ad's narrative is

open to interpretation. However, the implication remains that alcohol has lowered the younger man's inhibitions to the extent that he jumps into the pool and grabs his older partner in a sexually provocative manner. Hence the "power of the pyramid" ultimately constructs the couple's narrative as one of dominance and submission, of caretaker and ward.

Two ads are notable for their imagery of gay male couples in scenarios lifted from a mainstream heteronormative paradigm. Unlike homoerotic imagery, these ads speak not to perceived gay male difference but rather to a sameness with their heterosexual counterparts. Walters (2001) points out that these types of advertisements craft a gay identity that is White, affluent, and always coupled, removed significantly from the threat of sexual promiscuity or wanton desire. These couples are dealing with everyday issues like incompatible sleeping arrangements and financial matters.

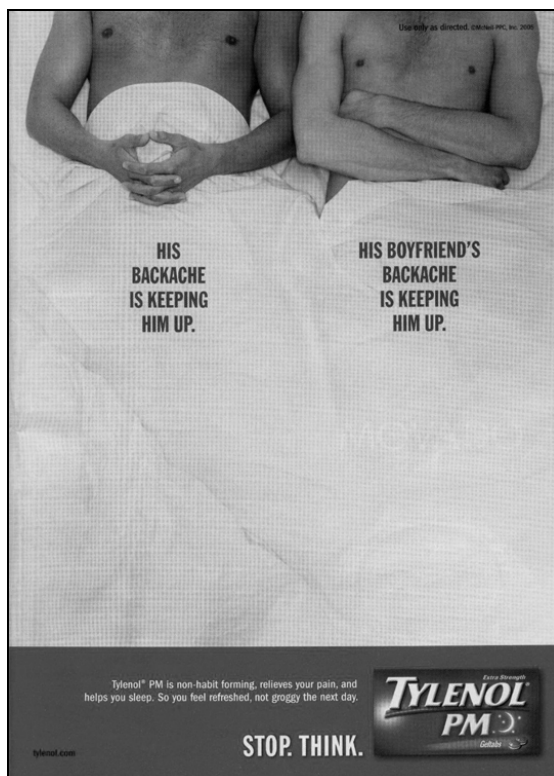


Figure 3



Figure 4

An ad for Tylenol PM pain reliever (Figure 3) uses a matter-of-fact approach that reproduces heteronormative depictions of married life. A couple, once again in this instance male and White, lies in bed, both men's torsos exposed above the sheets although their heads are not visible as the image bleeds off the top of the page. The copy superimposed below each figure reads "His backache is keeping him up" and "His boyfriend's backache is keeping him up." The backache sufferer's hands are neatly folded over his midsection, while his partner's arms are crossed in frustration. Numerous television and print advertisements for products ranging from sleep aids to cures for snoring feature variations on this theme, albeit in a dominant heterosexual context.

Similarly, an ad for Washington Mutual bank (Figure 4) depicts a White male couple, one man's arm slung across his partner's shoulder, walking on a beach and laughing heartily at the prospect of "free checking." While the image has no direct correlation to the service being offered, the patriotic headline "Home of the Free ... Checking" is indicative of Washington Mutual's desire to align itself with the concept of civil and human rights for LGBT persons, or at least those who are male and White. The term "Home of the Free" might just as easily been juxtaposed over an image of any homosexual or heterosexual couple of any race, allowing the bank to make its case for equality in a benign and non-threatening manner.

Gay Black Men and Intimate Relationships: Conditional and Exclusionary

The presence of racial diversity in representations of LGBT coupling is limited in the advertising texts in this particular issue of *The Advocate*. In the 38 ads under analysis, Black men appear as members of couples in only two texts; in both instances, these individuals are portrayed with White partners. The underrepresentation of racial and ethnic groups in most major media is well documented, and *The Advocate* reflects these deficiencies.

An advertisement placed by the Washington, DC Convention & Tourism Corporation (Figure 5) features a dominant image of the Washington Monument and an American flag billowing in the wind under the headline “honoring a guy who wore powdered wigs and tight pants.” Above a city logo and the words “The American Experience,” a small inset photograph reveals a Black man kissing his White partner on the cheek. The representations offered in the imagery of this ad are disturbing on a number of levels.

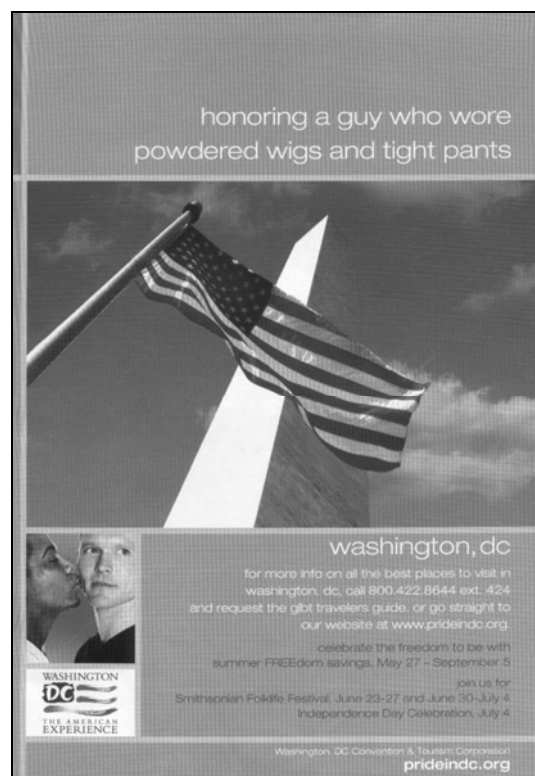


Figure 5

If the photograph is examined independent of its context, the positioning of the two models carries a subtext of dominance and subordination. In a tight frame that focuses on the model's heads, the Black man, eyes closed, is kissing his partner, who is gazing away from him and out of the frame. Although the White model may be the taller of the two, the Black model's subordinate position requires that he look upward to offer the kiss. The White man appears to be

completely oblivious to his partner's affections. A coy expression indicates that his mind is elsewhere and his attention is focused on another object, just out of the reader's site.

Hall (1973) has posited that two discourses, the discourse of written language and the discourse of photography, are necessary to produce and set a preferred meaning for a text. When the photograph is placed in the context of the remainder of the ad, additional layers of meaning allow for a more sinister interpretation. The position of the photograph on the bottom left side of the page causes the White model's gaze to be fixed on the Monument and the American flag. If the Monument itself is interpreted as a phallic symbol, the White man's personal narrative may indicate that his fantasies are focused on the size of his Black partner's genitals. This objectification of the Black male sex organ is based on a deeply set racialized and sexualized stereotype. The presence of the American flag billowing across the monument alludes to the White model's experiences as a gay male and an American are tied to his sexual prowess.

The copy reading "Washington, DC: The American Experience," situated directly below the photo, further problematizes the ad's dominant reading by adding allusions of hundreds of years of social and economic hegemony by White Americans and struggle for freedom and equality by African Americans. As the nation's capitol, Washington, DC is more closely associated with our history than any other American city, and the ad professes to represent the conditions of a singular "American experience." Clearly, the narratives of these two men differ based on race, with each of them possessing a distinctly unique set of experiences. The Black model, physically placed in a position of subordination, is given a narrative in which his partner, already situated at an intersection of racial and class-based power and privilege, objectifies him with an insidious and offensive stereotype. His "American experience" and his identity, one

informed by 300 years of slavery, freedom, civil rights, and social and economic struggle, are minimized and his identity is reduced to a crude reference to the size of his genitals.

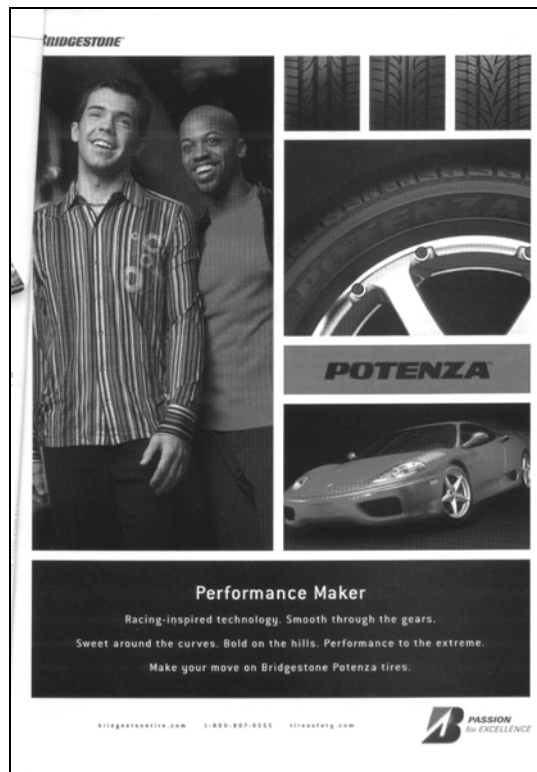


Figure 6

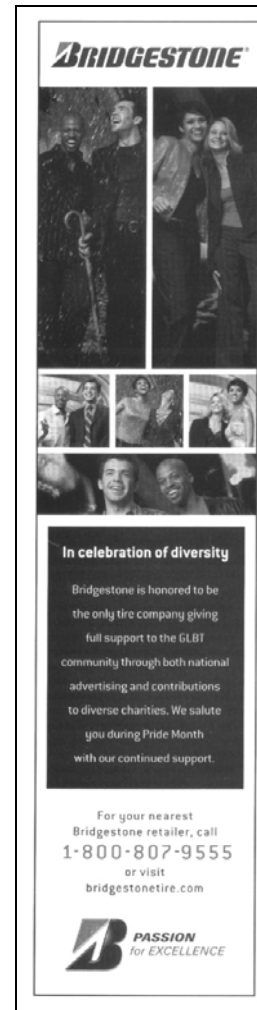


Figure 7

A far less problematic depiction of Black gay male sexuality is provided in a pair of advertisements for Bridgestone tires (Figures 6 and 7). In both ads, the interracial male couple is shown in a variety of settings, both wearing fashionable clothing, smiling broadly, apparently enjoying the notion of high-performance tires on their expensive sports car, also pictured in a separate frame. In the primary ad, the text refers to the tires as “Performance Maker,” a reference to gay male sexuality. Additional copy utilizes suggestive language like “performance to the

extreme” and “make your move.” A secondary ad run by Bridgestone on the adjacent page in support of the “GLBT community” also features an interracial lesbian couple in a series of vignettes that mirror those of the male couple. It is significant that while these women are featured in the smaller “diversity counts” ad, they are not depicted in the larger text designed to market the tires. Lesbians are acknowledged as a members of the diversity that Bridgestone seeks to support while they are divorced from the company’s target market for its core business.

Although the Bridgestone ad does not make stereotype a factor in its imagery, the problem with both ads is their suggestion that gay Black men’s identities are validated through their relationships with White partners and friends. There are no images of Black couples to be found, and the only instances where Black males appear without the companionship of White friends or lovers are in advertisements for HIV/AIDS medications. Gay Black men are strictly limited from participation in the social milieu of the LGBT population.

Beyond Coupling: Three’s Not Always a Crowd

An additional, ostensibly provocative spin on the theme of gay male coupling is revealed in an advertisement of lodging accommodations at the gay resort enclave of Provincetown, Massachusetts (Figure 8). Three White men are depicted walking away from the camera on a white-sand beach. Two of them men are fully clothed and walking closely, arm-in-arm, while a third model, wearing only a towel around his waist, walks beside the couple holding one member’s hand. The relationship between the three men is open to interpretation. However, it is the author’s experience that most gay men, regardless of the depth of their friendships, do not hold hands or walk in an embrace unless they are sexually involved. A negotiated reading of this text leads the author to believe that this imagery represents a nontraditional intimate relationship in which the primary couple – the two men walking closely – take on a third partner for sexual

gratification. The common essentialist notion of promiscuity and casual sex frequently perpetuated against gay men by the larger mainstream population may be reinforced by this text.



Figure 8

Lesbian Couples: Kids and Cruises

Lesbian couples appear in six advertisements, predominantly in texts promoting ocean cruises and hotel chains, as well as a retirement community sales ad and the previously referenced Bridgestone tire ad. Additionally, a lesbian couple depicted with a young boy is the only representation of gay parenting present in the publication.

Choice Hotels portrays a non-traditional family led by a White female couple tickling a young boy as they stand on a beach (Figure 9). The advertisement makes no other claim to difference, nor does it intimate that the three models depicted in fact constitute a family. The supporting copy speaks to discounted rates but does not specify that these discounts are “family

rates.” The ad could just as easily picture a family led by a heterosexual couple or a group of friends. The significance of the ad is its straightforward and unapologetic way of directly challenging a pattern seen too often in this country – loving, caring couples and families being told that they’re illegitimate, shameful and undeserving of respect, dignity, and validation.



Figure 9

Within the narrative of the ad, the question of the boy’s parentage is left open to multiple interpretations. Is he the biological offspring of one of the women from a previous heterosexual relationship, was he conceived by the couple through artificial insemination, or was he simply adopted? The characterization of lesbians as nonprocreative beings and the depiction of lesbian lovers as participants in same sex relationships may often cause the image of the lesbian mother to be unsettling even to members of the LGBT population, privileging a dominant interpretation of this imagery as an adoptive child with his two mothers. Also of note are the physical characteristics of these women. Short-haired, heavyset, and middle-aged, the couple is unlike the largely feminine representations of lesbian motherhood that are typically seen in movies and television – when they are seen at all.

