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## Ideological Criticism of the Social Construction of Gay Advertising

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**IDEOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION  
OF GAY ADVERTISING**

**A Thesis**

**Presented to the**

**Department of Communication**

**and the**

**Faculty of the Graduate College**

**University of Nebraska**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Masters of Communication**

**University of Nebraska at Omaha**

**By**

**Dawn M. Cripe**

**August 2004**

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## THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,  
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts,  
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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## **Abstract**

### **IDEOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GAY ADVERTISING**

**Dawn Cripe, MA**

**University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2004**

Mainstream advertising in the gay media has become more prevalent in the past few years as marketers discovered an untapped source of profits. This study examined mainstream advertising in the gay media and its ability to connect with its targeted audience as a diverse consumer group. The study looked through the lens of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of *The Social Construction of Reality* and the ideological perspective that gays and lesbians are an oppressed group. The objective of the study was to determine whether or not these advertisements presented a worldview that reinforced stereotypes of gays and lesbians in a negative way, ignored them altogether or presented an inclusive, positive worldview. Results of this study showed two worldviews: one with gays and lesbians as visible consumers; and one with gays and lesbians as invisible consumers. The majority of advertisers presented worldviews that ignored the gay and lesbian audience, which reinforces the cultural dominance of heterosexuals in society.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am in debt to many people for the completion, at long last, of this thesis. First, I extend thanks to Dr. Deborah Smith-Howell, the chair of my committee and advisor for many years. She has been an integral part of my education through her unending support, expertise (that seemed to come easily) and her matter-of-fact attitude when she told me I was “thinking too hard” or “I know you got it in you.” She is truly one of my life mentors and much deserving of the extra effort to produce a valuable piece of research.

I want to thank the rest of my committee members, Dr. Jeremy Lipschultz and Dr. Karen Falconer-Al Hindi. Both of these members eagerly took on my endeavor and offered their support and guided me with their expertise. Dr. Lipschultz never ceased to amaze me with his knowledge and enthusiasm for the world of media. Dr. Falconer-Al Hindi taught me to appreciate women in their diversity and to include them as part of this study. In addition, I thank them for their patience when they were probably wondering back in May, “Where the heck is Dawn’s thesis?”

I also want to thank my partner, Deana Pasewalk, for her continued support of my educational goals and in particular, this thesis. I know at times I was unreasonable, salty and downright a pain, but still cute. Thank you for understanding when I had to miss golf games, movies and dinners on the town. I, same as you, cannot wait to read a book just for fun.

Finally, I acknowledge all of those researchers from whom I borrowed the background for this thesis. It was invaluable and will inevitably lend itself to changing our society for the better, even if not in our lifetime.

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter One: Introduction and Background</b>	1
Review of Literature	3
The Social Construction of Reality	3
Gay History, Culture & Subculture	7
Advertising Strategies	12
General Strategies	12
Stereotyping	13
Sexual Appeals	15
Gay Imagery	16
Ideology and Worldview Perspective	21
Statement of Purpose	23
Research Questions	25
 <b>Chapter Two: Methodology</b>	28
Critical Ideology	28
The Study	29
The Artifact	29
The Unit of Analysis	32
Coding Descriptions	33
 <b>Chapter Three: Descriptive Analysis</b>	39
Description of the Study	39
 Message Construction: RQ 1	41
Figure 1	41
Figure 2	44
Figure 3	47
Sexual Appeals	52
 Positive/Negative Messages: RQ 2	54
Figure 4	55
 Stereotyping & Gender: RQ 3	57
Figure 5a	58
Figure 5b	59
Figure 5c	60
Figure 5d	60
Figure 6	61
Figure 7	62

Worldviews and Ideology: RQ 4	65
Worldview #1: Visible Consumers	66
Worldview #2: Invisible Consumers	73
Duplicate Advertisements	75
<b>Chapter Four: Conclusion</b>	78
Limitations	85
Future Research	86
<b>References</b>	89
<b>Appendix A: Coding Sheet</b>	93

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction and Background**

This study developed out of a long-standing fascination with mainstream advertisers' marketing strategies in reaching the gay and lesbian consumer that often seemed to miss the mark. This overlooked "sub-group" of society captured the attention of marketers in the mid to late 90's as an untapped resource, making this marketing audience a palpable dessert to hungry corporate giants (Wardlow, 1996). Two advertisements stand out as examples of this type of advertising: (1) A Donna Karen of New York (DKNY) advertisement in the November issue of the gay and lesbian magazine *Out* (1998). This advertisement, "introducing the DKNY shirt and tie collection," showed a woman adjusting a very attractive dark-haired man's tie. The two were gazing into each other's eyes looking as though they were about to kiss. This advertisement in the gay media was ambiguous in that it did not seem to be made for gays and lesbians, except perhaps the bisexuals in this audience who could appreciate the heterosexual nature of the advertisement; (2) The Bud Light advertisement in the September issue of *Out* magazine (1998). This advertisement featured a bottle of Bud Light strapped in a red sequined platform shoe. This advertisement, while eye-catching, seemed to suggest that the gay and lesbian beer drinkers were a flamboyant group, which bordered on the stereotyping of gay men.

As often happens in "niche" marketing, groups lose their range of diversity as advertisers apply a one-size-fits all marketing approach. Bhat (1996) argued that the

“homosexual” market, however, could not be described as a “niche” market because “niche” specifically referred to consumers with the same basic needs. These needs, said Bhat, are related to the 4 “P’s” of marketing strategy: price, product, promotion, placement and distribution. Bhat insisted that “homosexuals” are not all alike and therefore advertisers should not use market strategies that make that assumption. Chasin (2000) said of Rivendall Advertising that “their ads seem to represent all gay people as male, highly educated, and affluent, with consumption patterns that include unusually frequent travel, liquor and music purchases, and the like” (p. 36). From this perceived lack of diversity in “gay and lesbian” advertising strategies, the idea for this study was born to evaluate the perceptions of realities of mainstream advertising in the gay media and its ability to connect with its targeted audience as a diverse consumer group. This study is the author’s third such study that seeks to create a better understanding of the gay and lesbian consumer to help advertisers better position their strategies to attract this consumer group (Cripe, 1999 & 2000).

To accomplish this goal, the research took a critical look at full-page advertising in the gay media to identify how mainstream advertisers construct messages in this medium. Is it through the use of easily recognizable gay symbols, icons, and verbal messages or the lack thereof? Once these messages were identified, this research looked at the potential impact of these messages on the gay and lesbian audience. The study applied the theory of social construction of reality and the concepts of ideological criticism that gays and lesbians are oppressed members of society and that advertising plays a part in marginalizing their existence. This study attempts to answer whether or

not these messages could have a positive or negative impact; and if these advertisements legitimize the real life of gays and lesbians and their place in society or perpetuates oppression.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Social Construction of Reality**

It is important to study gay images in the mass media, in this case advertisements, because of the power of this medium to potentially create real-world images or identities for the gay, lesbian and mainstream consumer. These images of reality, whether mirroring reality or a media-created reality, can be explained through the social construction of reality theory, which simply stated assumes, “Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 19). Inherent in this process of perceiving reality is internalization. Berger and Luckmann (1966) wrote that internalization was the first step in a person creating an identity out of a shared reality. Through this process, people then understand their role or place in society as dictated by others. This is why it is so important to understand the messages that marketers construct in their advertisements when attempting to market to a “niche” such as the gay community. Bowes (1996) admonished advertisers to learn the history of the gay and lesbian community because theirs’ is one of “exclusion and discrimination” (p.219). He acknowledged that the attention bestowed on the gay and lesbian consumer market gave them recognition and

possible legitimacy, but it also had the potential of creating harm because it was profit driven on the advertisers side.

Legitimacy or “legitimation” is another concept in the theory of social construction of reality. This concept maintains that people assume roles and that these roles mold their identities within society, which leads to their acceptance in society. This premise of “legitimation” prompts the individuals to act in ways that are acceptable to their place in society as determined by institutions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). If one thinks of the media as an institution, then it makes sense that the media has the power to shape people’s worlds or their perceptions of it; and advertising is one of the most powerful of all mediums in this institution. Chasin (2000) concluded, “advertising in the gay press encourages national consciousness and distinct-group consciousness” (p. 110). She argued that consumerism bore the responsibility of assimilating minority groups into mainstream society and that was how gays and lesbians would find acceptance from others.

Furthermore, Wood (1999) wrote that we define who and what we are by looking to others, whether unrealistic or not, even to “mediated” others. Wood (1999) claimed that the power of advertising sets the norms for people in their respective cultures. She cautioned about the dangers of advertising in perpetuating stereotypes, misrepresenting roles, especially those of women and minorities, and in limiting people’s perceptions of reality. Wood (1999) highlighted the themes in media as they related to women and minorities, including the elderly, in advertisements: Under-representation or the absence

of women and minorities; stereotyping, which often misrepresents women and minorities; and relationship norms depicting women and minorities in traditional roles.

Wood (1999) also cited an example of elderly women in advertising, as being under-represented compared to men when in reality the opposite is true. She theorized that this under-representation could send a message that women's youth and beauty was glorified in society and that an aged-woman was undesirable. So, too, in the analysis of advertising to gays and lesbians, it is important to understand the kinds of messages being sent to this community. Are they under-represented? Are they being represented in stereotypical ways? If they are consistently shown as single or lacking relationships, does this have an underlying affect on their thoughts about family and relationships? Does this view of gays and lesbians misrepresent the lives of many gays and lesbians to the heterosexual mainstream society; and if so, how do these media-constructed messages affect their *social construction of reality*?

Schudson (1984) wrote that marketers claim they were only responding to consumer's needs and that their advertisements had not created the social ills of the world. In fact, Schudson said marketers scoffed at the idea of wielding that much power. Schudson (1984) agreed with marketers to a point, but acknowledged that advertising does incorporate "family values, sexism, and self-indulgence," all of which could not be overlooked. Far more dangerous, Schudson (1984) contended was the "political, economical, social and cultural forces" behind the advertising itself.

Sapiro (1999) made references to history, which painted a much more persuasive argument than Schudson's (1984) as to the power of advertising. She noted that

“feminist symbols and rhetoric” first appeared in tobacco advertising when women won the vote. These advertisements depicted free women taking the liberty of smoking. Sapiro (1999) also documented the history of women in advertising during WWI and WWII that appealed to women’s civic duty in helping win the war efforts. These efforts included rationing, sacrificing and taking on traditional-male jobs. Interestingly, too, Sapiro (1999) detailed how after the wars, women returned to their traditional roles.

Taking into consideration Schudson’s (1984) argument, it makes sense to look at another key concept of the social construction of reality: language. It is the most common thread of this theory as it shapes individuals’ perceptions of their world in the constraints of societal values and rules (Littlejohn, 2002). Included in this construction of reality through language is the use of signs and symbols, which often take on meaning separate from the object they embody. The construction of the social world through language then becomes a shared reality with others who understand the signs and symbols (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Preston (2000), in his discussion on micro-marketing, highlighted the power of the advertisement as the symbolic message rather than its literal message that motivates the consumer. His observation that the symbolic messages are meant to project positive messages about the product, not their historical downside, has implications for this study on advertising to the gay and lesbian consumer. In question is whether or not the advertisers think their appeals are reaching their targeted audience just by using gay symbols and images in their appeals; and if these messages are received in a positive way.