Social Interaction: A “Young, White Guy’s Club”

The advertisers who appear in this issue of *The Advocate* use a narrow brush in their depictions of LGBT friendship and bonding. As is the case with the portrayal of intimate relationships, representation of LGBT individuals in friendly scenarios is largely limited to young, White gay males. For the purposes of the study, ad imagery featuring two or more subjects engaging in social interaction in a manner which does not suggest sexual intimacy is classified as representing friendship.

Researchers (Weston 1991; Gamson & Moon 2004) have written extensively on the construction of “gay kinship,” in which LGBT individuals form strong familial bonds that serve as substitutes for family ties. In many cases, the blood ties were lost as a result of outright rejection or the emotional distance caused in relationships when individuals remained closeted. In particular, in-depth interviews conducted by Weston (2001) indicated that people from diverse backgrounds considered themselves to be the beneficiaries of better friendships than heterosexuals. These subjects also argued that they believed gay people accord a greater significance and respect to friendship.

Five models in an advertisement for Budweiser beer (Figure 12) are shown in a nightclub setting, sitting in two distinct clusters. Laughing and enjoying camaraderie over their beverage consumption, the five subjects represent the most diversified racial and gendered portrayals of friendship in the entire text. In fact, this single text marks the only appearance of racial and gender diversity in all the advertisements appearing in this issue of the magazine. Two White men, one Black man, and two White women comprise the group; all appear to be under age 30. A line of text encourages the reader to “Be yourself” and a rainbow patterned band across the

bottom of the page evokes LGBT pride and acceptance on the part of the company. The subtle rainbow is the only signifier that brands this ad as targeting the LGBT population.



Figure 12



Figure 13

Like so many beer and wine ads in mainstream publications, the text equates the consumption of alcohol with youthful attractiveness. Unlike the young man in the Luxor Las Vegas ad, these friends in the world of Bud Light are clean-cut, sober, and prone to good behavior. At the moment in time captured, their personal narratives indicate that their lives are carefree and there is no evidence of struggle and no visible power differentials.

Three advertisements (Figures 13, 14, and 15), all placed by travel and vacation providers, are absent of racial diversity in their portrayals of LGBT friendship. The ads feature multiple images with a total of 40 men, 39 White and one Black. Most of these models are young, athletically fit, and physically attractive. The absence of women comes as no surprise

considering the gender-specific nature of many LGBT cruises. These travel providers package their trips with an eye toward providing customized accommodations and experiences for gay men. The notions of an “all-gay resort” and “traveling with pride” are apparently closed to racial minorities, the aged, and those who do not fit a socially constructed definition of “attractive.” Once again, power and privilege are constructed in these narratives as belonging to a young, White, toned and attractive demographic.

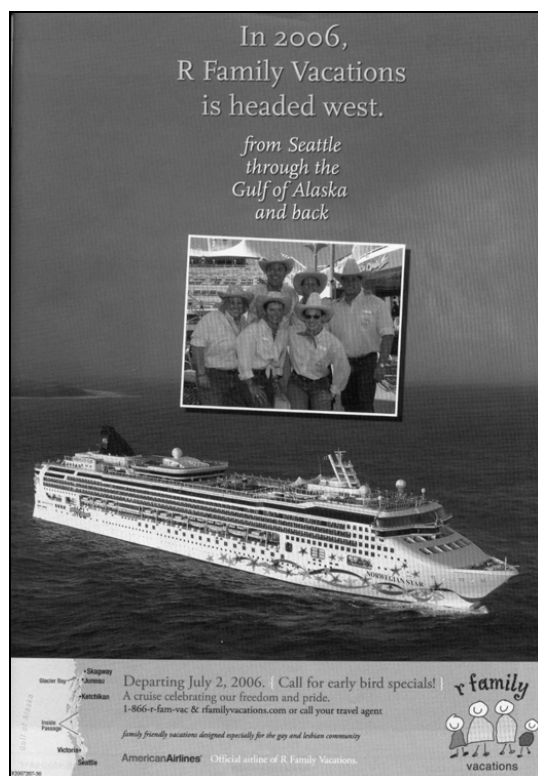


Figure 14

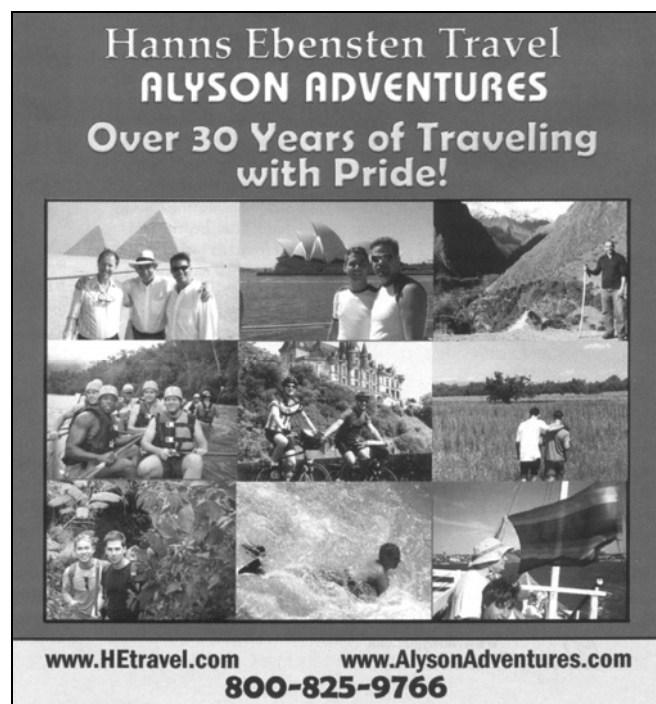


Figure 15

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Health and wellness in the LGBT population is an ongoing topic of study and debate. Studying the health concerns of LGBT people presents significant challenges for healthcare researchers. Health studies targeting the general population rarely ask about sexual or gender orientation. Unfortunately, the few that have been interested in sexual orientation often had serious methodological flaws. For example, early studies comparing the alcohol and tobacco use of heterosexuals and sexual minorities recruited gay and lesbian participants in bars. Not surprisingly, they found high levels of smoking and drinking among these individuals. Based on these studies, researchers concluded that gay and lesbian people smoke and drink more heavily than the population as a whole (Buford 2000). This may or may not be true, but certainly it cannot be scientifically proven by studies that recruit subjects in such biased ways. Truly representative studies on the health of members of the LGBT population have been rare, and they are still needed.

Aside from sexually-transmitted diseases, most commonly HIV/AIDS, healthcare issues traditionally associated with the LGBT population include alcoholism and drug abuse, and mental illness and anxiety disorders. However, studies in recent years have indicated that although gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals appear to have higher rates of some mental disorders compared with heterosexuals, the rates are not to the level of a serious pathology. Discrimination is believed to help fuel these higher rates.

Some surprising findings have also surfaced in studies of LGBT mental health. Rothblum (2001) found that lesbians reported equally strong levels of mental health as their biological, heterosexual sisters and also registered higher self-esteem. The study also found that bisexual women had significantly poorer mental health than lesbians and heterosexual women – findings

consistent with other studies on bisexuals. Rothblum speculates that possible reasons include the rejection faced by bisexuals in both the straight and gay populations. She also posits that their mixed sexual orientation is more difficult to integrate psychologically than heterosexuals' and homosexuals' single-sex orientations.

A study of gay and lesbian youth (Savin-Williams 2001) found that these young people are only slightly more likely than heterosexual youth to attempt suicide, refuting previous research that suggested much higher rates. While sexual-minority men and women were far more likely to report suicide attempts than heterosexual subjects, the two groups showed similar rates of true suicide attempts. Savin-Williams contends that the findings suggest that gay youth are vulnerable to the media's and researchers' negative depictions of gay youth as highly troubled people.

Healthcare advertisements appearing in the 2005 Pride issue of *The Advocate* represent a narrow range of the health and wellness concerns of the LGBT population. It should be noted that LGBT persons suffer the same physical ailments as heterosexuals, yet pharmaceutical companies focus their advertising money on drugs and therapies for HIV/AIDS and mental illness. Most of these ads, as the following analysis suggests, are targeted to gay men. In this particular text, lesbians, already positioned at a neglected intersection of gender and sexual orientation, are ignored.

Limited "Alternatives" for Mental Health Challenges

Solutions to gay men's mental health challenges are presented in a single advertisement. Alternatives – "the nation's only Gay owned and operated alcohol, drug, and mental health program" – occupies a full-page ad located near the back of the 200-page issue (Figure 16). Under the headline "break away," a young, muscular White man is shown leaping out of the

ocean, his hands raised high and his arms reaching upward in a stance suggesting victory. The copy goes on to explain that Alternatives provides treatment for a veritable laundry list of mental health ailments at its many nationwide locations, including anxiety, alcoholism, crystal methamphetamine addiction, eating disorders, sexual addictions, HIV psychological problems, suicidal/homicidal thoughts and behaviors, and bi-polar disorders and phobias. A separate copy block states that the program specializes in treating “HIV/AIDS-related grief and loss.”

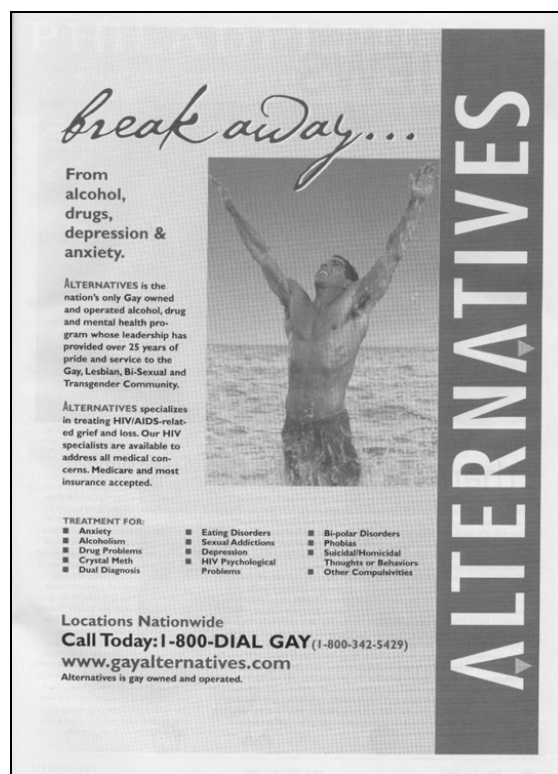


Figure 16

Once again, a youthful, White male demographic has been privileged at the exclusion of gay men of other races as well as lesbians of all races and ethnicities. The image has little relation to the service itself, and the reader is asked to identify with the model and to make a connection between the treatments offered by Alternatives and the eventual outcomes – happiness and energy (and if the reader is lucky, well-developed pectoral muscles and a trip to

the beach). In a publication rife with other images of strapping White males with bare chests, an advertisement for a mental health treatment program could reasonably be expected to visually acknowledge that mental ailments are not limited to a privileged social group. The program's very name, *Alternatives*, further supports the expectation that the narratives of groups already identified as "other" be present in the imagery. Mental health is a universal social concern.

"Living with," not "Dying of" AIDS

The selling strategy used by *Alternatives* is not uncommon among advertisers targeting gay men. With the AIDS pandemic well into its third decade, many people living with HIV in the developed world are doing so as a result of combination drug therapies that have significantly increased life expectancies. One effect of the success of combination drug therapies and the highly effective protease inhibitors is that the paradigm for understanding life with HIV has changed dramatically and now can be said to mirror chronic disease management. This model of management – "living with" HIV/AIDS rather than "dying from" it – has been accompanied by an odd marketing phenomenon: the emergence of HIV-positive individuals, mostly men, as a niche market (Crimp 2002).

Many of these advertisements targeting HIV-positive men have been subject to challenge and criticism by AID activists because of what they call misleading representations of HIV-positive people and their lives. In early drug ads in the mid-1990s, there was some concern that ads featuring athletic, handsome, and virile models participating in strenuous activity and being fully engaged in an active lifestyle were minimizing the realities of living with the disease. HIV/AIDS was being marketed as an inconvenience rather than a death sentence (Watney 2001, Crimp 2002).

In 2001, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration responded to the criticism and acknowledged that some pharmaceutical companies presented direct-to-consumer drug ads that falsely represented patients' lifestyles. The FDA also accused some advertising messages of overstating the ability of certain drugs to improve the health of HIV/AIDS patients by failing to represent the side effects that often prevent patients from engaging in rigorous activity. Advertisers were ordered to change the ads within 90 days to include information about the deadly nature of the virus and its transmission (Watney 2001).

Current HIV/AIDS medication advertisements appear to have toned down the imagery that once implied that successful drug treatments posed little risk or negative impact on quality of life. However, problematic representations of people with HIV/AIDS continue to make their way into LGBT-targeted publications, as the 2005 Pride issue of *The Advocate* amply illustrates. These ads not only appear to seduce the HIV-positive reader, but they also construct a questionable image of exactly who people with HIV/AIDS are, as well as what life is like living with the disease.

Representations of White and Black Men with HIV/AIDS: A Disturbing Dichotomy

Six pharmaceutical advertisements appearing in this publication offer a variety of messages about the way HIV-positive men deal with their medication schedules and the challenges posed by the disease. As in most print and televised drug ads, these individuals are encouraged to "shop around" for the appropriate medications and then to discuss their options with doctors. In these ads, six models, three Black and three White, are assigned narratives as they cope with the daily challenges of the disease. Unfortunately, distinctions among the aptitudes and capacities for dealing with the disease are clearly drawn along racial lines. While gay White men are depicted as happy and confident and are situated in vacation settings and

accompanied by life partners, gay Black men are portrayed as somber and isolated as they handle their medication regimens and cope with their infections.

An ad occupying a two-page spread for the protease inhibitor Reyataz[®], marketed by Bristol-Myers Squibb Company (Figure 17), features a young White man in scuba diving gear floating in water just off a dock. His head and feet are the only portions of his body that are visible within the frame and he is grinning broadly. The body copy encourages the reader to “fight HIV your way.”

The word on HIV:

Ask your doctor how REYATAZ (atazanavir sulfate), in HIV combination therapy, can help you **fight HIV your way.**

INDICATION: Reyataz (atazanavir sulfate) is a prescription medicine used in combination with other medicines to treat people who are infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Reyataz has been studied in 48-week trials in both patients who have taken or have never taken anti-HIV medicines.

Reyataz does not cure HIV or help prevent passing HIV to others.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION:

Do not take Reyataz if you are taking the following medicines: ritonavir, Veridol[®], Halcion[®], Olanzapine[®], Propofol[®], Camphor[®], Citrus[®], Minoxidil[®], Isotretinoin[®], St. John's wort, Acyclovir[®], Nefazodone[®], Pravastatin[®], or Protease[®]. Do not use Viagra[®], Levitra[®], Cialis[®], or Vioxx[®] while you are taking Reyataz without first speaking with your healthcare provider. This list of medicines is not complete. Discuss all prescription and non-prescription medicines, vitamin and herbal supplements, or other health preparations you are taking or plan to take with your healthcare provider.

Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any side effects or conditions, including the following:

- A change in the way your heart beats may occur and could be a symptom of a heart problem.
- Diabetes and high blood sugar may occur in patients taking protease inhibitor medicines like Reyataz.
- Yellowing of the skin and/or eyes may occur due to increases in bilirubin levels in the blood (bilirubin is made by the liver).
- Rash (redness and itching) sometimes occurs in patients taking Reyataz, most often in the first few weeks after the medicine is started, and usually goes away within two weeks with no change in treatment.

• If you have liver disease, including hepatitis B or C, your liver disease may get worse when you take anti-HIV medicines like Reyataz.

• Some patients with hemophilia have increased bleeding problems with protease inhibitor medicines like Reyataz.

Changes in body fat have been seen in some patients taking anti-HIV medicines. The cause and long-term effects are not known at this time.

Common side effects of Reyataz taken with other anti-HIV medicines include: nausea, headache, stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhea, depression, fever, dizziness, trouble sleeping, numbness, and tingling or burning of hands or feet.

You should take Reyataz once daily with food (a meal or snack). You should take Reyataz and your other anti-HIV medicines exactly as instructed by your healthcare provider.

Once Daily REYATAZ (atazanavir sulfate) is a protease inhibitor (PI) that is taken in HIV combination therapy.

- ◆ Can help raise your T-cells
- ◆ Can help lower your viral load to undetectable*
- ◆ Low chance of diarrhea (shown in clinical trials)
- ◆ Two pills taken once-a-day (with a snack or meal)†

* Undetectable is defined as a viral load of less than 400 or 50 copies/mL, depending on the test used.
† REYATAZ in combination therapy had a 3- to 5% rate of moderate to severe diarrhea.

† People who have taken anti-HIV medicines better usually take REYATAZ with ritonavir once daily as part of their HIV combination therapy.

You and your doctor can **fight HIV your way.**

REYATAZ[®]
(atazanavir sulfate) 150mg/200mg capsules

WWW.REYATAZ.COM

Please see important information about REYATAZ on the next page.

Bristol-Myers Squibb Company
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© 2002 Bristol-Myers Squibb Company. Princeton, NJ 08541

If you or someone you know needs help paying for medicines, call 1-800-477-4676 (1-800-477-4676). Or go to www.giving.org.

Partnership for Prescription Assistance

Figure 17

Although it is reminiscent of the early drug ads that came under fire, this particular image is part of a series of current ads in which young men, usually White, are shown in lush vacation surroundings experiencing life to the fullest. Against this background, the narrative presented for

this subject intimates that his HIV status is merely an inconvenience and that fighting it “his way” is allowing him to be active and engaged.

Try TRUVADA[®] as part of your combination HIV therapy...

Just once a day!

Make TRUVADA part of your daily routine. Two well-known medications, VIREAD and EMTRIVA, have been combined into one convenient pill that you take only once a day. Plus, TRUVADA can be taken with or without food. Ask your doctor if TRUVADA is right for you as part of your combination HIV therapy.

TREATMENT FOR EVERYDAY LIVING

Truvada
 245 emtricitabine-tenofovir disoproxil fumarate 245

www.truvada.com

INDICATION: TRUVADA is for use in combination with other anti-HIV agents to treat HIV infection in adults. TRUVADA contains two medicines, EMTRIVA[®] (emtricitabine) and VIREAD[®] (tenofovir disoproxil fumarate), combined in one tablet.

- EMTRIVA and VIREAD have each been studied separately. Clinical studies with TRUVADA or using EMTRIVA+VIREAD are ongoing.
- Since EMTRIVA and Epivir[®] (3TC) are similar medicines, studies using VIREAD+3TC support the use of TRUVADA.
- TRUVADA does not cure HIV infection. No studies show the effect of TRUVADA on the clinical progression of HIV. TRUVADA should not be used as part of a triple nucleoside regimen.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION:

- **Lactic acidosis** (a buildup of acid in the blood) can be a medical emergency and may need to be treated in the hospital. **Call your healthcare provider right away** if you have nausea, vomiting, unusual muscle pain, and/or weakness.
- **Serious liver problems** (hepatotoxicity), with liver enlargement (hepatomegaly) and fat in the liver (steatosis), may occur. **Call your healthcare provider right away** if you have light colored stools, dark colored urine, and/or if your skin or the whites of your eyes turn yellow.

- **Flare-ups of hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection:** If you have HIV and HBV, your liver disease may suddenly get worse if you stop taking TRUVADA. Do not stop taking TRUVADA unless directed by your healthcare provider.
- **Kidney problems:** If you have had kidney problems or take other medicines that can cause kidney problems, your healthcare provider should do regular blood tests to check your kidneys.
- **Bone changes:** It is not known whether long-term use of TRUVADA causes damage to your bones. If you have had bone problems in the past, talk to your healthcare provider before taking TRUVADA.

Changes in body fat have been seen in some people taking anti-HIV medicines. The most common side effects of TRUVADA when taken with other anti-HIV medicines are dizziness, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, headache, abdominal pain, depression, rash, and gas. Skin discoloration (spots and freckles) may also occur.

Discuss all medicines you take with your healthcare provider and be aware:

- **TRUVADA should not be used with Combivir[®], EMTRIVA, Epivir, Epivir-HBV[®], Epizcom[™], Trizivir[™], or VIREAD**
- Your healthcare provider may need to follow you more closely or adjust your therapy if you are taking Videx[®], Videx EC[®], Reyataz[®], or Kaletra[®] with TRUVADA.

For more information, please visit www.truvada.com or call 1-800-GILEAD-5 (1-800-445-3225) and select option 2. There is additional information about TRUVADA on the next page.

TRUVADA, EMTRIVA, and VIREAD are registered trademarks of Gilead Sciences, Inc. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. © 2005 Gilead Sciences, Inc. All rights reserved. CA E A 3620

GILEAD

Figure 18

Similarly, an advertisement for the Gilead Sciences, Inc. medication Truvada[®] (Figure 18) trumpets the fact that the drug only needs to be taken once per day, a minor relief from typical combination therapies that often require repeated doses of multiple medications daily. The focus of the imagery is a young, muscular, attractive White man standing on a traffic island in the center of a busy city street. With a pail of red paint at his feet, he is painting the words “Just once a day” on an invisible “fourth wall” between the reader and the subject. As automobiles speed past him on each side, his calm demeanor and cheerful deportment serve as a metaphor for the peace of mind and escape from the rigors of therapy that the drug offers. A

closer reading of the text, however, indicates that Truvada[®] is actually a combination of two existing medications, Viread[®] and Emtriva[®]. The satisfaction this young man is experiencing stems from the simple outcome of cutting his daily medication regimen by one tablet. A subhead identifies the drug as “treatment for everyday living.” Once again, HIV/AIDS infection is portrayed as a manageable condition, a part of everyday life that need not be troublesome with the convenience afforded by ingesting one fewer tablet.

Abbott Laboratories takes a different approach to its representation of HIV status (Figure 19) in an advertisement for its product Kaletra[®], assigning a narrative to an HIV-positive gay man that allows him the benefit of partner support. Adjacent to the headline “There’s more to me than just HIV. I am L.U. – Longterm Undetectable,” the subject is being held by the muscular arm of his faceless life partner, who is visible from the bridge of his nose downward. Both men are young, White, and are shown smiling in a setting that appears to be a doctor’s office. Supporting copy reinforces the man’s privileged position by stating that “You’ve got a lot going for you and being Longterm Undetectable can be a part of it.”

Of the six HIV/AIDS texts studied, this particular ad is the sole representation of an HIV-positive gay male in the company of his partner. The other ads depict individuals managing their medication regimens and making their treatment choices alone. The underlying message seems to be that people living with HIV/AIDS cope with their challenges with positive attitudes (when they are White), but they must do so alone. The pharmaceutical industry does a great disservice to gay men with HIV/AIDS by divorcing them in print from their support systems of lovers, friends, and family members.

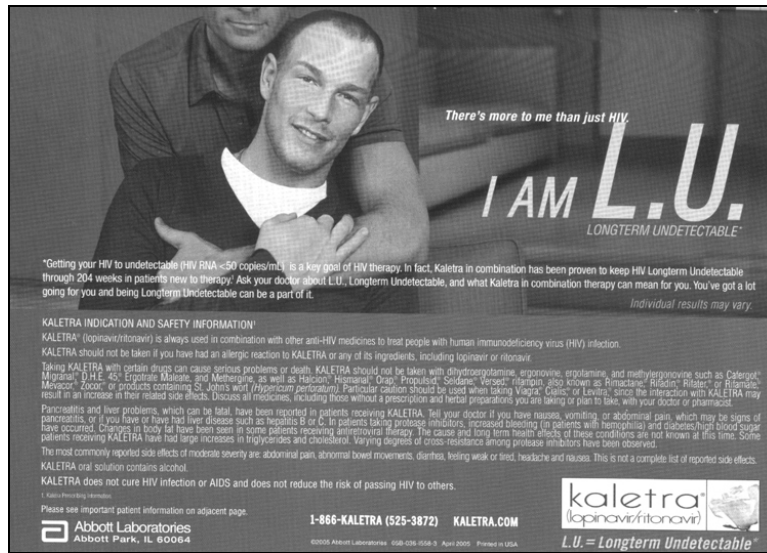


Figure 19

The headline “There’s more to me than just HIV” is troubling in its use of the words “just HIV,” which help to minimize the description of the disease’s impact on the subject’s life. While the subject’s HIV status certainly doesn’t define him any more than his sexual orientation does, people infected with the HIV virus are forced to build their lives around daily regimens of multiple medications. Side effects vary widely based on individual tolerance and body composition, but advertisers assume a naïve and precarious position when they insinuate that HIV doesn’t have major negative impact on the infected person’s life.

Despite one member’s HIV status, the couple in the Abbott Laboratories advertisement is positioned at a privileged point of intersection with regard to gender and race. The other ads featuring White men with HIV position them in attractive, dynamic settings and depict them as happy, upbeat, and confident in their ability to make sound health choices. Representations of gay Black men in HIV/AIDS medication advertisements are far removed from those texts, and often feature disconcerting imagery and negative explicit and implicit messages.

Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc. uses an African American model in its advertisement for the combination-therapy drug Viramune® (Figure 20). Positioned against a

wrought-iron fence, the man gazes at the New York City skyline in the distance, his back to the reader. The headline reads “I am taking on tomorrow.” However, his narrative has been constructed as one of isolation as he approaches his future. The fence serves as a visual metaphor for his marginalization from society, represented by the distant city. The advertiser has robbed him of his identity by revealing only his back and has deprived the reader of determining his demeanor as he looks to the future. While the ad texts already mentioned signify a positive, optimistic approach to the disease, the manner in which this subject is “taking on tomorrow” is indeterminable because his facial expression is hidden from view.

viramune
taking on tomorrow

VIRAMUNE as part of combination therapy

Help fight HIV
VIRAMUNE as part of combination therapy has been shown to reduce viral load to undetectable levels* in HIV-infected men and women—and raise your CD4 cell count.