## **Gay History, Culture & Subculture**

Berger and Luckmann (1966) explained that to understand the symbolic meaning, one has to understand the origin of its history in the socially constructed world. The gay and lesbian world is full of gay symbols that are full of meaning separate from the symbols themselves.

The Stonewall Society (2003) has documented these symbols and their meanings on the Society's website to show how gay cultural symbols such as the pink and black inverted triangles and the rainbow flag unite a proud community of gays and lesbians. These symbols also represent a history of struggle and solidarity dating back to the Holocaust with which gays and lesbians easily identify. During the Holocaust, the pink triangle badge identified condemned homosexuals, some 25,000 of them, to imprisonment, castration, sterilization and death during Hitler's reign. The Stonewall Society noted gay rights groups adopted this symbol in the 1970's to symbolize their "active fight back" from an oppressive past. Another symbol, the black inverted triangle thought to be worn by lesbians and other women of "anti-social" behaviors during the Holocaust, has since been adopted by lesbian groups as a symbol of their heritage.

Not to be forgotten, Stonewall, known as the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969, represents the beginning of gay and lesbian pride (Peñaloza, 1996). This rebellion took place in New York at the Stonewall Inn where members of the gay and lesbian community including transgendered people, bisexuals, and drag queens, stood up against discrimination and prejudice (Peñaloza, 1996). Dilallo and Krumholtz (1994) added Stonewall was the day after Judy Garland's funeral, a beloved icon of gay men.

The most highly visible symbol, the six-color rainbow flag, is recognized by the International Congress of Flag Makers and represents gay pride and diversity (Stonewall, 2003). Gilbert Baker, a San Francisco artist, designed the flag for the city's 1978 Gay and Lesbian Freedom Day Parade. Another flag, the Pride Flag, symbolizes the struggle against AIDS and memorializes those who have lost the fight to this terrible disease. It is the rainbow flag with a black stripe on the bottom. The red ribbon is also a symbol of the AIDS struggle and those who have lost the fight to this disease. A group of New York artists called "Visual AIDS" designed this symbol in 1991 to bring awareness to the devastating numbers of AIDS victims.

These are just a few of the recognizable gay symbols that unite the gay and lesbian community and until recently, these symbols and their meanings remained obscure to most people outside of this community. However, with the release of market research in the early 1990's specifically the Simmons Market Research Bureau's "Gay and Lesbian Market Study"; and the Overlooked Opinions report that identified the gay and lesbian community as the "dream market," these symbols soon signified corporate America's obsession with the profitability of the gay market (Chasin, 2000).

Wilke (1997) said it was no longer good enough for corporate America just to sponsor gay events or feature their product in a mainstream advertisement in the gay media, advertisers had to do more – they had to advertise in the gay media with advertisements that reflected the gay lifestyle. Chasin (2000) highlighted some key advertisers that reflected what Wilkes meant, such companies as Ikea, the Swedish furniture maker, aired the first television advertisement featuring a gay couple shopping

for a table; Miller Beer used the slogan “Celebrate Pride” in one of their print advertisements in the gay media; and Visa’s print advertisement for the new “Uncommon Clout” card that announced it was a “credit to the gay and lesbian community.”

Peñaloza (1996) outlined the strategies of these mainstream advertisers, which included the use of gay symbols for quick and easy identification. Sapiro (1999) suggested that advertisers would not use these stereotypical types of messages if they did not work. However, if advertisers use these symbols, they need to understand the latent meanings hidden within the symbols. Freitas, Kaiser, and Hammidi (1996) argued that “When the symbolism of the community becomes framed as a basis for a target market from an ‘outside’ perspective, the styles become divorced of the meaning(s) they once held” (p. 99).

Used in an advertisement, gays or lesbians may interpret an inverted pink triangle as a symbol of acceptance or “legitimation,” but the advertiser may only see it as a way to attract the gay and lesbian consumer to their product. The flip side is that the gay and lesbian consumer may also see it as a sign that the advertiser is “gay-friendly” and, again, as a validation of their existence; however, they may also see its use in an advertisement as a diminishment of their struggles for that validation. Kates (1998), in his exhaustive research interviewing gay males and their buying habits, reported that gay men were more inclined to purchase products and support companies that advertised directly to them, but that they also questioned the motives behind a profit-driven business. Kates believed gay symbols used in this scenario would become commonplace and a tool of gay consumerism. Problems of “identity” may also result if the message misrepresents the

gay and lesbian consumer or if the signs and symbols result in negative representations of this group. At issue here is legitimizing the gay and lesbian consumer as valuable members of society. By using gay symbols in advertisements, does this say to the gay and lesbian consumer that the advertiser acknowledges their heritage and recognizes them as contributing members of society and does this consumer interpret the message that way?

Freitas et al.'s (1996) study described two cultural spaces that emerge from the use of "style," which includes symbols and imagery that identifies these cultures. The first "cultural space" is the "target market," which Freitas et al. referred to as having access to market goods (p. 89). Freitas et al. defined marketing in this cultural space as economic-specific and did not necessarily include "gay labeling." These advertisements are often ambiguous by nature, whether from their placement in the gay media or through their advertising message. Freitas et al. (1996) also pointed out that gays and lesbians can interpret advertisements differently depending on their worldview and experiences. Ironically, though, the targeted audience is identified by their sexual preference, often noted through gay imagery and symbols. The Simmons Market Research Report and other research reports on the gay consumer, they noted, drew attention to this target market and made gays and lesbians, mainly gay men, visible in the "cultural capital market."

Aside from gay imagery and symbols identifying the gay and lesbian community, a "sub-cultural space" emerges from their use that does not have an economic tie (Freitas et al., 1996). Freitas, et al. described this subculture as one that is identified through

privileges and boundaries, whether through style, self-identity or “ostracism” from the dominant culture, in this case mainstream heterosexuals (p. 94). Often these styles or differences are subtle such as wearing a certain color bandana in a certain pocket, wearing shorts out of season, the style of haircut, the way one wears their watch or even the type of music to which one dances or sings – show tunes are favorites (Dilallo & Krumholtz, 1994). Often times these styles or differences are overt such as wearing T-Shirts with gay slogans or gay symbols such as the rainbow flag, a double gender symbol or the pink inverted triangle.

Freitas et al. (1996) added that no matter if the messages were overt or subtle, it was to whom these messages were sent, rather than just the visibility of the message. Freitas et al. (1996) cited a gay college student who said in his interview, “Most heterosexuals on campus ‘won’t get it’ (p. 97).” As Dilallo and Krumholtz (1994) wrote, “Gay isn’t: sherbert, minivans, roller derby, Miller Lite TV ads, a phase or awesome – Gay is: sorbet, convertibles, roller-blading, Miller Lite, a way of life, and fabulous” (p. 57).

It is identity in this community that makes up the “sub-cultural” of the gay and lesbian consumer. Freitas et al. (1996) cautioned that advertisers using these gay-identity symbols resorted to “target marketing,” the first cultural space, rather than “sub-cultural space.” Freitas et al., similar to Kates (1998), worried about the degradation of the meaning of these symbols that identified the historical struggle against repression.

Included in this sub-culture are several sub-groups of gays and lesbians, which has a diverse range of members (Rudd, 1996). Rudd reminded marketers and advertisers

that gays and lesbians in these gay subcultures “dress differently, act differently, attend different social events, and may wish to consume different goods and services” (p. 127). Dilallo and Krumholtz (1994) identified some of the gay male subcultures in their book according to their appearance and attire: “The Biker” with his leather, body piercing, tattoos and bandanas; “The Club Kid” with his baseball cap, Doc Martins (a style of boot), temporary tattoos, and multi-pierced ears; “The Opera Queen” with his black evening attire, silk scarf and gold ring; “The Activist” with his identifiable activist logoed T-Shirt, beret and baggy jeans, and this is just to name a few of the many subcultures within the gay male culture (pp. 60-62).

The gay identity becomes important in advertising strategies to reach the “whole” gay and lesbian market.

## **Advertising Strategies**

### **General Strategies**

Schudson (1984) wrote that advertisers and their agencies have to decide the best consumer appeal before moving ahead with an advertising campaign. He described the three basic strategies: the creation of a powerful emotional appeal known as brand imaging; the logical presentation that uniquely positions the product in its category; and the visibility approach that seeks to catch the targeted audience’s attention through humor, unusual graphics, gimmicks or clever text (p. 74). These strategies employ both informational (hard sells) and emotional (soft sells) appeals, mainly depending on the type of product promoted: The norm being to use hard sells for items such as electronic

and technical equipment and soft sells for products such as cigarettes and liquor.

Schudson (1984) noted that despite industry norms, the trend was becoming one of ignoring the rule of thumb and trying innovative ideas to sell products; however, these trends still employ the three basic strategies that Schudson outlined above.

Given the basics strategies of advertising, the expectation of examining the advertising in the gay media is that there will be the emotional appeals that will establish brand loyalty; that there will be unique product positioning; and that there will be visual appeals to quickly capture the intended audience's attention. However, it is the way these strategies are employed that will need a closer examination to determine if the strategies give way to stereotyping.

### **Stereotyping**

It is also important to ask if the media, in this case magazine advertising, perpetuates stereotypes that misrepresent the true nature of the gay and lesbian consumer.

Artz, Munger, and Purdy (1999) studied stereotyping of women in advertising as it pertained to sexism. They examined how the text in advertisements were "gender-neutral, gender-specific, or gender biased" and concluded that gender bias still exists in advertising. They cautioned that the continued use of sexism or gender-biased language in advertising would reinforce inappropriate portrayals of women. Artz et al. continued with their criticism of advertiser's use of gender-biased language as a quick way to attract a targeted consumer at the expense of portraying women in a gender-neutral light. This study shed light on the root of sexism, which is also at the heart of male "gayness." This

sexism berates a gay male for his likeness to women, an inferior being; this can be seen in the language berating him such as “Sissy, Fag, and Bitch (Russo, 1987).

Wood (1999) echoed Artz et al.’s caution on the use of gender-biased language that often depreciates or devalues women. Wood (1999) pointed to symbols as an especially powerful form of language, in that it constructs our reality of “what is, what will or might be and what has been,” which she referred to as “hypothetical thought” (p.116). Keeping “hypothetical thought” or “perceptions of reality” in mind, advertisements that perpetuate stereotypes can be especially harmful to the targeted audience.

Along the same thought, Thomas and Treiber (2000) examined advertisements in light of race, gender and status issues, looking for stereotypes. Through a content analysis of magazines in niche markets that were predominantly Black, White, Black and female, and White and female, Thomas discovered that advertising perpetuated race and gender stereotypes. This was especially true in relation to women and Blacks. Thomas (2000) also echoed the dangers of stereotypes affecting the everyday perceptions of self, especially if those perceptions are inaccurate.