Talk about your options
Starting a new anti-HIV regimen can be a challenge—with different dosing times and restrictions, there's a lot to remember. Dosed just twice a day, VIRAMUNE can be taken with or without food. Talk to your doctor to see if VIRAMUNE is right for you.

Indication and Important Safety Information for VIRAMUNE
VIRAMUNE is indicated for use in combination with other antiretroviral agents for the treatment of HIV-1 infection. VIRAMUNE does not cure HIV or AIDS, and has not been shown to reduce the risk of passing HIV to others through sexual contact or blood contamination. VIRAMUNE can cause severe liver disease and skin reactions that can cause death. These reactions occur most often during the first 18 weeks of treatment, but can occur later. Ask your healthcare provider about how to recognize these problems. Stop taking VIRAMUNE and do not restart it if you have these reactions. Call your healthcare provider immediately.

Any patient can experience liver problems with VIRAMUNE but women and patients who have higher CD4 counts when they begin VIRAMUNE treatment have a greater risk. If you are a woman with CD4 <250 cells/mm³ or a man with CD4 <350 cells/mm³, you should not begin taking VIRAMUNE unless you and your doctor have decided that the benefit of doing so outweighs the risk. The dose of VIRAMUNE for adults is one 200-mg tablet daily for the first 14 days, followed by one 200-mg tablet twice daily. The 14-day lead-in period is important because it can help reduce your chances of getting a rash. Other side effects that patients have experienced include nausea, fatigue, fever, headache, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and myalgia. Changes in

body fat may occur in patients receiving antiretroviral therapy. Please see Medication Guide for VIRAMUNE on following page for more detail on these side effects and other important information.

viramune
(nevirapine)
Generic name: nevirapine

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Boehringer Ingelheim

www.viramune.com

Figure 20

An additional line of copy further obscures the advertiser's intention in constructing the text. “Starting a new anti-HIV regimen can be a challenge – with differing dosing times and restrictions, there's a lot to remember.” The copy goes on to reveal that Viramune® is dosed only

twice a day. No other HIV/AIDS ad in the study includes text that refers to the confusion HIV-positive individuals may face in establishing their dosing regimens. When considered in light of these other texts, the advertiser has further problematized an already poor representation by allowing an interpretation that implies the African American man is more likely to be confused by his treatment options.

Two additional ads further isolate their gay Black male subjects by removing them from any substantial visual context. OraSure Technologies, Inc. (Figure 21) promotes its breakthrough oral HIV antibody test with a photograph of a very young – perhaps teenage – Black male about to use the product to determine his HIV status. He is depicted as serious and focused. The copy assures the reader that “When it comes to your HIV status – you deserve to know NOW.” The subject is further marginalized through two lines of supporting copy reading “Know now. Take action now!” and “Protect yourself and others around you.” The implication here is that this young man would continue to irresponsibly engage in unprotected sexual relations if his HIV status were to remain in question. The focus is shifted from his own well-being to that of those with whom he is sexually intimate.

When compared with advertisements featuring the cheerful and optimistic (White) individuals already infected with the virus, this ad reduces its subject’s identity to that of a transmitter of the AIDS virus. His happiness and well-being are irrelevant, and his status as “other” is reinforced by copy that portrays him as a danger to himself and his lovers.

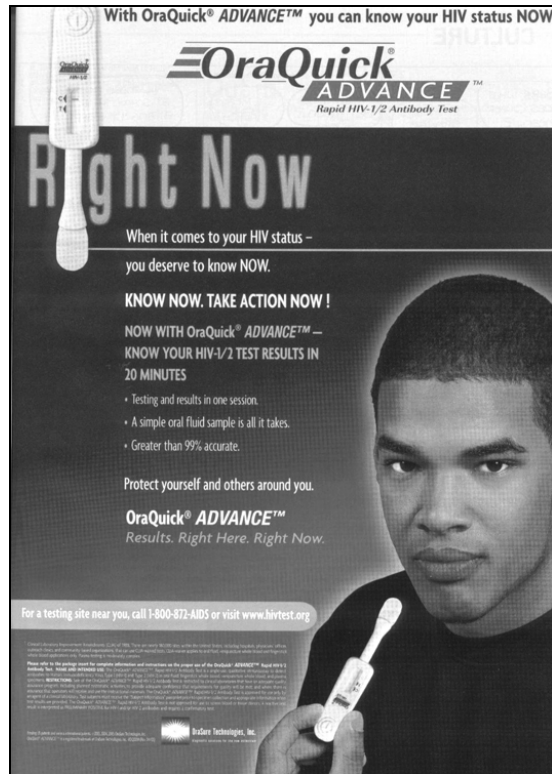


Figure 21

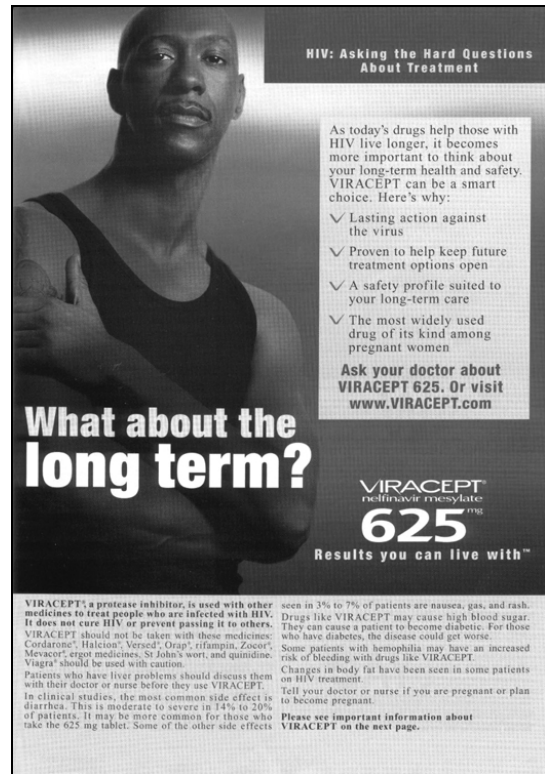


Figure 22

Pfizer, Inc. also provides a troubling representation of gay Black men with HIV in its advertisement for the drug Viracept® (Figure 22). The model is a brawny man wearing a tank top with his arms folded across his chest. The copy indicates that he is “Asking the hard questions about treatment” and wondering “What about the long term?” He is physically placed against a solid blue background, giving his narrative no context. Unlike the men in other HIV/AIDS ads, he is unable to take decisive action, to “fight HIV (his) way,” because he is bewildered by the onslaught of questions to be addressed. Once again a stereotype has been perpetuated of a gay Black man being unable to make effective decisions about his own life. He is already at a disadvantaged intersection regarding race, and this marginalization is bolstered by copy and imagery that minimizes his story and underestimates his capabilities.

Depictions of gay Black males in advertisements for HIV/AIDS medications are inherently problematic. Researchers have traced rising rates of infection among Black men who do not self-identify as gay and who are often involved in heterosexual relationships. These men, said to be living on the “down low,” have occasional sexual relations with other men. Although there may be some pass-along readership, it would be erroneous to assume that these men are primary readers of *The Advocate* or that they would be active in HIV-testing and management regimens. HIV/AIDS affects members of the gay male population without regard to race, social status, or age. Representing HIV/AIDS-affected individuals in print advertising is a slippery slope, and not likely to be easily accomplished by advertisers.

Lesbian Health Issues: Under the Radar

Studies have show that lesbian women have higher risk factors for a number of ailments and that they also face unique challenges within the health care system that can cause poorer mental and physical health. Breast cancer and cervical cancer rates have been found to be higher in women who have not given birth, placing gay women at higher risk. High levels of smoking among lesbians also increase their likelihood for lung cancer, heart disease, and stroke. Yet lesbians of all races and ages, who are at marginalized intersections of gender and sexuality, are absent from health and wellness ads.

Fundamentally, lesbians need access to the same high quality health screening and preventive care that is appropriate for all women throughout their life cycles. Lesbians and their providers often remain uninformed about important health issues, including the need for cervical and breast cancer screening, reducing the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, caring for mental health issues including depression, diagnosing and treating substance abuse, pregnancy and parenting assistance, and understanding domestic violence in the population.

With women's health issues so prevalent in many major national publications, it is surprising that pharmaceuticals companies do not have a stronger presence in *The Advocate*, the unofficial organ of record for the LGBT population.

FINANCES, CONSUMER SPENDING, AND DISCRETIONARY INCOME

A common and longstanding assumption among many advertisers is that LGBT people typically earn more money than their heterosexual counterparts and have more disposable income to spend on luxury products. But a 1998 report released by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force labeled the assumption a stereotype and a fallacy (*USA Today* 1998). The report, titled "Income Inflation: The Myth of Affluence Among Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Americans," concluded that most marketing studies had mistakenly focused on upscale gays and did not accurately reflect the gay population. At least six other similar studies released between 1998 and 2001 found similar results (Walters 2001). Seven years later, advertising texts appearing in *The Advocate* construct a financial image of gay men in particular as having sufficient wealth to vacation frequently, to purchase the finest automobiles and home furnishings, and to channel considerable sums of money into investments and financial securities.

Buford (2000) contends that even though studies have tended to exaggerate the difference between gay and non-gay levels of affluence, it is somewhat likely that gay and lesbian income figures are slightly higher than those of the general market, due to several technical factors. First, people who enjoy a measure of financial security and independence may be more likely to live openly gay lives than those who would face possible job discrimination upon divulging their homosexuality. At the very least, they would be more likely to self-identify as gay or lesbian to

survey takers. Second, studies that include both gay men and lesbians may yield higher-than-average incomes because of the prevalence of males in the sample. Since gay men tend to outnumber lesbians in most surveys, and since women earn about 75 percent as much as men, the average income for the LGBT population may appear higher than the norm. This gender disparity is strengthened when a gay “household” is comprised of two income-earning men.

To the extent that LGBT consumers constitute a distinct consumer niche for marketers, what makes them a particularly attractive target market is not overall household income, but rather two other lifestyle factors that affect the population’s patterns of consumption: higher discretionary income and more disposable time.

The absence of children in the majority of LGBT households means that these households, which do not earn substantially more income than others, have significantly more disposable income not earmarked for necessities like feeding and clothing children and paying for their healthcare. An even stronger effect of the absence of children is a gain in disposable or free time. While modern parents devote much of their non-working time to child care, LGBT individuals and couples are more likely to have time for leisure activities. For advertisers, they are attractive prospects the entertainment and travel industries, including movies, premium television channels, airlines and cruise companies, and resorts.

All of this begs a question. If advertisers are revealing their beliefs about the financial capacities and characteristics of the LGBT population through the texts they create, exactly what do they believe is the gender and racial composition of these well-endowed “dream consumers”?

What We Drive is Who We Are: Representations in Automobile Ads

The six advertisements for automobiles appearing in this issue represent a range of vehicles ostensibly of interest to LGBT consumers. The vehicles presented include luxury

models by Volvo Cars of North America, Jaguar, Audi, and Land Rover, and a less expensive, midline sedan by Saturn Corporation. Four of the texts are devoid of human models, while two others feature young men as parts of the imagery. A closer examination and juxtaposition of these two ads reveals a great deal about the advertisers' assumptions about income and race.

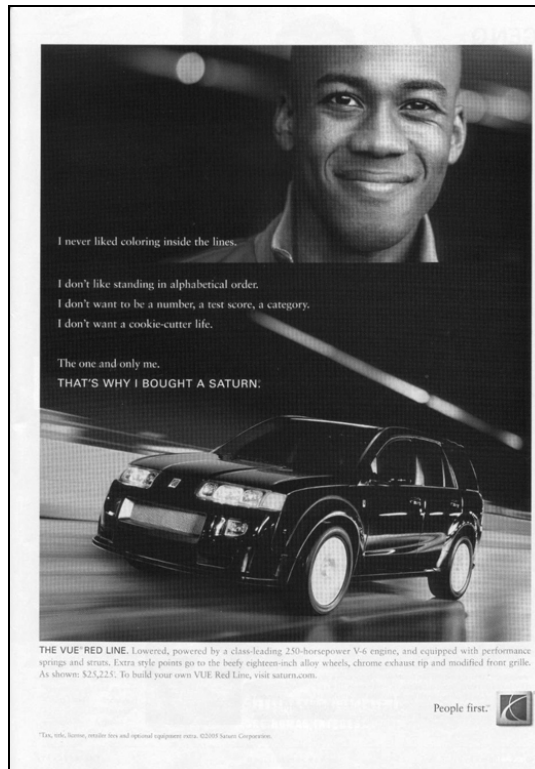


Figure 23



Figure 24

Saturn Corporation, a company known for producing affordable, budget-line vehicles, offers an image of a young Black male (Figure 23) telling the reader that he “never liked coloring inside the lines.” As the copy is written in first person, he also asserts that “I don’t want to be a number, a test score, a category” and “I don’t want a cookie-cutter life.” As one of only three Black men appearing in ads other than those for HIV/AIDS medications, his identity is constructed around his desire for individuality and distinction, a fulfillment that the market

dictates may be attained through the purchase of consumer goods, in this case, a “distinctive,” “non-cookie-cutter,” yet budget-priced automobile.