This study looks at the graphical nature of the advertisement to see what is there in the constructed message or what is missing in it in regards to sexism, class or gender stereotypes—are gay men portrayed in the same way as “straight” men in advertisements such as involved in sports, repairing cars or doing outdoor chores? Are lesbians portrayed in similar roles to “straight” women such as caring for sick family members, cleaning the house or shopping for dresses? Are there children in the advertisements?

Are gays and lesbians shown in “normal” roles, if not, why not? What roles are shown instead? Do the products suggest a gendered, sexism or status message by the price or by the targeted audience?

Russo’s (1987) research of 80 years of film showed that even though gays have been present in film for as long as there has been film, their roles have been stereotypical roles devaluing their being. It was disturbing or in Russo’s words “revolting.” Russo (1987) also rejected mainstream film and television portrayals normalizing gays and lesbians as a way to help society understand how to tolerate “homosexuals” living among them.

It is this confusion of how to address the gay and lesbian community as normal that makes it so important to understand how the messages are constructed in the media, specifically advertising. By doing away with old stereotypes, advertising can create a more balanced view of a segment of society that has long been misrepresented.

### **Sexual Appeals**

Sexual appeals in advertising would seem to be a natural fit in the gay and lesbian media simply because their very existence is based on sexual preference. The sexual nature of gays and lesbians is also the premise for a “niche” marketing approach. This study will look at sexual appeals in these advertisements to see if there are any definitive conclusions to be drawn from its use or the absence of it.

Schudson (1984) acknowledged that sexual appeals have been used virtually since the beginning of advertising, but in a minor role in magazine advertising. The appeals

are used to grab consumers' attention and not necessarily to sell the product. He wrote that family values in advertising played a much bigger role than sex.

At risk, too, is the reaction to sexual appeals. LaTour and Henthorne's (1994) study on consumers' reactions to sexual appeals in print advertising concluded that consumers reacted more negatively to overt sexual appeals. They documented the consumers' responses as a reflection of current societal attitudes and moral standards. LaTour and Henthorne (1994) also made note that sexual appeals range from overt sexual appeals from nudity to subtle sexual innuendos; and that advertisers grapple with balancing the attention-getting sexual appeals with the potential negative responses to these appeals. Also at issue, they said, is the assumption of reactions from the advertisers' intended audience—in this case, gay and lesbian consumers.

The question arises as to whether sexual appeals are an effective strategy to use in advertisements targeting the gay and lesbian consumer. Also, because there is an inherent sexual nature attached to the gay and lesbian consumer, another question is whether advertisers avoid using overt sexual appeals, instead opting to use subtle sexual appeals; if so, why? This study will look at sex appeals as a piece of the bigger picture of the constructed message of the whole advertisement.

### **Gay Imagery**

Stereotyping, as Kendrick and Lazier's (1993) research revealed, is a way to quickly connect the consumer to the product. In this case, the use of gay imagery, symbols and icons captures the gay consumers attention and directs it to the product – or

does it? Kates' (1998) research on the gay male consumers suggested that the diversity of the gay community needed to be acknowledged by advertisers to give the community legitimacy and not just through identifiable symbols. For example, the use of gay symbols in advertising Coors Light does not lend itself to legitimizing the gay consumer if that company did not have gay policies in place for its employees. Kates (1998) questioned whether corporate America was just "using" these "sacred" symbols of the gay community to attract the gay consumer, but not acknowledging them as legitimate members of society as a whole. Kates (1998), in his guidelines for marketers, suggested they avoid integrating important gay symbols in their advertisements unless they had earned the right to use them by validating the gay culture in some way. He insisted that advertisers could achieve this privilege with their support of gay rights, corporate sponsorship of gay causes or promotion of domestic-partner benefits. Otherwise, said Kates (1998), advertisers run the risk of devaluing these symbols and the history they invoke.

At issue, too, is whether or not mainstream advertisers show gays and lesbians in relationships similar to heterosexual couples, in their advertising. If mainstream advertisers opt not to show gay and lesbian couples in their advertisements, does this denote a lack of acceptance of gay and lesbian relationships as being normal? How does this translate to the gay and lesbians' perception of their world or to heterosexuals who see the same advertisement?

It is also important to understand why or how advertisers started marketing to the gay consumer; and how this plays into the construction of the advertisements. In many of

the research studies in Wardlow's (1996) book about gay images and advertising, the researchers attributed this sudden onslaught of advertising in the gay media to the Simmons Market Report. Badgett's (2000) research denounced the Simmons survey as misleading advertisers of the viability of the gay and lesbian consumer. She cited early publications of the Simmons report in 1991 that caused the initial uproar among its critics; followed by updated surveys that were equally misleading.

Peñaloza's (1996) concern with the report was that it showed the gay consumer was "rich," but failed to show the diversity of the gay community. She argued that this approach devalued the gay community and ignored its diversity. She said what it did, though, was make a "composite sketch" of the gay male "out" consumer that showed they had a higher disposable income than most singles or couples. This composite sketch did not account for the lesbian consumer, the closeted gay consumer or other gay men who were on the lower economic end of the scale (Rudd, 1996). Peñaloza (1996) also suggested that the gay consumer's sexuality was made an issue. She argued that advertisers did not focus on the uses and gratifications or consumption habits of gays and lesbians, as they should when considering advertising strategies.

Bhat (1996), in his clarification of Delozier and Rodrigue's (1996) research on strategies and implications to the gay market, wrote that advertisers needed to focus on the "bases of segmentation" and not the "descriptors of segmentation." Bhat described the bases of segmentation as those characteristics that identify the basic underlying consumer differences such as "price elasticity, needs or benefits sought, media usage, deal proneness, and shopping patterns" (pp. 214-215). He said the "descriptors" are

applied “after” the bases of segmentation are identified, or should be. Descriptors, wrote Bhat, are “demographic, socioeconomic, or psychographic profiles.” Using these descriptors only, Bhat cautioned, was the foundation for stereotyping. By promoting products through the gay consumers’ sexual nature, an example of using “sex” as a descriptor for attracting the gay and lesbian consumer, Peñaloza (1996) said it — using sex — perpetuated the “morality” issue and steered mainstream consumers away from products identified as “gay” products.

This issue of “gay” identification and mainstream consumer’s responses to this identification confronted advertisers when they promoted their products to the gay and lesbian consumer. Bhat, Leigh & Wardlow’s (1996) study of gay imagery as seen in advertisements such as a jeans ad and a shampoo ad, showed that mainstream heterosexual consumers reacted differently to the advertisements because of the gay imagery or the lack thereof based on their predisposed attitudes toward homosexuality. A vast majority of mainstream America still believes that homosexuality is immoral, that gay marriages should not be allowed and that the homosexual lifestyle is an unacceptable norm (Peñaloza, 1996). Bhat et al. (1996) maintained that mainstream advertisers wanted the gay consumers’ dollars, but not at the expense of having their product identified as “gay” products, which might cause them to lose a valuable customer base.

Delozier and Rodrigues (1996), in their “profile and strategies” of marketing to the gay and lesbian consumer, questioned whether it was necessary to have separate advertising campaigns for them. They asked whether it was necessary to promote “motor oil” with gay innuendos or if the product could sell itself in the gay and lesbian market.

The researchers said advertising should rely on the 4 “p’s” of advertising: product, price, promotion and placement. Distribution is also part of this “rule of thumb.” Delòzier and Rodrigues, much like Peñaloza (1996), cautioned advertisers against associating their product with gay imagery unless it was a “gay” product such as domestic-partner benefits.

An American Express’s advertisement in the August 1999 issue of *Out* magazine is an example of just such a product or service that needs “gay” targeting. The ad shows a lesbian couple with their arms around each other and it discusses domestic-partner benefits. In the tagline, American Express denotes the fact that they offer these benefits to their employees. This both legitimizes the company’s position on the issue and validates their placement in the gay arena. On the other hand, advertisers such as Philip Morris (Marlboro) and Budwieser thought it necessary to have market-specific advertising for the gay and lesbian community. Sigesmund (1999) wrote in *Newsweek* that beer industry sources say the new slogan, “Be Yourself and Make it a Bud Light,” was developed specifically for Bud’s beer campaigns in gay-oriented publications.

The American Legacy Foundation (2003) sponsored an advertisement in the September issue of *GENRE* that revealed an advertisement from an internal tobacco sponsored report on how to reach the gay market through advertising. It showed the silhouette of Philip Morris’ Marlboro Man and the text read, “The Marlboro Man is ‘the ultimate stud,’ ‘orally fixated (positive)’ and ‘maybe a great one-nighter’” (p. 25).

The advertisement noted, too, the name of RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company’s report for reaching the gay market: “Project Sub-culture Urban Marketing or its acronym,

SCUM.” Melillo and Gianatasio (2002) wrote in the New England Edition of *ADweek* that The American Legacy Foundation unveiled a campaign to expose the truth behind these marketing strategies to see if there was any malicious intent. Was it niche marketing or stereotyping at its worst? To reach the gay and lesbian market, do advertisers have to resort to the very same overt sexual nature that ostracizes this consumer from mainstream society?

This type of target-marketing strategy shows how advertisers need to develop a much more “gay-sensitive” approach to attract the gay and lesbian community. Using overt sexual messages, as in the suggested Marlboro advertisement, or referring to the project as SCUM, both demoralizes and misrepresents the diversity of the gay and lesbian community: A better understanding of the diversity of the community and its consumers is needed.

### **Ideological & Worldview Perspectives**

Using ideological criticism as a conceptual foundation, this paper subscribes to the worldview that gays and lesbians are an oppressed group and media, especially advertising, has the power to create stereotypes that perpetuates this oppression. Foss (1996) identified oppression as a tool of patriarchal or dominant cultures that marginalize people based on gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, just to name a few domains. Foss went on to say that researchers who expose forms of oppression also need to understand how the artifacts under study promote the marginalizing of certain groups and to “challenge or resist,” this manifestation. This study will seek to identify advertising

that promotes a worldview that gays and lesbians are not part of the dominant culture. Once identified, the study will, as Foss (1996) suggested, seek to offer alternative advertising strategies. As in the case of the oppression of women, Foss (1996) said the marginalizing of women resulted in men becoming the standard for the sexes and women becoming the sub-standard of the sexes. This “standard” not only resulted in language that degraded women, but it also silenced their voices, ignored their experiences, and erased their contributions throughout history. As in the case of gays and lesbians, Mickens (1994) said it plainly:

We’re looking for validation of our relationships in every way we can. We don’t get it from our biological families. Most religions still won’t bless our relationships. And, in this country, most courts and legislatures don’t seem likely to allow us the privilege of legal marriage. (p. 100)

The goal of this study is to identify the advertisements that “miss the mark,” ignore this consumer altogether, and ones that set a standard of excellence in advertising in the gay media. By identifying advertisers that promote the diversity and reality of gays and lesbians, a new standard can be set for others to follow. Companies such as American Express, Absolute Vodka, and IBM, all have contributed to promoting this standard and the hope is that this study shows that these companies continue to strive for this inclusive style of advertising (Kates, 1998, Chasin, 2000, Cripe, 1999 & 2000). Other companies continue to enter this marketplace, which makes it even more critical to

promote a standard that “hits the mark,” so advertisers, through naivety or otherwise, do not resort to stereotypical advertising.

### **Statement of Purpose**

After close examination of the issue, questions remain as to whether stereotypical advertising is a useful strategy and if the gay and lesbian consumer identifies positively or negatively with these types of ads. In question, too, is how advertisers can do a better job of connecting with this target audience, so that the perceptions of gays and lesbians in their advertisements are positive ones. These are all questions that this type of research can answer and by so doing, can improve how advertisers promote their products to this consumer group. It can also help integrate gays and lesbians into society as legitimate members who are diverse and unique, so that “niche” marketing to gays and lesbians as a separate group will no longer be necessary.

All of these issues need to be considered when mainstream advertisers promote their products to the gay and lesbian consumer. More than just changing the way advertisers create advertisements to attract the gay and lesbian consumer, this research can help advertisers create a new social construction of reality that more accurately reflects the real life of gays and lesbians. This in turn can help change the way gays and lesbians perceive themselves and the way society perceives them. Wood (1999) cautioned that, “if we use media as a reference point for what is normal and desirable, we may find ourselves constantly feeling that we and our relationships are inferior by comparison” (p. 321).

This study examined the mainstream advertising in the gay media to ascertain its potential stereotyping or legitimizing of gays and lesbians to determine the “perceptions of reality” created through these advertisements. The expectation of the researcher was that advertisers will use stereotyping to attract the gay and lesbian consumer; and that misperceptions of reality result from these stereotypes, whether positive or negative; and that this stereotyping ultimately leads to the further marginalizing of gays and lesbians.

Bawer (1997) condemned the use of all stereotypes directed at any segment of society. He surmised whether good or bad, the use of stereotypes dehumanize every member of the segmented group. He concluded even positive stereotypes depicting the gay lifestyle as wealthy and carefree, in the end, concealed the true diversity of the gay community. Bawer reminded his readers that the wealth of gay people spans all spectrums of the economic scale, not just the upper part of it. Peñaloza (1996) reiterated that this niche marketing approach often disenfranchised those in the community who did not fit the composite sketch of the “gay, white, affluent male.” She concluded that those members who did not fit this bill were ones who were more on the fringes of society and who might make mainstream society members uncomfortable.

Expectations of stereotyping resulting in representations of the gay and lesbian community that are less than favorable come from personal observances, which may bias the researcher’s expectations of the results of this study. However, a critical look at the construction of advertisements through the lens of the social construction of reality has the potential to reveal worldviews created by these advertisements; then through careful examination, the perceptions of these worldviews can also be examined.

A critical analysis of the advertisements addressed the following research questions:

**RQ 1:** How do advertisers construct their messages to target gay and lesbian consumers?

**RQ 2:** In what ways are these messages positive or negative?

**RQ 3:** What stereotypes result from these messages?

**RQ 4:** What are the potential damaging effects of the advertisements in the way of gay and lesbians' perceptions of themselves or society's perceptions of them?

In the end, this research is valuable not only to advertisers in changing their marketing strategies in the gay media, but also in helping publishers of the gay media to assume greater responsibility for mainstream advertising in their publications; and to promote more realistic perceptions of the gay and lesbian consumer so that "legitimation" or validation of gays and lesbians can occur both inside and outside of the community.

While validation is a key factor to the gay community's identity, it becomes somewhat cumbersome when trying to affix that validation to a message in an advertisement without offending the target audience. This is where the critical analysis provides insight into the process of how advertisers achieve, or do not achieve, this mix.

Based on a limited examination and analysis of advertising in the gay media, advertiser newcomers to this market have only to consult with seasoned advertisers such as Absolut Vodka and American Express that have successfully created marketing

strategies for advertising their products to the gay community. These companies appear to have set the standard for the “right” way to effectively reach the gay and lesbian consumer. What is their secret? Previous studies (Cripe, 1999 & 2000) seem to suggest that they presented the gay lifestyle in a positive or neutral light; acknowledged the diversity within the community; used gay symbols or icons that promoted positive images and understood the history behind the symbols; supported gay rights and issues through sponsorship of gay events and internal policies; and used advertising that affirmed the legitimacy of gays and lesbians as valuable members of society. These strategies provided the background rationale and guidance for this study. The standards set by these companies also give this research a point of reference to look for effective advertising. In addition, the research, which will be more detailed and comprehensive in nature, will look for other positive advertising strategies that may emerge.

Reiterating the feeling of “legitimation” through consumerism, Jonathon Adler commented in *Out* Magazine (1999) after submitting his rainbow colored, all-purpose plastic card in a contest for new flag designs that represent the gay community:

My basic feeling is that the flag is a prime ad space that’s been unused until now. And as we all know, gay people are being looked at more and more for their disposable incomes. So I imagine that, in the future, the flag will be used for advertising (p. 37).

The impetus for this study, then, is whether or not gay symbols and imagery in mainstream advertisements in the gay media has come to symbolize “legitimation”; and if this “legitimation” through consumerism distorts perceptions of reality of gays and lesbians.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Methodology**

#### **Critical Ideology**

This study moved forward through the lens of a critical ideological perspective based on feminist criticism applied to marginalized people, in this case gays and lesbians. Foss (1996) defined the feminist approach as one that seeks to rid the world of oppression from the dominant, patriarchal society; and presents solutions to the problems revealed in the findings. The basic premise behind critiquing an artifact through this approach, as Foss wrote, is to bring equality to marginalized people so that their lives are enriched as a result of it.

The artifacts in this study – gay magazines, specifically *Out* and *The Advocate*—were examined to see if the elements of oppression existed within the artifacts. For the purpose of this study, a unit of analysis—advertisements—was analyzed. Foss (1996) explained that the feminist critique of the artifact seeks to identify how oppression is constructed in the artifact as it relates to the perpetuation of the oppression. She further explained that the unit of analysis is part of the artifact that is studied to help identify the construction of the oppression. In this study, mainstream advertisements fit the unit of analysis perfectly because they come from the dominant culture and are more likely to show constructed elements of oppression. This approach also ties into the social construction of reality that constructs perceptions of the gay and lesbian community, specifically, the gay and lesbian consumer.

## **The Study**

This study used a critical qualitative analysis—based on feminist criticism—of mainstream advertising in the gay media, specifically of two prominent gay magazines with predominantly gay male readership: *Out* and *The Advocate*. A qualitative content analysis is used as a way to gather and critique the potential messages of the advertisements on their intended audience. Wimmer and Dominick (2000) wrote of using the content analysis as an approach, “the goal of content analysis is the accurate representation of a body of messages” (p. 136). This study attempts to identify and understand the messages within the advertisements and the advertisements as a whole.

## **The Artifact**

These two magazines were chosen for this research because of the prevalence of mainstream advertisements in the issues. These magazines also boast both a gay and lesbian readership, not just gay or lesbian. It is interesting to note that the lesbian-specific magazine, *Girlfriends*, had exclusively in-house advertisements from gay companies such as the Olivia Cruise Line or bookstores for gay women. Another popular gay magazine, *GENRE*, published in Hollywood, California, is a monthly magazine with a predominantly gay male readership of about 50,000 (Brogan & Lee, 2003). This magazine sports a glossy cover and runs about 100 pages. It was originally considered for the study, but the advertising tended to target gay males, rather than be inclusive of the gay and lesbian consumer.

The magazine, Out, a monthly magazine published in New York and established in 1992, boasts a readership of 120,000 nationwide and prides itself on being both a gay and lesbian magazine (Brogan & Lee, 2003). Out is a publication of LPI Media, INC. It has the appearance of a mainstream magazine such as Cosmopolitan or Redbook with its glossy cover, colorful title and attention-grabbing articles. It often features both men and women, or who appear to be men or women, on the cover. Out dedicates its pages mainly to current events, the arts, fashion, gossip, finance, fitness and culture. It also includes news articles concerning gay issues, presenting updates on political action and legislation.

Out magazine's layout is similar to any other magazine with content pages, letters to the editor, book and movie reviews, travel guides, an advice column, horoscopes and a "who's who" on the "scene" of gay, lesbian and gay-friendly celebrities. It also has a page of subscription inserts and a single subscription insert postcard. Out, also has an online version.

Unlike Genre that features only men in their designer clothing advertisements, Out magazine features both men and women, separately, in these advertisements. Of the 120 pages of the October 2003 issue of Out, there were 73 advertisements, including the inside and back cover pages. These pages include advertisements of credit cards, designer clothing, shoes and accessories; liquor and beer; HIV and AIDS medications, hygiene and other healthcare products; movies, plays, videos and upcoming gay events; and tires.

The Advocate, established in 1967 first as a newspaper, is now a bi-weekly magazine (Chasin, 2000). The Advocate, is a publication of LPI Media, as is Out magazine. According to the last audit statements ending June 30, 2003, the magazine had a paid circulation of 107, 138 with two percent of that number from international sales (M. Hu, Account Associate, personal communication, December 16, 2004). The magazine has an “entertainment-looking” cover similar to People Magazine with high gloss, flashy colored text, sexy gay, lesbian or featured celebrities and people. The cover also often highlights inside stories with photo insets. The magazine also is thin in appearance like People Magazine, with its average number of pages around 70.

The inside layout of The Advocate, however, is similar to Time or Newsweek, with its bold titles in strips of color such as “At Issue,” “The Nation,” “Behind the Headline,” “The Buzz,” and “Money.” The magazine has gained recognition for its articles as evidenced by its receipt of the industries “Editorial Excellence Award” for four years in a row (advocate.com, 2003). It prides itself on being both a national and international news magazine concerned with the issues of gays and lesbians and is distributed in 17 countries outside of the U.S. (advocate.com, 2003). There are also poll results related to these political issues. Of the 70 pages of the September 30 issue, 35 pages were dedicated to advertisements including the inside and back cover. These advertisements included ones for liquor and beer, tobacco, hygiene and healthcare products including condoms, cars, travel resorts, movies, plays and books, upcoming gay events, the Democratic party and a mental health program for drug and alcohol rehabilitation. The magazine also has an online version.

### **The Unit of Analysis**

The study identified and categorized full-page advertisements based on the use of gay symbols to include colors; icons and images identified with gay culture such as Marilyn Monroe and Dorothy's red shoes; intimate relationships of same-sex couples; verbal messages, denoted as either positive or negative; advertisements that lack gay symbols, images and text or display heterosexuals only. These categories emerged as recurring advertising themes from the author's previous studies and were expected to emerge again (Cripe, 1999 & 2000). Chasin (2000) noted similar advertising themes that she referred to as "gay windows" or "gay vague" ads. In these advertisements, gay symbols, gay lingo, and same-sex couples appeared in gay media advertisements, which she claimed were gay simply by their placement in gay publications.

Magazine issues from August 2003 through January 2004 were selected for this research project. A total of 17 magazines were used for this study from *The Advocate* and *Out* magazines. Eleven issues were used from *The Advocate*, a bi-monthly magazine, however, one issue during this time frame was a double issue; and six issues were used from *Out*, a monthly magazine.