By contrast, Volvo Cars of North America utilizes a young White man in its advertisement marketing the considerably more expensive S40-T5 sports sedan (Figure 24). The second-person copy makes gay-vague and suggestive references to the model’s connection to his vehicle: “All these years and you never even suspected” and “It wasn’t obvious, but the signs were there.” While both subjects’ identities are constructed in light of their affinities for their vehicles, it is significant to note that the Black man’s presence in the text for the less expensive vehicle further diminishes his power within the overall context of the publication. Even if the Saturn, loaded with optional features, approaches the cost of the Volvo, there is still a perception of the Saturn as a “budget” vehicle when compared with the luxury-skewing Volvo. If advertisers truly are marketing to the LGBT population because of its perceived wealth, it is unfortunate that Saturn chose as its model a subject already at a disadvantaged racial intersection.

Other automobile ads attempt to make direct emotional connections with LGBT audiences through two different selling practices: using coded language and appealing to an alleged concept of community pride. An ad for the Hertz rental car agency (Figure 25) features one of the vehicles from the agency’s so-called “Prestige Collection,” a Jaguar S-Type luxury car. The suggestive headline reading “Yes, you are the type,” has both a literal or dominant meaning and a coded meaning revealed through either a negotiated or an oppositional reading. The dominant or preferred meaning makes a surface appeal to the LGBT individual’s sense of self-worth and entitlement. In the advertiser’s estimation, the gay man or lesbian reading this text will identify with the copy, think twice, and realize that they are deserving of the auto. In this

regard, the ad could just as appropriately be run in any mainstream publication. However, this line of copy is also coded language specifically geared toward LGBT audiences. The notion of having a “type” to which one is sexually attracted is more common among LGBT individuals than among their straight counterparts. In line with the writings of both Dyer (1977) and Hall (1997), the subliminal message at play in this text is that the identity of the gay man or lesbian considering the Jaguar is actually validated through association with the car. By renting the Jaguar, readers enter the realm of the elite and enjoy the same rush of emotion afforded them when they learn that a human object of sexual desire shares their feelings.

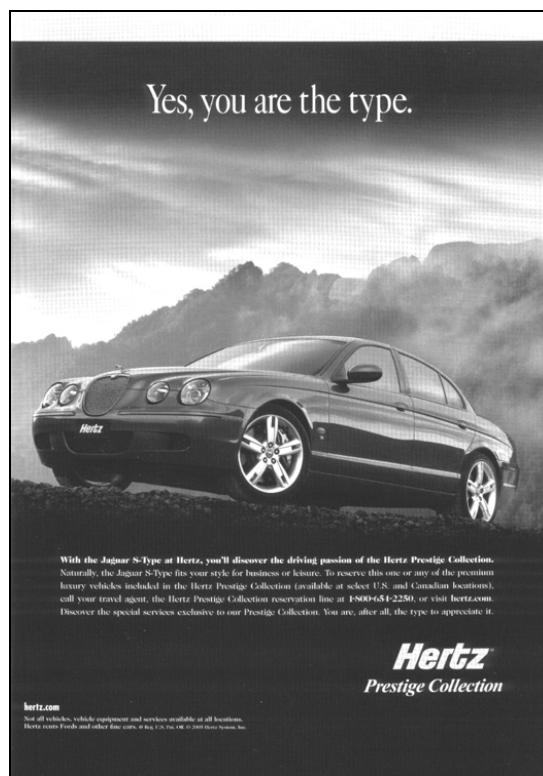


Figure 25

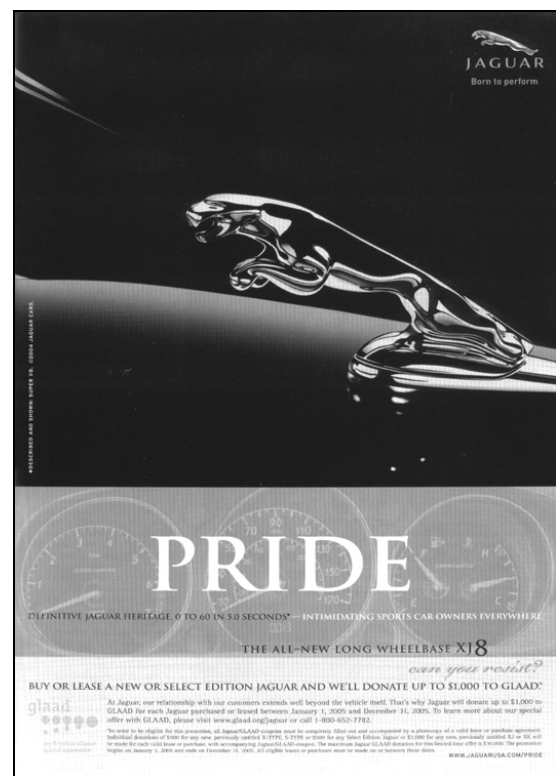


Figure 26

Another advertisement for Jaguar, this one sponsored by the manufacturer (Figure 26), invokes notions of LGBT pride with the simple headline “PRIDE” in bold letters below the auto’s immediately recognizable pouncing-feline hood ornament. Secondary copy at the bottom

explains that Jaguar will donate up to \$1,000 to the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) for each new car purchased or leased. The company takes its alignment with the LGBT population a step further with financial commitment to an organization focused on anti-discrimination measures and activities. However, use of the term “pride” as an advertising pitch-word has come under fire from LGBT activists and critics, who contend that the marketing of pride strips the concept of its history of struggle (Chasin 2000).

Co-opting Gay Pride for Profit

The co-opting of gay pride is found elsewhere in this annual Pride issue in advertisements for Delta Air Lines, Inc. (“Showing Pride, Living Your Life”) and Wells Fargo Bank, N.A. (“It Started at Stonewall and Spread Across the Nation: Wells Fargo celebrates over three decades of GLBT Pride”). The Delta text (Figure 27) includes a photograph of a gay pride parade in progress. The image is somewhat indistinct and obscured by design treatments, but the portion of the parade in view reveals shirtless men reveling on the back of float while others dressed in leather hats and short pants ride along in a convertible. Lesbians and people of color are noticeably absent from the frame. Although the airline is attempting to establish synergy with the LGBT population, ultimately it has merely perpetuated yet another stereotypical depiction of both the gay demographic and the concept of pride as a natural outgrowth of social struggle. By omitting any representation of those at neglected points of intersection in the LGBT population, the airline has fallen in step with other advertisers who allow power and privilege to be assigned to the dominant culture – the White male – residing within the subordinated LGBT subculture. In doing so, Delta weakens its stance as a progressive advocate of LGBT equality.

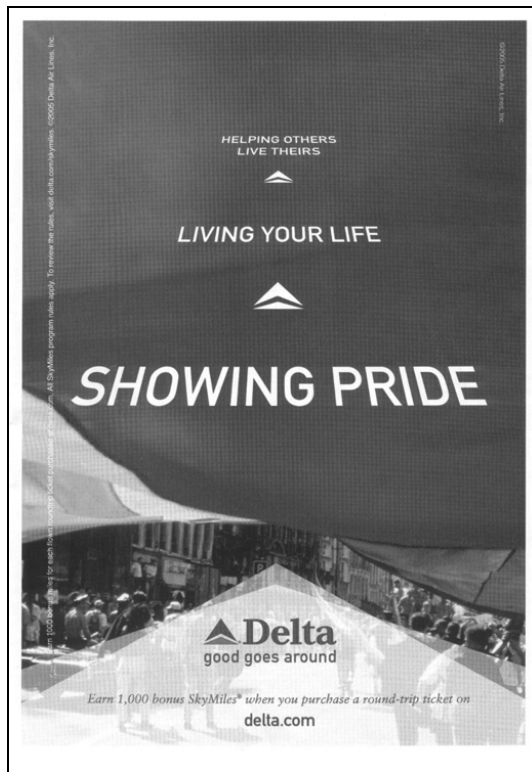


Figure 27

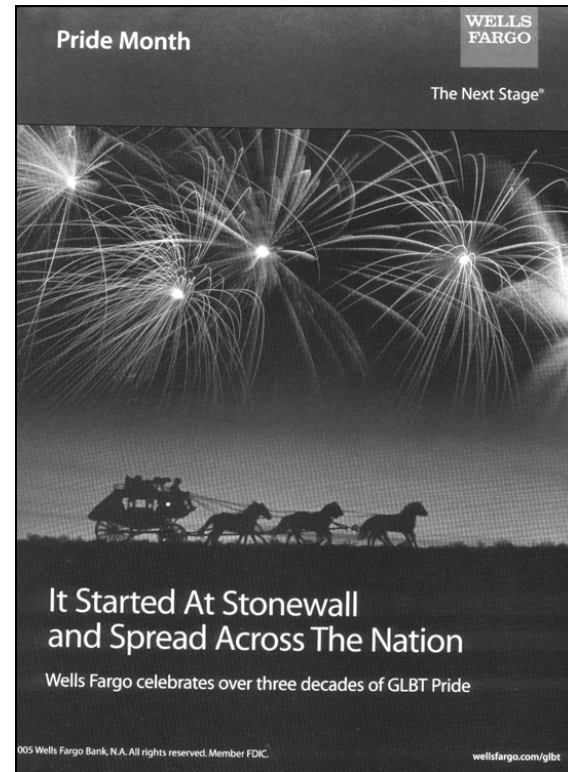


Figure 28

Wells Fargo Bank, N.A. also makes reference to gay pride in its advertisement heralding Pride Month (Figure 28). The advertiser does so in a manner similar to that employed by the Washington, DC Convention & Tourism Corporation – by alluding to gay equality and social progress while invoking American history. The text “It All Started at Stonewall and Spread Across the Nation” is accompanied by imagery featuring a sky ablaze with fireworks under which the shadow of the Pony Express races across a prairie landscape. While the Pony Express reflects the corporate history of Wells Fargo and at face value seems to be an appropriate metaphor for LGBT advancement, it also makes a direct reference to a period in the nation’s history when social justice and equality were virtually nonexistent. The era of rapid westward expansion across the United States in the mid-nineteenth century occurred at a time when the nation was divided over the propagation of slavery and the massacres of Native American tribal peoples. By setting the imagery in this type of historical context, Wells Fargo has failed to

elaborate its corporate contributions to the very LGBT equality that it claims to celebrate. As a financial institution, Wells Fargo missed an opportunity to show that its services and policies have immediate benefit for gays and lesbians, whether they are exploring mutual investment opportunities or purchasing a home. The ad also privileges the dominant gay culture with its use of the acronym “GLBT” rather than “LGBT.”

Gay and Straight: Financial Solvency for All

Financial institutions are more likely than other types of corporate interests to run advertisements that more closely align the wants and desires of the gay population with those of the straight population. Invariably, these ads promote the “good life” in a context that minimizes variations in sexual orientation and aligns LGBT financial interests with those of the heterosexual mainstream. The need for financial solvency, home ownership, and retirement security are all universal concerns shared by all genders, races, and classes.

An ad from Chase Bank USA, N.A. features a brightly painted birdhouse against a cloudless azure sky (Figure 29). The copy reads “Boyfriend. Girlfriend. Partner. Or flying solo. Everyone deserves a dream house of their own.” The advertiser makes this play for LGBT consumers who are shopping for home financing solutions by presenting a safe, even wholesome image. This pleasant yet vapid imagery allows Chase to appeal directly to gay and lesbian consumers while avoiding any controversy that might accompany a gay-specific visual, like a same-sex couple purchasing a home or meeting with an investment counselor. The copy further attempts to validate gay identity and self-worth with references to “all kinds of families” and the closing line “After all, it’s all about you being you in a place where you’re comfortable.” This closing statement unintentionally raises the specter of the closet by intimating that LGBT individuals are only comfortable showing their true identities within the confines of their homes.