An analysis was done after careful "deconstruction" of the advertisements to see all the elements within it. Preston (2000) noted that through deconstruction of the message, it was possible to see several hidden symbolic messages aimed to "multi-target" a wide range of consumers. Once these categories or others that may have emerged, were identified, the advertisements as a whole were examined to see if the full message reflected the gay and lesbian community in a positive or negative way or ignored it all

together; and then the potential implications of these representations was examined. The analysis also explored what sexist or gendered messages appeared or what “normal” male and female roles, as seen in advertising to heterosexuals, were absent. Finally, this study identified advertisements that used sex to sell their product, if the product itself was not of a sexual nature such as condoms or lingerie.

### **Coding Descriptions:**

The study classified the advertisements into the five categories previously stated: Intimate Relationships, Icons/Image, Colors/Symbols, Verbal Messages and Straight Selling. The advertisements were sorted into these categories and then counted. While the categories and coding provided a systematic and straight-forward way to organize the information collected, it also served the purpose of identifying dominant themes, possible stereotypes and worldviews that emerged from the study. Given that, the study was not so concerned with forcing an advertisement into a particular category, but rather analyzing the advertisement for any and all themes or identifying strategies that emerged and then categorizing the ad into one or more of these categories. This approach allowed a critical analysis to drive the study as opposed to relying strictly on the hard numbers. This in turn helped the study to focus on the overall perspective gained from critically analyzing the advertisements; while the numbers and percentages are used later in this study, they are used as a way to emphasize the dominant themes, stereotypes and strategies that advertisers use to sell to the gay and lesbian consumer. After the advertisements were analyzed and put into these categories, they were then subdivided

into positive or negative messages and the categories were coded in the following manner:

**Intimate Relationships:** This category helps identify the target audience and can be a factor in determining legitimation. Images of people that represent intimate relationships based on their proximity; and touching such as holding hands, hugging, embracing, kissing or intimate sexual gestures. This category also includes images depicting familial relationships such as family photos or suggestions of family ties. This category was separated into advertisements depicting same-sex relationships and heterosexual relationships. The heterosexual relationships were coded as negative because they promoted a dominant heterosexual cultural ideal. The category includes portrayals of people of the same-sex that may not be couples, but simply by the placement in the gay media it suggests a relationship between the people.

**Icons/Images:** This category is important in determining if the advertisers are trying to appeal to a separate cultural identity for gays and lesbians. It included icons that promote the product or service. The definition of “gay icon” used for this study is any person in popular culture with whom the gay community identifies itself. This includes people or imagery from entertainment in music, the arts, Hollywood – who are gay, have gay characters or are simply popular with the gay community – and people from the world of sports. Images may include entertainers such as Cher, Marilyn Monroe, the cast of characters from *Will and Grace*, Melissa Etheridge, RuPaul the famous Black drag queen or Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz* in her red shoes.

**Colors/Symbols:** This category also helped determine whether or not the advertisers use identity as a means of attracting the gay and lesbian consumer to their product or service. The category includes the use of gay imagery or symbolism of gay culture such as the inverted pink or black triangles, the AIDS Memorial Quilt or the red ribbon symbolizing support of finding a cure for AIDS, the Human Rights Campaign logo or colors, and use of the rainbow flag or colors – red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple.

**Verbal Messages:** This category helped identify the language that advertisers use to appeal to the gay and lesbian consumer and whether or not these messages are gay specific. The language is also an indicator of whether or not advertisers use legitimization as a way to sell their products and services to the gay and lesbian consumer. It includes words identifying intimate gay relationships such as partner, lover or significant other. Verbal messages also include, but are not limited to, words that symbolically and historically have represented the gay community such as gay, lesbian, transsexual, out, closet, diversity, pride, rainbow, and triangle. This category includes acknowledgements of sponsorship support of gay issues such as AIDS and HIV research, The AIDS Memorial Quilt, The Gay Rodeo, The NAMES Project, Lambda Legal Defense, the Education Fund, domestic-partner benefits and any references to other gay organizations and affiliations. This category also includes advertisements with taglines touting the company's employment policies in support of domestic-partner benefits or other policy issues.

**Straight Selling:** This category helped determine the targeted audience. These advertisements simply sell the products and services without the use of gay imagery or text; these advertisements may include ads with people, either one person or more, but without intimate touching. However, advertisements that have heterosexuals or suggest heterosexual relationships, without intimate touching, were noted as negative representations. As Delozier and Rodrigues (1996) suggested to marketers, these advertisements constrain themselves to using the “4 P’s” of marketing: product, price, promotion and placement. Distribution is also part of this “rule of thumb.”

The study excluded mainstream pharmaceutical or life insurance advertisements aimed directly at AIDS or HIV sufferers because these products do not typically appear in mainstream media advertising. Also excluded are advertisements that declare their companies are gay-owned or operated because these are not “mainstream” advertisements, on which this study focuses. In addition, advertisements of mainstream movies, videos, concerts and Broadway plays were excluded because the content of the advertised product was too difficult to ascertain for its gay message. One mainstream entertainment advertisement was used, however, because it used a familiar “gay” icon to promote its products. There were 183 of these excluded advertisements, which represented 36% of the original count. Subtracted from the original total of 514, this left 331 advertisements. From this total of 331 advertisements, 134 duplicate advertisements, representing 26% of the original 514 ads, were also removed before the analysis, which left 197 advertisements for analysis. These duplicate ads are addressed again later in the

study because of the potential messages they reinforce. The remaining 197 advertisements were then analyzed.

Because the coding categories are not mutually exclusive, the advertisements were coded in the respective category or categories and then analyzed. After the advertisements were deconstructed to identify any latent messages and coded in their respective categories, specifically, stereotypes, gender messages, sexual appeals and targeted audiences were isolated and identified. Then the advertisements were analyzed for the total message.

Russo's (1987) observations of 80 years of Hollywood films depicting "homosexuals" from invisible, to sissified, to something to be feared or hated and finally as a great way to get a laugh, has shown how "mediated-stereotypes" do an injustice to a diverse population. He cautioned that these mediated-characters could not be separated from the social perceptions of gays and lesbians, which has greater repercussions in established institutions, especially in the political realm. Croteau & Hoynes (2000) echoed Russo's concerns through their observations of gay and lesbian portrayals in film being represented as "non-sexual" beings that do not threaten mainstream society. This is far from an accurate representation of gays and lesbians and one that does injustice to their very being. "Legitimation," as Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued, is the main focus of social reality and one's identity within that reality. That is why it is imperative to get the perceptions or worldviews in advertising to represent the wide range of diverse people who make up the gay and lesbian community.

Once these steps were completed, the advertisements were analyzed as a category to determine worldviews and their potential impact on the targeted audience.

Specifically, the categories were analyzed for their common messages and common targeted-audience appeal.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Descriptive Analysis**

The first part of this chapter describes the study and the artifacts. By understanding the artifacts in question, it can help us understand how advertisers use or do not use specific strategies to attract the gay and lesbian consumer. This understanding in turn answers the research questions that drive this research, which the second half of the chapter addresses.

#### **Description of the Study**

Archived issues of the magazines were ordered from the magazines' online service. This process was costly and time consuming and yielded only six months—17 magazines—worth of back issues because of the company's ordering policies. Each issue was reviewed for its advertising content. The advertisements, minus the previously mentioned exclusions, were cut, labeled, coded and compiled in a book according to their primary category. A chart was made recording the date of the issue, the total number of advertisements per issue and whether the advertisements were positive, negative or neutral in regards to gay appeals. In total, there were 514 advertisements in these 17 issues, of which 331 were coded after excluding the aforementioned gay-specific product advertisements from gay-owned companies, insurance agencies, pharmaceutical companies and movie producers. This number, 331, included the 134 duplicates. Approximately 75% of the duplicate advertisements ran in *The Advocate* issues and all

were rated either positive or neutral. The duplicates are addressed in the overall conclusion with the understanding that these advertisements may be more effective in producing a particular worldview because of repeated exposure to them. Once the 134 duplicates were removed from the total, 197 unique advertisements remained for analysis in this study. Each advertisement was then entered into a database and coded by magazine, issue, number of duplicate advertisements, descriptor category, stereotyping of positive, negative or neutral, and sexual and gender appeal (See Appendix A: Coding Sheet).

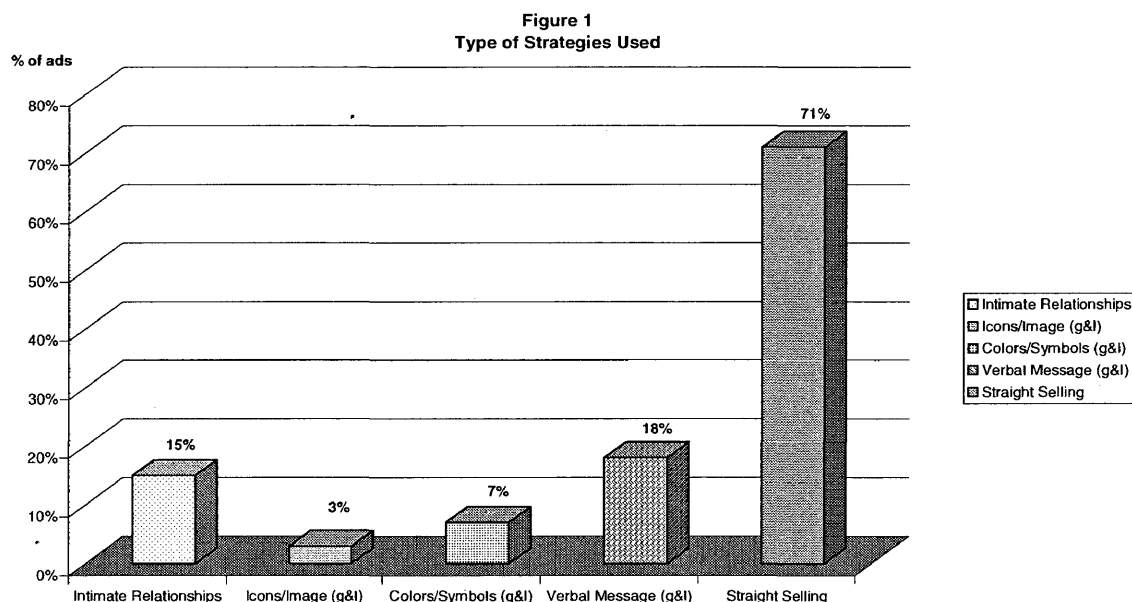
Prior to entering the advertisements into a category, the advertisements were carefully deconstructed and analyzed to determine the individual parts of the message that made up the whole message. Deconstruction of the advertisements helped identify the descriptor categories, stereotype messages, gender and sexual appeals. Once this part was completed, an analysis of the full message, including latent messages, helped determine the target audience to see if the advertisers got it right, missed the mark or ignored the gay and lesbian consumer altogether. Questions were asked such as, “How does this advertisement make its appeal to the gay consumer, if at all?” “Does it use gay imagery or other symbolism?” “Does it appeal to a different audience such as a mainstream audience; if so how?” “Does it communicate a gendered message or stereotypical gender role; if so, how?” “If it has a stereotypical message, gender or otherwise, is it positive or negative and why?” “Does the advertisement make its appeal through a sexual message, and if so, is it necessary to sell the product?” Finally, “What worldview does it represent?” After this process was completed, each of the

advertisements was classified in one or more of the five coding categories depending upon their use of gay images depicting gay and lesbian lifestyles, symbols, icons, verbal messages or lack thereof.