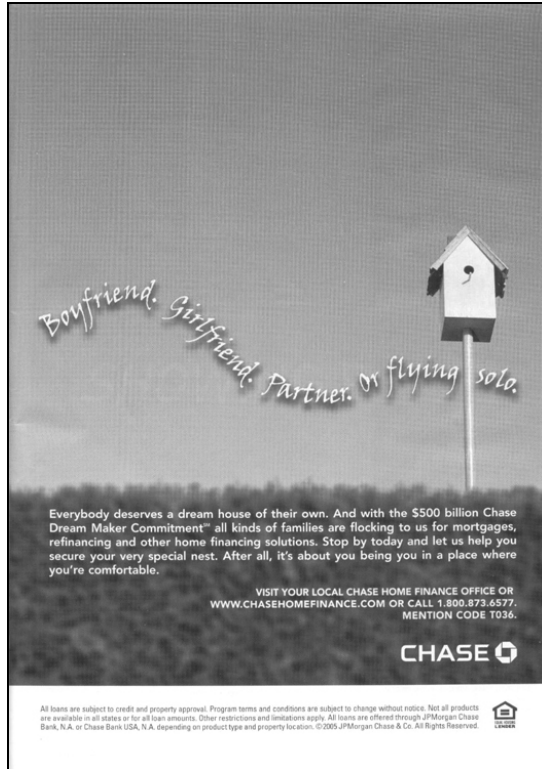


Figure 29

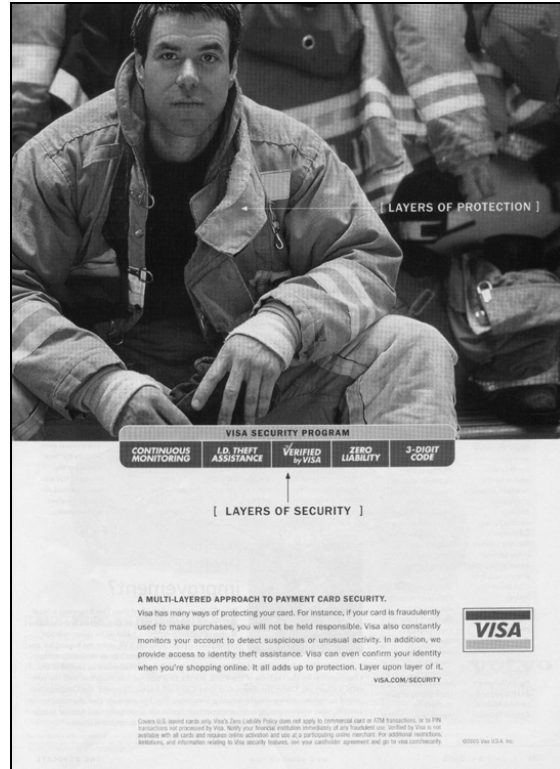


Figure 30

Visa U.S.A., Inc. uses a covert, gay-vague appeal in its advertisement promoting the security of its debit and credit cards (Figure 30). A young, White, exceedingly attractive firefighter gazes into the camera with steely intent, wearing his heavy fire-retardant coat as his colleagues stand behind him, their faces out of the frame. A line of copy reading “layers of protection” is accompanied by an arrow pointing to his firefighting gear. This ad could easily appear in any mainstream publication and not elicit a hint of controversy as there is nothing specific in the imagery or text to indicate that this individual is a homosexual. Yet there are several suggestive pieces of coded language and visuals that provide a hint of familiarity to the reader who is “in the know.”

As a firefighter, this man is a member of a fellowship of professionals who have been positioned in American culture as “heroes.” A dominant reading of his narrative reveals a simple analogy between the “layers of (financial) protection” afforded him by his Visa card and the protection he receives from his personal gear. However, a negotiated reading recognizes that he is at a disadvantaged position of power as a gay man in a predominantly straight profession. The layers of protection referenced in the copy may also allude to the hiding of his true identity from his colleagues. Are these layers protecting him from the dangers of fire or from the risks associated with divulging his sexual orientation to his coworkers who are mulling about just behind him? A minor visual nod to the gay reader is the conspicuous placement of the model’s left hand and the absence of a wedding ring.

The Gay White Male Body: Selling Soft Drinks, Sunshine, and Sofas

Youthful, attractive, and primarily White men are used by marketers to sell a broad range of products and services to gay male target audiences. Whether the model has any relation to the product or service being sold is irrelevant in the advertisers’ world. The underlying assumption seems to be that gay male audiences will accept without question a product that is positioned on the page with an object of sexual desire. These images signify a fast-paced, hyper-sexualized, and highly consumptive lifestyle. For those who cannot afford these luxuries, life becomes characterized by the sense of lacking. The desire for a sexual object implies a lack of sexual fulfillment. Commodities are framed in much the same way, since products are packaged and promoted to appeal to the consumer’s sense of need.

The strongest example of the commodification of gay male bodies in this publication comes in an advertisement for Diet Pepsi (Figure 31). A well-toned surfer is portrayed on the beach, his can of soda in hand and his surfboard just behind him. A graphic that is suggestive of

the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's nutrition information label states that the model consumes two six-packs of the product per week in order "...to keep his 'six pack'" or abdominal muscles. The advertiser assumes that gay (White) male readers will identify with the subject and desire similar physical characteristics. In an attempt to fulfill that desire, they must acquire the product. In this instance, the desire may extend to the model himself. The end result is that the ad effectively targets both aspects of desire: the desire to be *like* the muscular model, and the desire to be *with* him in a sexual sense.

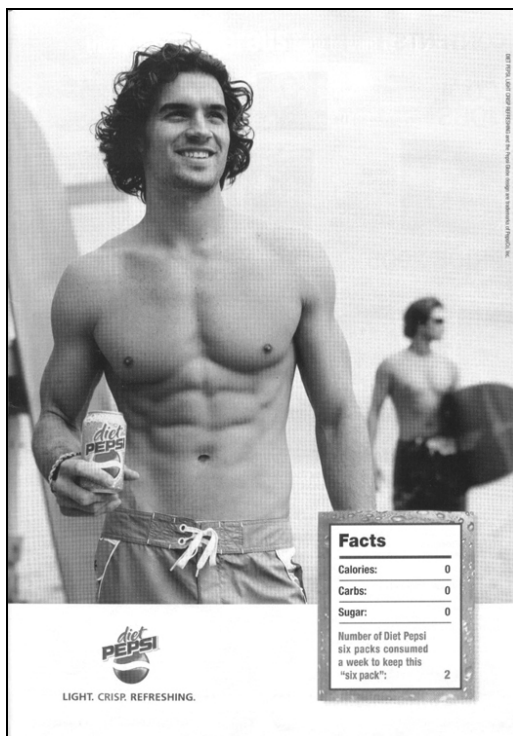


Figure 31



Figure 32

The young Diet Pepsi drinker is assigned a personal narrative in which his desire is fulfilled through his association with the product and the "good life." The persona of the carefree California surfer living a life on the ocean waves has had a place in the American popular imagination since the early 1960s. In this ad text, the reader makes an emotional and

subconscious connection between the product, the attractive model, and this life of ease and luxury. In this setting, there is no homophobia and no discrimination. He enjoys his power and privileged position in the LGBT population with no fear of his marginalized position in mainstream culture. The imagery creates an aura of wellbeing, success, and contentment that is meant to convince those who consume it of the product's efficacy.

Muscular, White bodies also have a strong presence in advertisements for cruise lines and tropical resorts. The tourism industry has targeted gays as well-financed travelers who will spend significant amounts of money for prime accommodations at all-gay resorts and gay-friendly enclaves in domestic and overseas cities. The assumption is that LGBT individuals, and particularly gay men, enjoy congregating not only in gay clubs while at home, but also when vacationing. An ad for the Club Atlantis Vallarta all-gay resort in Mexico (Figure 32) features a dominant image of four young White males jumping up from a swimming pool. Two smaller photographs highlight a gay couple and a tug of war in which all participants fit the privileged demographic. With all the subjects falling into the dominant LGBT culture, the "all-gay" resort is actually portrayed as an "all-White" and "all-male" destination as well. The advertiser plays into readers' desires by perpetuating the power and privilege of Gay White men while marginalizing those at disadvantaged intersections of gender and race. Gay Black men require medication for HIV/AIDS, yet they don't take vacations. Lesbians raise children together, but they don't spend their leisure time vacationing in Mexico.

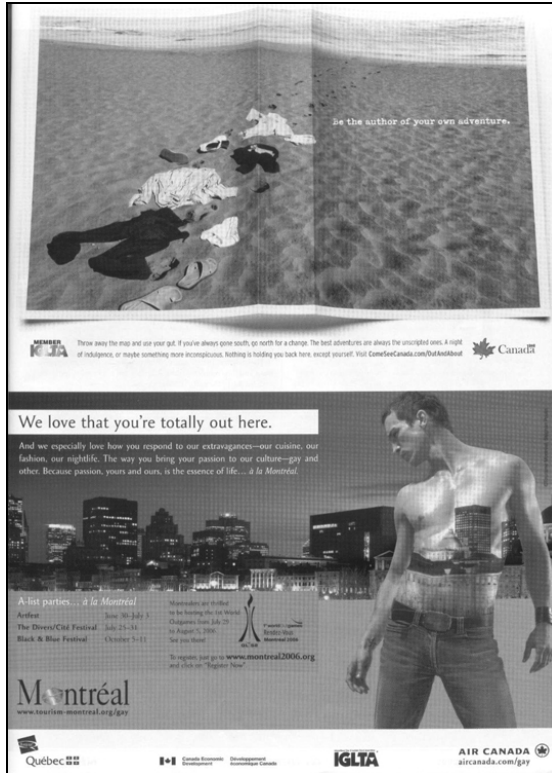


Figure 33



Figure 34

The Canada Economic Development agency has taken a bold step in marketing the city of Montréal as a gay-friendly tourist destination with an advertising text loaded with disjointed gay imagery (Figure 33). Under the headline “We love that you’re totally out here,” a shirtless model wearing tight blue jeans is positioned in front of the city skyline, a portion of the image projected onto his chest and stomach. The esoteric supporting copy reads “And we especially love how you respond to our extravagances – our cuisine, our fashion, our nightlife. The way you bring your passion to our culture – gay and other.” A negotiated reading of the ad uncovers the fact that the “response to our extravagances” and “passion” attributed to the LGBT population are actually euphemisms for the tourism dollars that gay visitors bring to the city’s economy. The Canada Economic Development further marginalizes LGBT identity with its references to cuisine, fashion, and nightlife; the agency indirectly asserts that gay visitors, by

virtue of their sexual orientation, will be more interested in shopping for clothing and going out to nightclubs than in appreciating the city's culture and historic sites.

The shirtless male body is a common visual in many ads appearing in *The Advocate*, but in this text, there is no apparent reason for the model's presence. He is not interacting with the product (participating in any activity in Montréal) nor is there a reference to his presence anywhere in the copy. He is an object of desire to be associated with the city, much as the surfer was positioned with the Diet Pepsi.

The ad also lists three "A-list parties" that gay visitor's can look forward to attending, playing on the stereotype of the gay male affinity for celebration and revelry. Finally, the "o" in the word "Montréal" has been replaced with a pair of rainbow-colored pursed lips, a blatant attempt to associate the city with gay pride.

Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams furniture manufacturers use coded imagery that is not easily deciphered in their advertisement for their Dr. Pitt Collection sofa line (Figure 34). The fascinating image centers on a man who is reclining on a large sectional sofa, holding up a small toddler while three other young children play nearby, also on the sofa. The copy reads "House calls. Incredibly good looking, built to last ... and low maintenance." While the double entendre referencing the young man is obvious, his narrative is not. There is no indicator of his relationship to the children, one of whom is Black and the other three White. Perhaps the reader is to presume that he is a pediatrician, connecting the visual with the "House calls" copy and the name of the collection. Or perhaps this is a coded appeal to LGBT individuals who long for family life and adoptive children, made tangible through the cozy living room setting and the presence of small children. Despite the fact that the model is a member of the privileged gay

demographic, he is not the focus of the ad, nor are the children. The dominant element of the imagery is the sofa itself and the model's interaction with the sofa and the children is incidental.

The imagery in this ad also teases LGBT readers with the prospect of adoption. In most states in the U.S., it is difficult for open, self-identified gay men and lesbians to adopt children. Whether they are single or partnered, LGBT individuals are either barred entirely from adoption or forced to deal with more stringent and invasive procedures in the adoption process. The ad sends a mixed message. While it is obvious that the model is interacting comfortably with the children, perhaps in a parental role, this scene of family bliss is out of reach for many prospective gay and lesbian parents, particularly those with modest financial means. The advertiser may ultimately hinder its own sales pitch by positioning the product in a scenario that is frustratingly unavailable to many of the publication's readers.

LGBT REPRESENTATIONS IN THE CORPORATE WORKPLACE

Domestic partner health insurance and equal employment opportunity policies covering sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are increasingly becoming part of the norm in the American workplace. A recent report from the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the nation's largest LGBT civil rights advocacy organization, notes that 138 major U.S. corporations earned the organization's top rating for what is calls "fair and equitable treatment" of LGBT employees ("State of the Workplace" 2006). Among the corporations receiving perfect scores on HRC's determining factors were Ford Motor Company, Pillsbury, Kraft Foods, Microsoft, and IBM. Almost all of the companies rated – 436, or 98 percent – include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies. The report also states that benefits for domestic partners achieved a first in 2006, when a majority of the nation's largest corporations provided health insurance for

domestic partners of employees. Today, 254 of the Fortune 500 provide equal benefits to same-sex couples. In addition, 86 percent of Fortune 500 companies include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies. And 10 times the number of Fortune 500 companies include nondiscrimination clauses for gender identity and expression today as compared to figures released in 2001. These corporations attempt to create comfortable working surrounding for their LGBT employees by implementing measures designed to prevent the hostile workplace environments in which many out gays and lesbians have been forced to work.

Three companies received a score of zero on the report. They were: oil giant ExxonMobil, grocery chain Meijer Inc., and high-tech consulting firm Perot Systems. None of these companies offer even minimal benefits or workplace protections to their LGBT employees. The analysis itself covers 446 companies, including surveys from Fortune 1000, Standard & Poor's 500, Forbes' list of the 200 largest privately held firms, the American Lawyer 100, and other companies with 500 or more employees that requested a rating or for which HRC had sufficient data to derive a score.