### **Message Construction:**

This section of the chapter addresses **RQ 1:** How do advertisers construct their messages to target gay and lesbian consumers?

71% or 140 of all advertisements analyzed did not have any gay appeals in them. These advertisements were categorized as a “Straight Selling” strategy or more simply put, advertisements with product placement without gay imagery. This category was mutually exclusive from the other four strategy categories (See Figure 1).



This large percent of “Straight Selling” or neutral advertising was surprising considering that of the 140 advertisements, 55% of them had one or more people featured in them. These advertisements could have easily acknowledged the presence of the targeted consumer, but failed to do so. Instead, advertisers such as Puma, Captain Morgan and Tylenol PM chose to show the people, often only one person, in their advertisements using, wearing or just thinking about the products without making any reference to the person or persons being gay. One could argue, as DeLozier and Rodrigue (1996) did, however, that advertisers do not need to target a particular audience unless the product is specific to that consumer group. This concept was evident in Captain Morgan’s advertisement that had people of both genders hanging out in what appeared to be a “straight” bar. Although there were people of the same sex sitting at the tables together, neither the men nor the women appear to be making advances on people of the same sex. Instead the opposite is true, especially of the two men and the two women playing pool in the foreground of the ad: The two men are “eyeing” the women as if they are attracted to them. Given the target audience, Captain Morgan could have portrayed this bar as a gay bar simply by showing gay couples or same-sex people only, whether or not they needed to position their rum as a gay-specific product.

Another interesting finding was even though these two magazines boast both a gay and lesbian readership, women were portrayed in only 23% of these “Straight Selling” advertisements that had people featured in them; advertisements showing only women lowered this number to less than 10%. McNeil-PPC’s advertisement for Tylenol PM and Saturn’s advertisement for cars both featured men, when women also use these

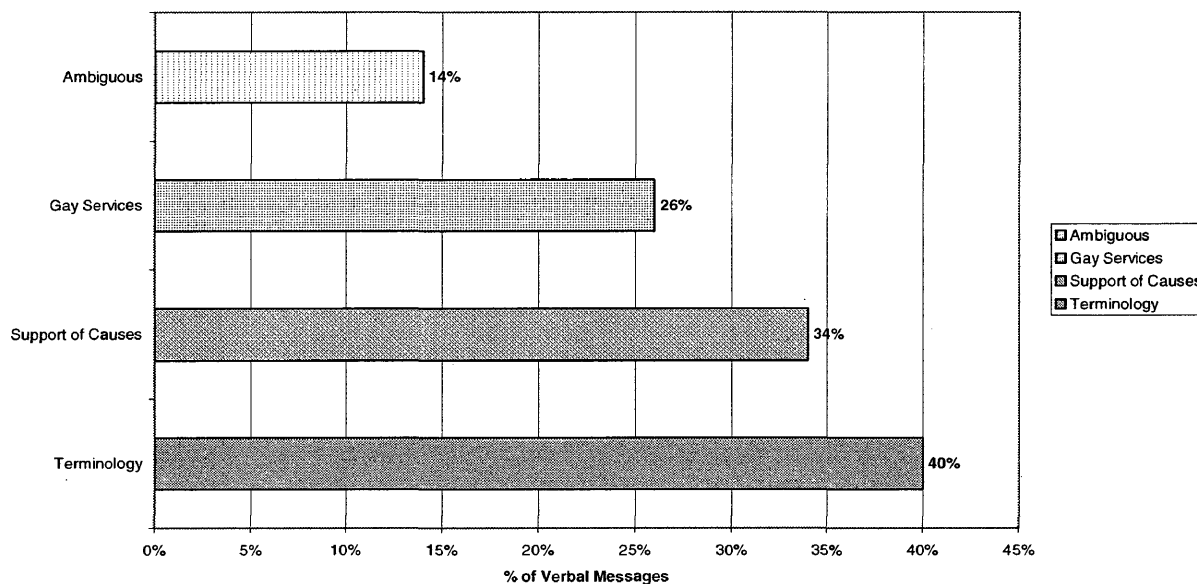
products. The makers of Nivea chose to feature their face-care products for men only and used male models in their advertisements, even though Nivea makes products for women, too. Other advertisers promoted their products using both men and women. Skyy Vodka and Tanqueray Dry Gin, each ran two separate advertisements: one featured a man with their products; and the other featured a woman with their products. One other finding to note was of these advertisements with people featured in them, only 10% showed people of color. Again, Skyy Vodka and Tanqueray featured both people of color and Caucasians in their advertisements. These findings seem to support Peñaloza's (1996) argument that advertisers have deduced gays are mainly white men, based on the "composite sketch" presented in the Simmons Market Research Report; so they specifically target gay, white men in the gay and lesbian community.

Almost 30% of mainstream advertisers do make a concerted effort to specifically target both the gay and lesbian consumer in some way. Their strategies, as seen in Figure 1 above, include appeals using intimate relationships in 15% of the total ads; however, with the advertisements portraying heterosexual relationships removed, this represents only 12% of the total advertisements using this strategy with a specific gay and lesbian appeal. The other strategies include appeals using recognizable icons and images within the gay community, 3% of the total ads; colors and symbols depicting the history and struggle of the gay community, 7% of the total ads; and verbal messages widely used in the gay community or used to refer to gay and lesbians, 18% of the total ads. These four strategies, unlike the strategy of "Straight Selling," are not mutually exclusive and often overlap; consequently, the total adds up to more than 100%. These strategies using gay

appeals both validate and acknowledge the presence of the targeted audience within this gay medium. Each of the strategies is discussed in the following section. In addition, a sexual appeals strategy that emerged from all five of these strategic appeals is discussed at the end of this section.

Of the advertisers that use the four types of strategies with gay appeals, 67% of them use verbal messages to attract the attention of their targeted consumer. These messages include using terminology familiar to the gay consumer; supporting gay and lesbian causes or events; promoting services specifically for gays and lesbians; and making the message ambiguous in that it could appeal to either gay and lesbian or heterosexual consumers (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2**  
**G & L Verbal Messages**



Almost half of the advertisers that use verbal text use “gay” terminology that is readily associated with the gay and lesbian lifestyle. Terms such as “coming out,”

“closet,” “Queen,” “domestic partners,” and actually mentioning the words “gay or lesbian” are seen in these advertisements such as in Bridgestone’s advertisement. The term “accessorize,” a term more often associated with the female gender, is used in this advertisement to refer to two men purchasing tires. The men appear to be a couple and the term used in conjunction with them suggests they are gay. Subaru, in one of their advertisements, also uses this type of verbal text strategy to refer to icon Martina Navratilova as the “Queen of England.” The term “queen” is a common reference to gay men with effeminate characteristics. Subaru also adds verbal text to affirm their support of gay and lesbian causes.

More than 30% of advertisers that use verbal text to communicate their message to this consumer group do so by claiming “community support” or “support of gay and lesbian causes such as the Rainbow Endowment for gay and lesbian health, the Human Rights Campaign for equality, National Coming Out Day or the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Often these messages are coupled with the familiar terminology used in the main part of the advertisement. Again, Subaru is an example of how advertisers use both the terminology and support of gay and lesbian causes in their car advertisements. Absolut Vodka did a two-page insert using this strategy of both affirming their support of National Coming Out Day (NCOD) and employing common “gay” terminology. The first page of their ad announces NCOD and the last page defines the importance of the event to gays and lesbians. The centerfold of their advertisement has two pullout tabs labeled “come out” and when the tabs are pulled apart, several “closets” are displayed.

Closets” and the term “coming out,” are also common references to gays and lesbians accepting and proclaiming their gay identity.

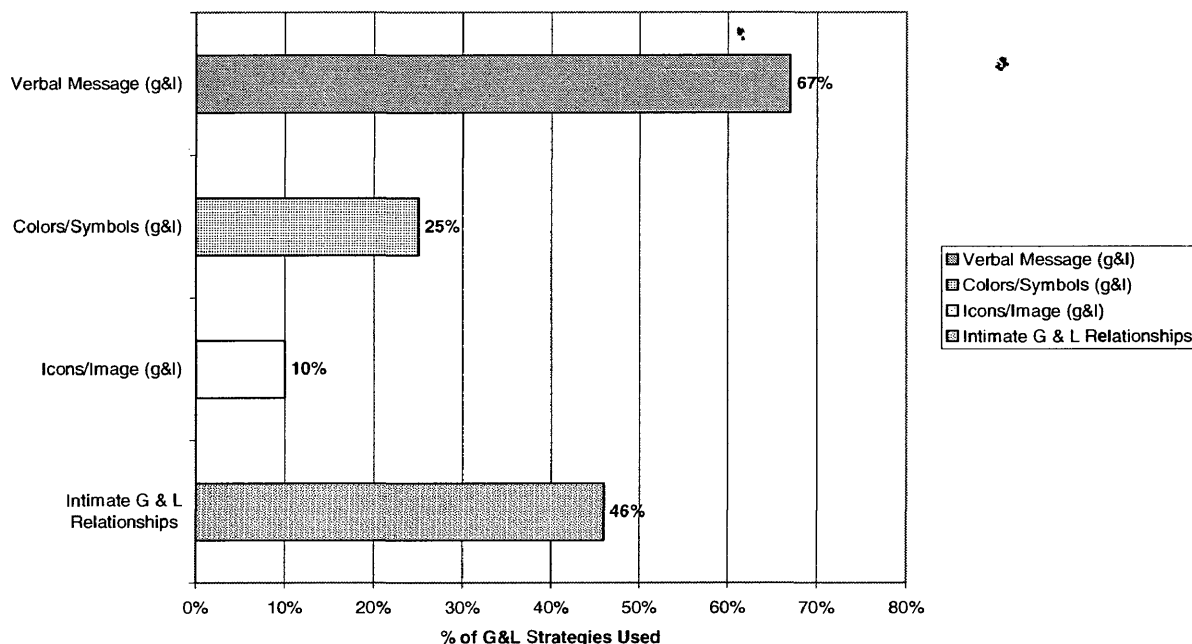
Almost 30% of the advertisers that use verbal text use it to promote services for “gays,” such as domestic-partner benefits, gay travel cruises or gay-friendly travel spots. American Express has their own gay travel division and advertises their “Intimate Journeys” for men. In addition, American Express promotes their domestic-partner benefit services to gays and lesbians in their regular ads.

One advertiser, a real estate developer for Wilton Village, specifically asks gays and lesbians to come out and see their residential village. This two-page advertisement boasts diversity as the foundation on which “this gay-friendly city was built.” The advertiser even touted their research that included gays and lesbians, but it is interesting to note, though, that of the five “artist renderings” of the village showing people, not one shows a gay couple. All the couples shown are heterosexual...or possibly bisexual. This muddles their message and leaves their advertisement lacking in sincerity.