Employers increasingly look to domestic partner benefits as a relatively inexpensive way of promoting a diverse workforce and ensuring maximum employee productivity. The costs of adding domestic partners to the employer's overall benefits package have proven to be minimal. A Hewitt Associates LLC study revealed that the majority of employers experience a total benefits cost increase of less than one percent ("Benefit Programs" 2005). The study also indicated that the prevailing reason most companies offer domestic partner benefits is to attract and retain qualified employees. But the consumer-oriented employer that treats its employees equally stands to gain not just with its own workforce but also with the LGBT consumer market.

One significant indication of supposed corporate investment in LGBT employees comes in the form of corporate identity advertisements appearing in gay-oriented publications like *The Advocate*. These texts serve two distinct yet interrelated functions: to recruit qualified LGBT individuals to the ranks of their workforces, and to gain LGBT support for their products and services.

Critics (Wilke 1997; Chasin 2000; Buford 2005) argue that the courting of LGBT consumers for eventual sales is a far more pressing motivator for these advertisers and that the importance of illustrating a commitment to diversity is purely a market-driven decision. Regardless, this strengthened association of LGBT persons with major corporate entities can serve as a source of reaffirmation and validation for gays and lesbians nationwide who may face discrimination in their own workplaces. In addition, corporate policies among the nation's major businesses will ultimately make their way into smaller businesses as market forces drive additional acceptance for LGBT workers.

Four such corporate identity ads appear in the issue of *The Advocate* under study. The corporate advertisers present – Aetna Life Insurance Company, Hewitt Associates LLC, IBM Corporation, and Kaiser Permanente – adopt three unique approaches to illustrating their commitment to LGBT equality: through a focus on the personal narrative of single subject; with a group of six individuals representing the company's LGBT corporate workforce, and with a direct appeal devoid of human presence.

The global human resources and consulting firm Hewitt Associates LLC appears to favor a narrow definition of LGBT diversity in its advertisement titled "Don't Leave Who You Are Behind in Order to Get Ahead" (Figure 35). With the words "Who You Are" printed in red ink for emphasis, the photograph features a White male in the foreground with six colleagues

standing in the distance holding hands in a semicircle. Wearing his professional garb, the subject is stern and stoic. The second-person appeal to readers continues in the body copy with affirming verbiage like “Don’t hide your true colors” and “Take pride in who you are and where you work.” Although the intention to acknowledge and validate gay equality is apparent, the ad fails to account for the diversity of identity within the LGBT population itself. With a member of the dominant LGBT demographic as the featured subject, the piece marginalizes the lesbians and racial minorities who surely comprise a portion of Hewitt’s multinational workforce.

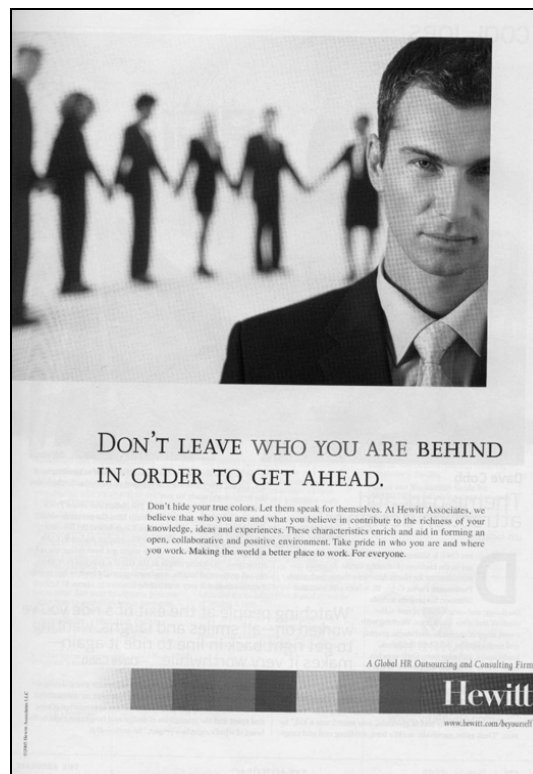


Figure 35

The subject’s narrative within the context of the ad can be interpreted in two ways, either assigning him power and privilege or stripping them from him. The semicircle of hand-holding individuals may represent the heterosexual majority in the workforce of corporate America,

diverse in gender and race but joined in adversity against the gay male, barring him from their ranks. In this reading, he is depicted as “other,” shunned from corporate acceptance and the trappings of success unless he chooses the closet and leaves his true identity “behind.” A second, negotiated reading of the text assigns LGBT identities to the colleagues, making them representative of a diverse LGBT workforce of whom the main subject is the dominant signifier. In this reading, the subject becomes the beneficiary of power and privilege, and his gendered and racially diverse colleagues are marginalized as they are depicted in soft focus and relegated to the background. Members of the LGBT workforce who don’t fit the dominant demographic are assigned the status of “other.” In either reading, Hewitt has privileged the gay White male as representative of all LGBT identity; however, the more damaging reading is the one in which the secondary models are assigned LGBT identities. In that case, Hewitt has undermined its intention of championing gay equality by minimizing the diverse nature of the LGBT working population.

Similarly, Kaiser Permanente uses the narrative of a single subject, once again a White male, to confirm its commitment to LGBT equality, albeit in a tenuous and indirect manner (Figure 36). Although the subject is not identified by name, his entire narrative is written in first person, prompting the reader to assume the man is actually a Kaiser employee. Young, toned, and running along the beach, he is the embodiment of strength and confidence as the headline asserts “I lead by example.” The additional body text includes expository information that lets us know that he “holds [himself] to a higher standard of excellence,” he “continuously finds encouragement and inspiration all around [him],” and he “[is] never satisfied with ‘good enough.’” He closes his testimonial by assuring readers that Kaiser Permanente is an outstanding

corporation for which to work if “you believe personal and professional satisfaction comes from being your best.”

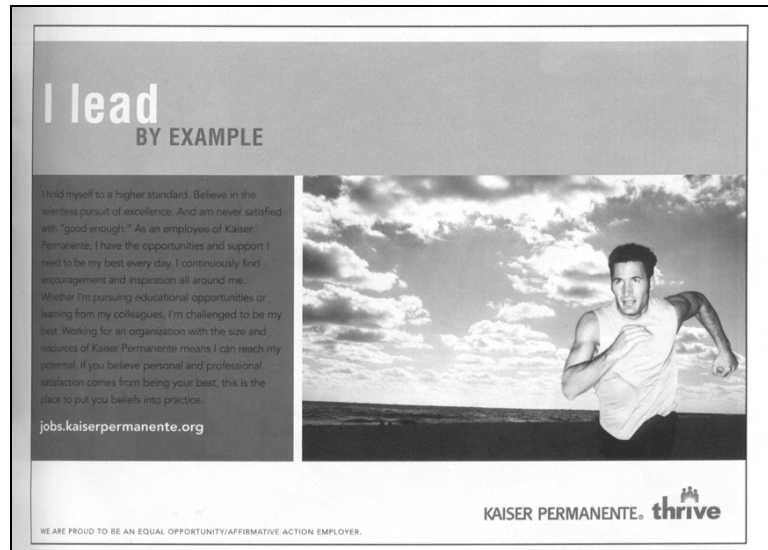


Figure 36

In order to identify with the subject and to find credibility in the message, the reader must make a series of assumptions about his narrative. Since the image does not reference the workplace, neither in setting nor in the model's manner of dress, we first must assume that he is in fact a Kaiser employee. At no point does his statement reference his sexual orientation or the company's commitment to LGBT equality. Kaiser Permanente would have us believe that the organization is LGBT inclusive simply because the ad is run in a gay and lesbian publication and since the model is an attractive White male, ostensibly gay. There is no coded language in his testimonial to confirm his identity. The prominent placement of the company's equal opportunity statement does little to strengthen its case, given the fact that federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regulations do not cover sexual orientation or gender expression. Generic and vague, the ad could be run in any mainstream publication. In fact,

heterosexual men would likely find the piece equally appealing since the model strongly expresses his determination and rugged individuality.



Figure 37

The Aetna Life Insurance Company makes even more of a soft sell in its appeal to LGBT readers (Figure 37). Speaking to the organization's "culture of diversity," the advertisement includes a nondescript photograph of a series of bins, each containing a spice or other dry good. In aggregate, they form a muted rainbow of colors to serve as a visual metaphor for the company's corporate culture. Under the headline, "Variety is the strength of our workplace," the body copy makes numerous claims to the diverse workforce and specifically mentions the value of people of "different races, ethnicities and gender." The corporation also voices its commitment to partnering with women- and minority-owned firms, even going so far as to

designate specific company-wide spending terms. There is no direct addressing of LGBT members of the workforce. Several lines of coded copy include phrases like “open minds and open doors,” and “an environment where engaged, productive people work together for the benefit of all.” A single, euphemistic allusion to gay identity appears in a reference to a “truly diverse workforce” being comprised “not only of different races, ethnicities and gender, but also of different perspectives, experiences and working styles.” LGBT identity has been reduced to a “different perspective,” a term that implies neither significance nor value. This tepid and ineffective approach to trumpeting gay inclusion places the burden on the reader to decode the visual and textual metaphors as ultimately a validation of gay identity.

IBM Corporation makes the strongest case for its commitment to LGBT workplace equality with an advertisement featuring six members of the corporation’s “global GLBT sales network” (Figure 38). The six employees stand in a field under copy reading “Chelsea | Provincetown | The Castro | Armonk, equating three noted gay enclaves across the U.S. with the company’s corporate headquarters in the decidedly non-gay town of Armonk, New York, about 60 miles north of Manhattan. Gender and racial diversity is present in the form of three women, one Black (presumably African American) male, and one woman who appears to be Asian (or Asian American). Of the two White males, one is a member of the privileged younger generation, while the other appears to be a man in his 50s. The reader is led to assume that these workers are gay and lesbian. Unlike the Hewitt Associates and Kaiser Permanente advertisements, members the IBM workforce are identified by name, adding credibility and a more personal tone to the piece.

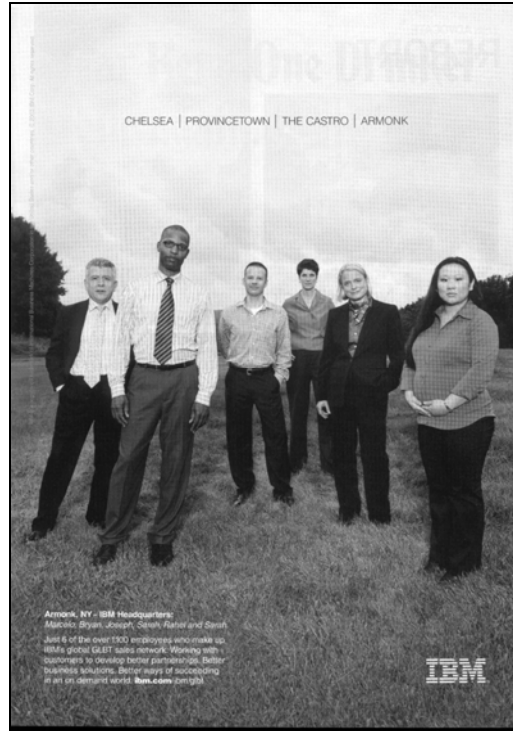


Figure 38

Although the ad is a diverse representation of gay identity on the surface, it is not completely unproblematic. The Black man and the Asian woman stand on a horizontal plane closest to the camera, yet she is standing apart from the other five, who are positioned in two distinct clusters. She is the only representation of an Asian American woman in this issue's advertisements, and her status as "other" may be reinforced by her physical separation. She is also the largest of the women shown, perhaps an indicator of the prevalent marginalization of individuals whose body size varies from the socially constructed "norm" of thin and athletic. With scant representation of Asian Americans in LGBT publications as well as in mainstream media overall, more integrative portrayals of these individuals are desirable.

There is also some inconsistency in the demeanors of the employees that may be interpreted as displeasure. While the four White individuals are all smiling in the photograph, the Black man and Asian woman appear solemn and detached. Although their physical proximity to

the reader places them in a dominant position for the purpose of the ad, their facial expressions may give the reader a sense that they are dissatisfied with their company status. Finally, IBM also does a disservice by opting to use the “GLBT” acronym in its copy, thereby removing this small acknowledgement from the lesbian population.

While protections for LGBT Americans are an uphill battle in Congress and some state legislatures, corporate America continues to surge ahead by removing barriers to employee success – and companies across the nation are likely to benefit from this progress. As this wave of new protection and validation for LGBT workers continues, advertisers who choose to publicly declare their support through paid advertisements in LGBT publications would be well-served to carefully consider the narratives given to their subjects. They must also recognize that they have a stronger responsibility than other advertisers to carefully consider their representations of diversity within the gay and lesbian population.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

Advertisers appealing to the LGBT population in *The Advocate* have assigned power and privilege to the traditional dominant demographic in American society – the upper-middle-class White male. Ironically, those who do not fit the preferred demographic are depicted in ways that reinforce their status as “other,” those falling outside the realm of social acceptability. In advertisements that construct LGBT identity, this position of power is extended further to stipulate that the privilege belongs to those who are young, able-bodied, and engaged in dynamic, active lifestyles. Lesbians of all races and classes, gay men of color, gays and lesbians of other ethnicities, those with modest incomes, and the disabled are branded “others” and appear in limited capacities or have been omitted from the equation entirely. When these marginalized identities do appear, they are often positioned in relation to the dominant demographic. In many cases, they draw their social identities directly from their relationships with White males.