A small percentage of the advertisers that use verbal text use it in an ambiguous way such as stating they “support diversity,” which could be a term that is inclusive of gays and lesbians. This is how Delta Airlines presents their services in their advertisements. In addition, some advertisers use terms that have ambiguous meanings such as in California Closets’ advertisements that simply promote their unique style of “closets” for people’s homes—these closets have nothing to do with “coming out,” but the “pun” seems to work in this medium.

The next strategy used by advertisers is one promoting gay and lesbian intimate relationships, which includes dating, long-term relationships and families. These advertisements, with the advertisements portraying intimate heterosexual relationships removed, represent 46% of the ads that specifically target the gay and lesbian consumer; again these strategies are not mutually exclusive (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3**  
**Gay & Lesbian Strategies**



The first type of these intimate relationships can be seen in the advertisements for Bud Light beer, W Hotels “weekenders” and Chandon champagne. All of these advertisements show men engaged in intimate conversations or in varying intimate positions that one would expect to experience while dating. These advertisements legitimate gay men’s relationships beyond just showing them as being “close friends.” In

three of the advertisements—a Bud Light beer ad, a Key West travel ad, and a Volvo car ad—women’s relationships are validated, too. Women are seen in intimate relationships in these ads touching, holding or caressing each other. However, in a couple of the ads as in the one for Perrier water, the message of intimate relationships is ambiguous because although the women are touching, it is unclear whether the relationship is more than just close friendship, especially with three women in the ad. The same is true for Reposado’s ad for tequila showing three young men lying on a bed together. Given the ads are in the gay medium, it makes sense that these portrayals depict gay relationships, but the use of ambiguity shows how advertisers attempt to send a message that could appeal to both gay and lesbian and heterosexual consumers. Ambiguity could prevent a “gay” association, which Bhat et al’s (1996) study found could turn off mainstream consumers to the advertiser’s products.

The next advertisements showing intimate relationships clearly validate gays and lesbians’ long-term relationships, including their familial ties. These advertisements show couples with silver and china, pets, and children, although not listed here in any order of significance. Towle’s advertisement for silverware showing two older men snuggling on a sofa together, suggests a long-term relationship when combined with the verbal text that reads, “Celebrate your Life’s Style. Sterling for the way you live.” Advertisements showing gay couple’s with children perhaps send the strongest message of legitimization of the gay lifestyle. Liberty Travel showing two men holding the hand of a young boy who is saying, “My daddies are taking me on a big boat!” is a clear validation of the gay lifestyle being seen as a normal one. This advertisement is similar

to Chereskin's advertisement for men's clothing that shows two young, attractive Caucasian men sitting on the floor with three babies crawling all over them. Two of the babies are blonde and blue-eyed and one is of Asian descent; the caption reads, "R you ready to adopt a new lifestyle?" Chandon not only acknowledges family relationships, but the implications of most gay men needing to "adopt" children to make families.

Another advertisement that goes all out and depicts various gay families of both men and women is the large, two-page Volvo car advertisement. The insets show one male couple holding an Asian baby, another male couple snuggling a Yorkshire terrier and yet another male couple leaning against each other, head-to-head. There are also three women couples featured in the ad: one couple is laughing and lying on a bed together—it is a close-up shot of their faces; one multi-racial couple is sitting on a sofa with their legs crossed over each other and they are holding hands—this is a close-up shot from their waists down; and one couple is hugging and clearly expecting a baby. The Volvo advertisement ran eight times, which helps reinforce this message of validation.

All of these 24 intimate relationship advertisements in some way affirm gay and lesbian lifestyles and perhaps have the greatest positive impact on their perceptions of reality. However, as seen in "Straight Selling," women were underrepresented in that they appeared in only four of the 24 advertisements; two of which showed them along with male couples; and two of which showed them by themselves. This finding echoes Wood's (1999) concern that women are still not equally represented in the media, especially advertising. Other advertisers using this intimate relationship strategy, not only failed to make an attempt to appeal to the gay and lesbian consumer, their target

audience, but also completely ignored the opportunity to validate their existence. Instead of using portrayals of intimate gay and lesbian relationships, these advertisers promoted the dominant heterosexual culture with portrayals of intimate heterosexual relationships. These ads included intimate touching with suggestive sexual text. Kenneth Cole, Yves Saint Laurent and Jose Cuervo advertisements all showed heterosexuals in various “close” intimate positions. None of these advertisements used any form of gay appeal, which could potentially have the greatest negative impact on gays and lesbians’ perceptions of reality.

The third strategy of using gay colors and symbols, although only accounting for 25% of the ads using gay appeals, is perhaps, as Kates (1998) suggested, the quickest way for advertisers to attract this targeted consumer group to their products and services. These colors and symbols, as noted earlier, promote solidarity of the history of the gay and lesbian community’s struggle to achieve equality, tolerance and acceptance. By the use of these colors and symbols alone, advertisers can market their products as gay-friendly. McNeil-PPC’s advertisement for Tylenol PM changed their “Straight Selling” ad simply by adding a recognizable piece of gay culture, a depiction of Keith Haring’s “Heritage of Pride” painting. Haring was a well-known artist who died of AIDS. A Sam Adams advertisement also included gay imagery by making a rainbow out of a silhouette of longneck beers. These tiny, colorful, eye-catching symbols are what advertisers use to quickly catch the targeted consumer’s eye (Kendrick & Lazier, 1993).

The fourth strategy using gay appeals, similar to the above category using colors and symbols, is small in comparison. It represents less than 10% of the ads using gay

appeals. The use of gay icons and images, though, is a powerful appeal. It not only helps the targeted consumer to quickly identify with the message and the product, but it promotes a role model figure, easily recognizable and often held in esteem in the gay and lesbian community, whether or not the icons are gay themselves. Dillallo & Krumholtz (1994) put it this way in their prologue to the list of Eighteen Films Every Gay Man Should See:

Hollywood's influence over gay men—and vice versa—cannot be overestimated. What with sirens like Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, and Charles Nelson Reilly, it's easy to understand the fascination of gay men with the silver screen. Besides providing reams of material for budding drag queens, the movies portray a world in which every gay man, perhaps consciously, wishes to live—the men are gorgeous and the gowns are glamorous (154).

In one advertisement, Paramount Pictures uses Joan Crawford to attract consumers to buy their videos. The videos advertised have gay subjects, but the value of this advertisement to the study is in Paramounts use of the icon image of Crawford, a drag queen favorite. Dillallo & Krumholtz (1994) wrote that gay men love and respect Joan Crawford because of “her refusal to be held down.” The text in the ad reads, “Mommie strongly suggests you add these movies to your collection...Hangers not

included.” Other icons included Martina Navratilova, Marilyn Monroe and Andy Warhol, all gay community favorites.

The next part of this chapter addresses the use of sexual appeal strategies, which were seen throughout the five different strategies.

### **Sexual Appeals**

Sexual appeals were seen across the categories and although these appeals were few in number, it is still important to look at how advertisers chose to use these appeals because of the sexual nature of the gay and lesbian consumer. Did advertisers use explicit gay sexual appeals or did they shy away from it and use heterosexual appeals? Were these appeals in any way stereotypical or gender-biased? In addition, advertisers using or referring to “taboo” gay sex, as Peñaloza (1996) pointed out, can ostracize themselves from their mainstream consumers because of the product association with what some consider to be socially unacceptable or immoral behavior. The advertisements classified as “sexually appealing” had overt verbal or visual sexual messages such as intimate sexual touching of one’s own or another’s breasts, chests, butts or crotches; kissing or caressing; suggestive sexual contact or relations such as lying in bed together at a hotel; seductive looks at another’s breasts, chests, butts or crotches; and sexually suggestive positions or sexual gestures. The verbal text messages suggested or mentioned the above descriptors for visual sexual messages. These types of sexual messages were difficult to identify given the many sexual preferences of the members that make up the gay community: gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people.

However, for the purpose of this study, an effort was made to identify the sexual appeals that did exist within the parameters mentioned above.

Sexually appealing advertisements made up only 16% of the total advertisements, with sexually suggestive messages for everything from alcohol, cigarettes, underwear, condoms, designer clothing, and cologne to hotels, cars and travel services. These advertisements also ranged from overt sexual advertising such as with the Calvin Klein, Diesel and Chereskin underwear advertisements showing bare-chested, well-endowed, sweaty models posing or touching themselves to more subtle hints of suggestive sexual relations such as three young, attractive men, fully-clothed, lying in bed together eating popcorn and watching television. Interestingly enough, a few of the advertisements for men's clothing used "rear shots" to promote their pants. Levi Strauss used this rear shot, and although there were no other sexually suggestive messages verbal or otherwise, the placement of this type of advertisement in the gay media is suggestive due to the nature of gay male sex.

Because of the "taboo" nature of gay sex, it is interesting to look at the Bud Light advertisements and their use of cartoon-like drawings, in depicting sexually suggestive portrayals of gays and lesbians in some form of intimate touching or caressing. These portrayals are mostly of young, bare-chested, "pretty" men with bulging muscles, tattoos and earrings. The young men appear to be at a party and the shots show them in varying positions of intimate conversation. Most of them are touching the other male with whom they are conversing or sitting or standing in close proximity to them. All but one of the men has a big flashy smile. In addition to the cartoon-like nature of these advertisements,

they are black and white sketches with only a glimmer of color on the logo of the beer in the picture. While these advertisements affirm some form of gay sex or intimate relationships, it gives pause as to whether the use of black and white cartoons soften the sexual nature of the message or dilutes it to a point of being virtually invisible.

Other advertisers actually seem to flirt with their gay and lesbian consumers such as seen in Subaru's car advertisements, but again, these ads do not specifically make reference to "gay" sex: one advertisement reads, "Likes to be driven hard. And put away wet;" the other simply reads, "Nice package," a reference to men's crotch area.

The conclusion of the use of sexual appeals is that mainstream advertisers, for the most part, shy away from the sexual nature of their gay and lesbian consumer and simply promote their product or services.

These strategies are how mainstream advertisers constructed their messages in targeting the gay and lesbian consumer. In addition to looking at the strategies, however, it is also important to look at whether the messages within the advertisements are negative or positive. The next section of this chapter answers this question.

### **Positive & Negative Messages**

This section of the chapter addresses **RQ 2:** In what ways are these messages positive or negative?