Stereotypes appear to be perpetuated more often than challenged. While the dominant images of young, physically fit, upwardly mobile White males themselves construct a stereotypical image of gay identity, the stereotyped representations of those classified as “other” are far more damaging. Images of Black males as persons infected with HIV/AIDS and acting in supporting roles to their White friends and lovers divorce them from their hard-won advances and equalities in other facets of public life.

While representations of White males celebrate the strength and virility of the male body, lesbians are largely separated from their sexuality, depicted in scenarios of motherhood and domestic joy that mirror an antiquated view of female identity from the mainstream population.

While *The Advocate* positions itself as an organ of record for the LGBT population, its advertisers appear to be ignoring more than 50 percent of the publication's target demographic.

Neglected Points of Intersection and the Dangers to LGBT Identity

In analyzing the advertisements, I have attempted to examine the human subjects from an intersectional perspective, accounting for their lived experiences at varying intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality. The study has revealed a constructed identity for gayness that is narrow and limited. The dominant demographic profile put forth is that of a young, White male, usually depicted in scenarios that indicate he is upper middle class, in fine physical condition, highly masculine, and ready to spend his considerable income on the trappings of commercially mediated "success." Black men are relegated to the roles of supporting players, either as partners or friends of White males or, more egregiously, as individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Men of other ethnicities are completely absent.

With *The Advocate* positioned as a national publication of record for the LGBT population, the lack of lesbian representation in advertising texts is surprising. The few females who are present are almost exclusively depicted as members of White couples focused on vacationing and raising children. Women of color appear in only two instances – a Black female in an interracial gay relationship and Asian American woman shown with her colleagues in a corporate diversity advertisement. Female diversity appears more frequently in corporate advertisements than in any other category, which uncovers an interesting bit of subtext. While women are valued as members of the corporate workforce, they are simultaneously devalued as consumers of the very products and services that they are helping to create.

Suzanna Danuta Walters (2001) writes that this narrow definition of gay identity in the advertising world has dire implications for LGBT inclusion in society as a whole.

In the world of the market, all the gays are men, all the men are white, and all the whites are rich. The inevitable focus on the niche most likely to consume freely relegates other gays (women, the poor, minorities, the “excessively” butch or feminine) even further into the shadows. If advertising – like so much of our popular culture – constructs and makes visible identities and desires (eat this and you’ll be satisfied, wear this and you’ll find love, drive this and you’ll have style), then the parameters of gayness are being drawn very closely as advertisers help to produce the (largely fictional) identity of “gay” as wealthy white man with an eye on fashion and oodles of disposable income.

The focus on a narrow definition of gay identity can feed into some of the most damaging stereotypes about LGBT individuals, but it can also delude gay people into believing in their own inclusion, even if that inclusion is largely a business decision. Market forces are perpetuating an ideology of gayness as a “lifestyle” with gay clothing, gay travel, and gay resorts. Warner (2000) claims that magazines like *The Advocate* and *Out* make it possible for large numbers of LGBT people to “...feel that they take part in something called ‘the gay community’ without needing to belong to a political scene.” And if being gay is increasingly defined by market forces, LGBT people may come to believe that their acceptance in the consumer realm translates to societal acceptance as well.

As consumers of products, services, and images, we must stay vigilant of what we buy and the reasons behind our purchases. Woods (1995) points out that “any company which can influence how we perceive ourselves, and how we want ourselves to be perceived, is guaranteed influence on how we spend our money.” The media not only influences how identities are constructed, and what types of knowledge is produced about a particular identity, but simultaneously, that constructed “market niche” becomes the consumer of those products. So while advertisers sell the image of gay White men vacationing on the Gold Coast of Australia and driving Land Rovers, the underlying message reads that *only* gay White men who travel to exotic locales and drive luxury vehicles are acceptable to society at large. Conversely, those who

fall outside of that image are fair game for further marginalization and homophobia. Faced with this threat, gay men may often feel immense pressure to become financially wealthy, giving them the ability to buy the products that will make them visible and respected in both mainstream and LGBT cultures. Others who identify as lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, or transgendered are then separated from this image altogether.

Larger questions loom and can only be addressed by systematic and comprehensive analysis. How can LGBT targets of commercial exploitation control their own images? Are media portrayals that privilege a White, male, upper-middle-class gay “lifestyle” serving to further oppress those who occupy a different demographic profile? Are there messages in the commercial marketplace from which we may make linkages with other subordinated groups whose identities have been subject to commodification? And will a commodified path to liberation advantage some gays and lesbians over others? As the LGBT population is positioned as the “perfect consumer,” those who do not conform to that representation are in danger of being eliminated from the equation.

Market Commodification and Political Clout

Chasin (2000) questions whether inclusion in the consumer market assists the political LGBT equality movement by proliferating images of gay and lesbian citizens in the media. She raises the point that this advertising lacks diversity, but she also claims that advertisers do not shoulder all the blame. Gay marketing firms, such as Mulryan/Nash and Overlooked Opinions, have “misled corporations by generalizing the results of surveys of gay-publication readers to the gay ‘community’ nationwide.” These firms have also used extrapolation techniques that cannot be applied with accuracy to a self-reporting population, thus overinflating gay wealth and spending patterns (Chasin 2000). As a narrow definition of the LGBT population is constructed

by the corporate world, the question of whether this newfound visibility is tantamount to political advancement and social inclusion remains.

Writing in the *Washington Blade*, Robert Bray (1997), program director for the Institute for Alternative Journalism, points out that gay life stands in danger of becoming little more than another commodity. To conform to corporate marketing interests, LGBT identity must conform to a prescribed and rigid consumer standard. If gays are positioned as “dream consumers,” those who refuse to conform to that representation are eliminated.

Bray asserts that one insidious gay stereotype may be succumbing to another, one that appears innocuous and does not involve blatant social scorn, but is equally damning in its service to corporate interests:

The old defamation is the Andrew Cunanan, Jeffrey Dahmer, serial killer pervert that we’ve all come to know and oppose in the media. The new defamation is the portrayal of gays and lesbians as domesticized (sic), sanitized, primarily White, fairly high economic class, possibly suburbanite. What’s defamatory about that is that we can do better. There’s a whole range of gays and lesbians in the middle of those two types, and we should not just settle for either the old kind or the new kind of defamation.

Mass media images may be creating a vision of gay life that is chic and profitable, but the LGBT population must remember that fashion, style, and “chicness” cannot substitute for legal protection and equality. As Skover and Testy (2002) have stated, the validation of gays and lesbians in the consumer marketplace comes at a time when issues of gay marriage, adoption, and employment discrimination are hotly debated in the executive and judicial branches of government. There is little value in cultural acceptance when full participation in society continues to be out of reach.

Simultaneously, the LGBT population cannot separate itself from the country’s commodity machine any more than any other demographic group. Some scholars (Walters 2001,

Skover & Testy 2002) argue that turning difference into an object of barter may be a quintessentially American experience. Companies that advertise to gays, sponsor gay events, or enact gay-friendly hiring policies often face boycotts and attacks by those opposed to LGBT equality, most notably the religious right. Although marketing to gays and lesbians is supposedly a sound financial decision, these daring corporate moves are largely hidden from general public view. Marketing efforts with gay imagery are relegated to the gay and lesbian press and direct mail efforts, and corporate hiring policies are generally not topics of promotion and discussion.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

A number of factors should be considered when considering the findings of this analysis in preparation for a more comprehensive assessment of LGBT portrayals in media generally and in the LGBT press specifically. First, the analysis included one issue of *The Advocate*, representing a single text of the bi-weekly's 26 issues published annually, a relatively small sample size. A more thorough study might examine a full year of publications or might consider a sample of select issues from several years to observe trends in advertiser appeals. Ideally, the most comprehensive study of LGBT portrayals in advertising would embrace additional national gay-oriented publications including, but not limited to, *Out*, *Genre*, and *Curve*, a major lesbian-oriented publication.

Additional studies may also benefit from analyzing regional and local gay and lesbian publications in order to interpret how their depictions of identity compare and contrast with those seen in national publications. And a longitudinal study might examine LGBT publications over an extended period of time, comparing advertising representations with gay and lesbian advancements in popular cultural and the political realm.

A second limitation concerns the study's inability to account for the seasonal placement of advertisements based on corporate marketing decisions. Demographic profiles may well be influenced by seasonal advertising. For example, travel and tourism agencies may be more likely to advertise during the first half of the year as travelers plan summer vacations. Automobile manufacturers may run heavier ad campaigns at the time of year when new car models are being introduced. Seasonal variations may be taken into account in a broader study encompassing a full calendar year of publications or a longer span of time.

The 95 classified advertisements that appear on the final six pages of the publication are also worthy of further analysis. These smaller, less costly ads represent real estate services, business opportunities for LGBT individuals, financial services, gift items, additional travel and resort ads, and a variety of other consumer goods. I intentionally omitted these texts from this study because of their lack of prominence and overall impact.

A textual or content analysis of *The Advocate* may also provide additional layers of understanding about the representation of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Studies might examine the editorial content of the publication, including feature stories, news items, and guest editorials. An examination of the specific placement of advertisements in relation to editorial content may also reveal which identities are most closely aligned by the publication's editors with various issues and challenges facing the LGBT population.

While this study presents a textual analysis of the advertisements themselves and the layers of meaning they offer, additional studies of both the production and consumption of LGBT-targeted ads may be beneficial. An assessment of the advertising research and creative conceptualization behind the ads may reveal how advertisers interpret the needs of the LGBT population and utilize this information in crafting their messages. In addition, focus groups and

personal interviews with readers of *The Advocate* might be utilized to uncover how these advertising texts are interpreted by their target audience and how these interpretations contribute to the formation of personal identity.

Each of the four major themes analyzed in this study is also worthy of more in-depth consideration. Separate studies might be conducted to observe racial representations in HIV/AIDS medication ads, the commodification of the gay White male body, and the depiction of race and sexuality in advertisements for consumer goods. Although *The Advocate* professes to appeal to the total LGBT population, not just gay men, a similar textual analysis of advertising content might be conducted for national publications targeted exclusively at lesbians, such as *Curve* or *Girlfriends*.

To the Future: LGBT Representations in Mainstream Advertising

This analysis has documented representations of LGBT identity as they appear in one text within the gay and lesbian media. But the inclusion of LGBT persons in mainstream advertising continues to be largely absent. Television advertising has banished LGBT individuals from hawking the goods and services of our economy except in the most ambiguous of ways, an example being a 2001 Volkswagen spot in which two young men of indeterminate sexual orientation load a discarded chair into their car. Gay imagery is absent from mainstream print publications, in which depictions of home and family life are overwhelmingly heterosexual. While gays and lesbians are discussed in popular media as having commandeered nearly every facet of popular culture, the reality is much different. Even in the bottom-line driven world of corporate advertising, gays and lesbians are still marginalized. But change may be on the horizon.

As members of the LGBT population view their commercialized images in publications designed specifically for their consumption, we must not lose sight of the fact that these same images will eventually make their way into the mainstream media. Corporate America is setting the stage for these depictions of LGBT identity to enter wider channels of distribution. Society at large watches the same television programs, reads many of the same magazines and newspapers, and shops in the same retail outlets. Thus, the general population views LGBT identity as mediated by popular culture, and interprets these cultural representations for what LGBT people “really are.”

Since LGBT persons do not constitute the majority of the populace and must regularly appeal to the majority for its tolerance or acceptance, we must account for our commercially constructed identity. Whether the representations reinforce or break stereotypes and whether the media depictions allow for intersectional interpretations, whatever the attributes and however positive or negative the images, they must be appropriately addressed by the LGBT population and within the academy. Ever vigilante, the LGBT population must also recognize that its growing visibility and newly enfranchised place in American culture is not necessarily tantamount to an improved quality of life for gay men and lesbians.

Scholars of LGBT studies in particular focus critically on the construction of heterosexuality, challenging its cultural dominance and exploring the types of resistances that complement it. But even LGBT theory at times must challenge pro-gay perspectives. Lesbians of various sociopolitical orientations (butch v. femme, radical feminist) and people of color (Blacks, Asians, Native Americans) criticize gay representations as sexist and racist because they marginalize specific forms of experience by privileging a masculine notion of homosexuality and

gay identity. As this analysis has shown, this privileged representation is largely White, male, affluent, young, and heteronormatively masculine.

By acknowledging the diversity that exists within the LGBT population, advertisers can offer both LGBT and heterosexual consumers meaning-rich cultural resources that transcend simplistic stereotypes. At the same time, gay men and lesbians must struggle to resist and reform their commodified identities; we cannot afford to turn a blind eye and simply to assert that the images are not “us.”

Stuart Hall has given marginalized populations a rousing call to action through his scholarly support for negotiated and oppositional readings of mass media texts. By applying these readings to advertising texts, members of the LGBT population can bring constructive criticism to the table, refusing to accept dominant codes created for them by the forces of the consumer culture. While they may not constitute a diverse representation of what it means to be gay or lesbian, these mass media images remain society’s culturally mediated window into our lives. They should be closely scrutinized and deconstructed, heralded when appropriate, and challenged when necessary.

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