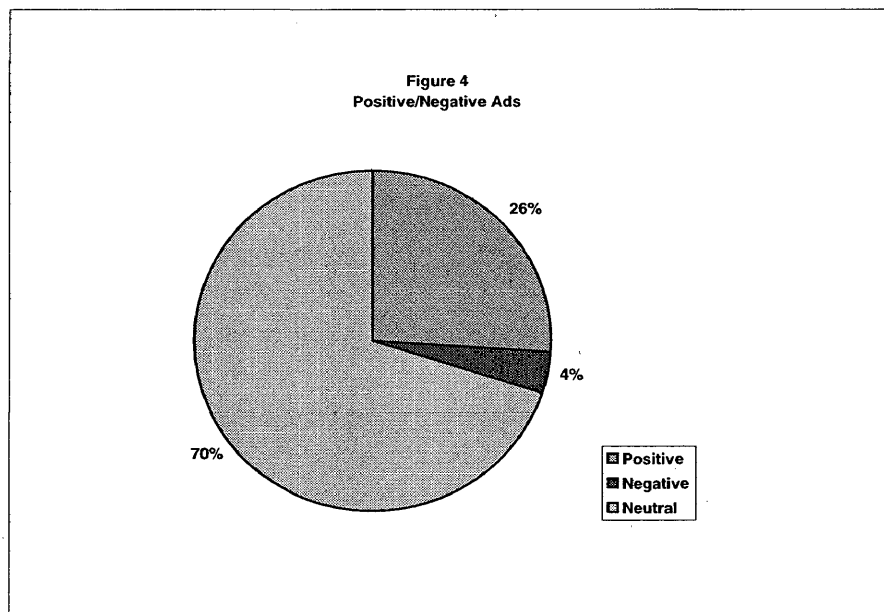
To determine a positive, negative or neutral message, all 197 advertisements in the study were coded according to the following parameters:

**Negative:** Ads that had derogatory statements about gays and lesbians; showed only heterosexuals in the ads or had a heterosexual context in the graphics or text.

**Positive:** Ads that portrayed gays and lesbians or pieces of their history and culture through gay symbols, colors, icons and images.

**Neutral:** Ads that promoted the product or service without any implicit or explicit appeals or references to gays and lesbians; and without heterosexual-specific messages in the text or graphics; or the portrayal of intimate heterosexual relationships.

Following these guidelines, 70% of the advertisements were neutral and emerged exclusively from the “Straight Selling” strategies. Of the remaining advertisements, 26% were positive and only 4% were negative (See Figure 4).



The neutral advertisements simply promoted the products or services available to the gay consumer or any consumer for that matter. Even though many of these neutral advertisements showed people in them, especially the designer clothing advertisements including Louis Vuitton and Calvin Klein, the ads had no heterosexual or gay-specific message in them. Other ads only showed the product or service such as Absolut Vodka or Jaguar. These advertisements using product placement only could be considered positive if one takes the perspective of Delozier and Rodrigue (1996) who argued that if the product is not gay-specific such as domestic-partner benefits, a gay-specific appeal is not necessary. However, with less than 30% of mainstream advertisers using gay-specific strategies to attract this consumer group—other than advertising in the gay medium—this in and of itself has the potential to be negative because it makes the gay and lesbian consumer virtually an invisible entity.

The 26% of positive advertisements emerged exclusively from the four categories of advertisements that used specific strategies to attract the gay and lesbian consumer. These positive-rated advertisements portrayed gay and lesbian consumers as normal people with jobs, families, friends, and with desires and needs for consumer goods and services. These advertisements particularly reached out to gay and lesbian consumers through visuals of same-sex couples in intimate relationships such as in the Towle's silverware and Volvo ads; in the use of icons and images such as in Paramount's ad with Joan Crawford and Subaru's ad with Martina Navratilova; and in the use of gay and lesbian cultural symbols and colors such as in the Sam Adams' beer and the Absolut

Vodka ads, among others. In essence, these advertisements validated gays and lesbians' lifestyles, history and culture and made them visible consumers.

The small percentage of negative ads was negative because of the heterosexual context and not because of derogatory statements or references to gays and lesbians or their culture. This can be seen in two of the Puma advertisements that show heterosexual couples engaged in dating activities with supporting "suggestive heterosexual" text. One of the Puma ads shows a young man crawling up a trellis to a young woman's dorm window. The ad reads, "Josie thought Sam was being romantic. She didn't know he was also seeing the girl across the hall." Advertisements such as Kenneth Cole's ad for Black Cologne and Yves Saint Laurent's ad for apparel show heterosexual couples engaged in intimate or suggestive sexual positions. These advertisements although few in number promote the dominant heterosexual culture commonly seen in mainstream advertisements and ignore the gay and lesbian lifestyle and culture, making it virtually invisible.

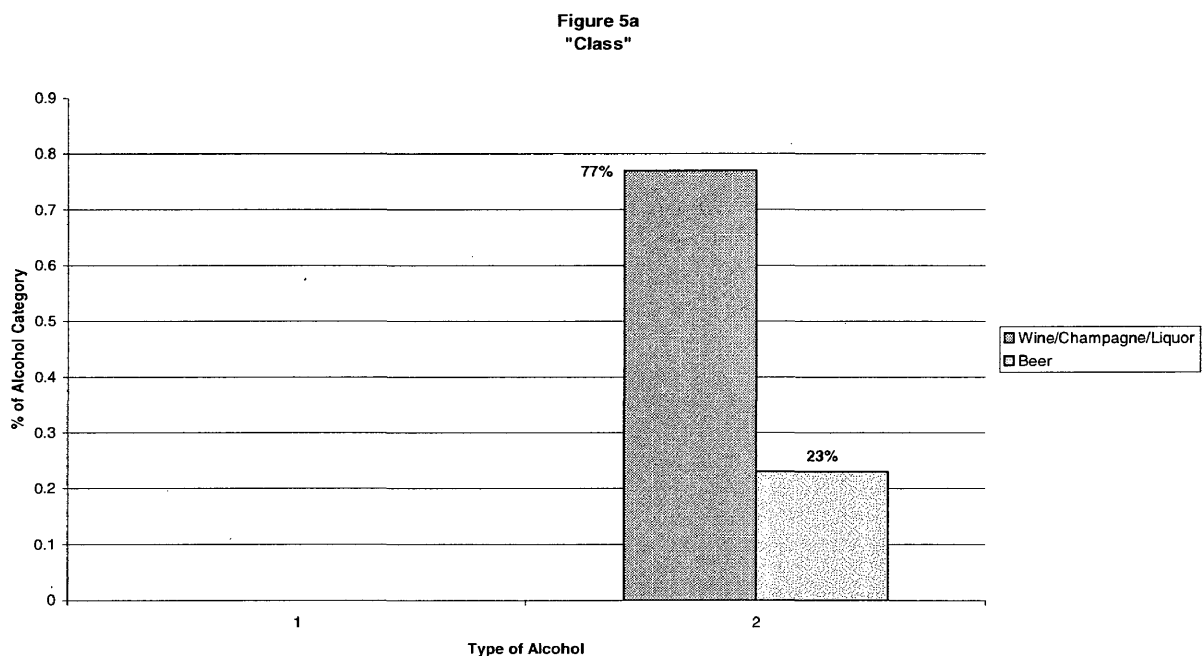
The next part of this chapter identifies the use of stereotyping, especially that of physical attractiveness, as a way to attract the gay and lesbian consumer.

### **Stereotyping & Gender**

This section of the chapter addresses **RQ 3:** What stereotypes result from these messages?

Four distinct stereotypes—class, race, gender and physical attractiveness—emerged from this study. In addition, these stereotypes seem to fit the "composite sketch" of the gay person: affluent, white, and male.

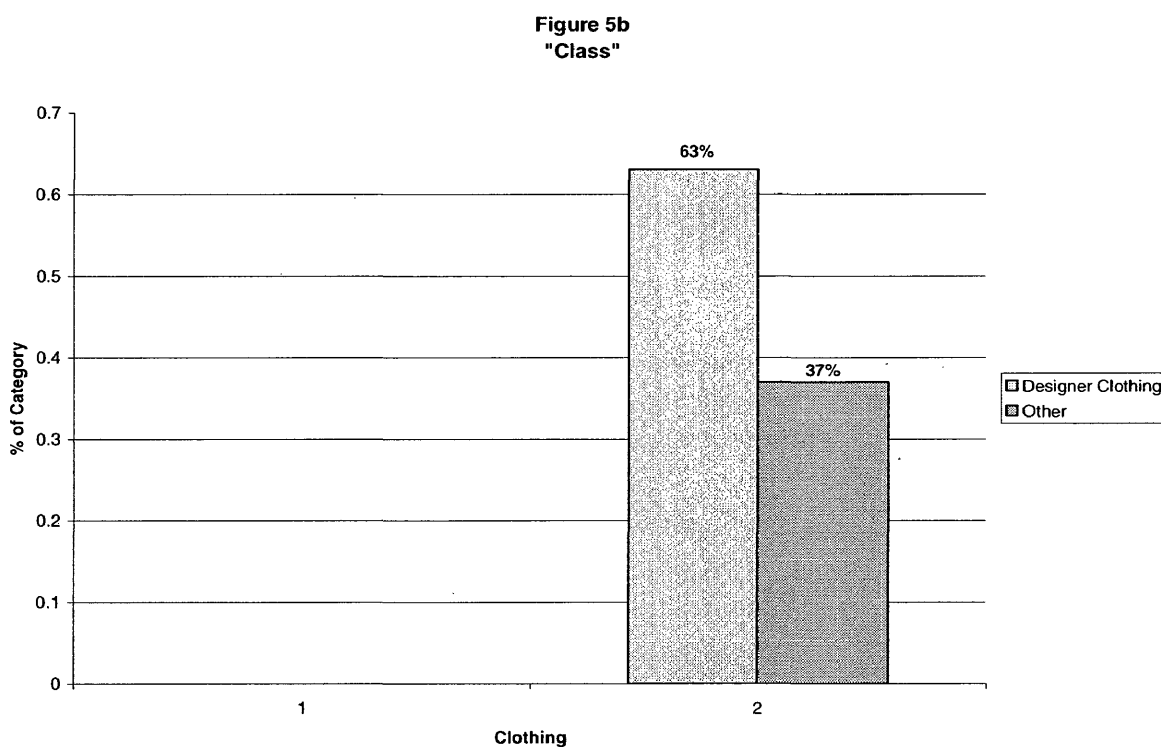
The first stereotype, class, is immediately apparent in the type of products and services advertised. These products are the premium brands of alcohol, expensive cars, ritzy hotels, designer clothing, and fine watches and jewelry, among other items. Croteau and Hoynes (2000) suggested that unlike everyday items all people need, the higher priced items, or luxury items, target the “affluent audience,” which appears to be the preferred audience of these mainstream advertisers. There are four specific categories of products that suggest this class stereotyping. The first category of products is alcohol beverages (See Figure 5a).



The majority of the advertisers for alcohol promoted their premium liquor, wine and champagne. Brands such as Chandon, Freixenet, Crown Royal, Absolut Vodka and Bacardi make up 77% of the alcohol category, while beer advertisements for Miller and Bud Light make up the other 23% of this category. Chura (1999) quoted a marketing

representative for Miller Brewing, Chris Amburn, as saying, “The gay community has lots of money. It’s single men with no responsibility, two good incomes in the house. Miller realizes that” (p.53).

Similarly, the second category of products suggesting a class stereotype is designer clothing advertisements (See Figure 5b). These advertisements make up 63% of the clothing category with fashions by advertisers such as Gucci, Kenneth Cole, Armani,

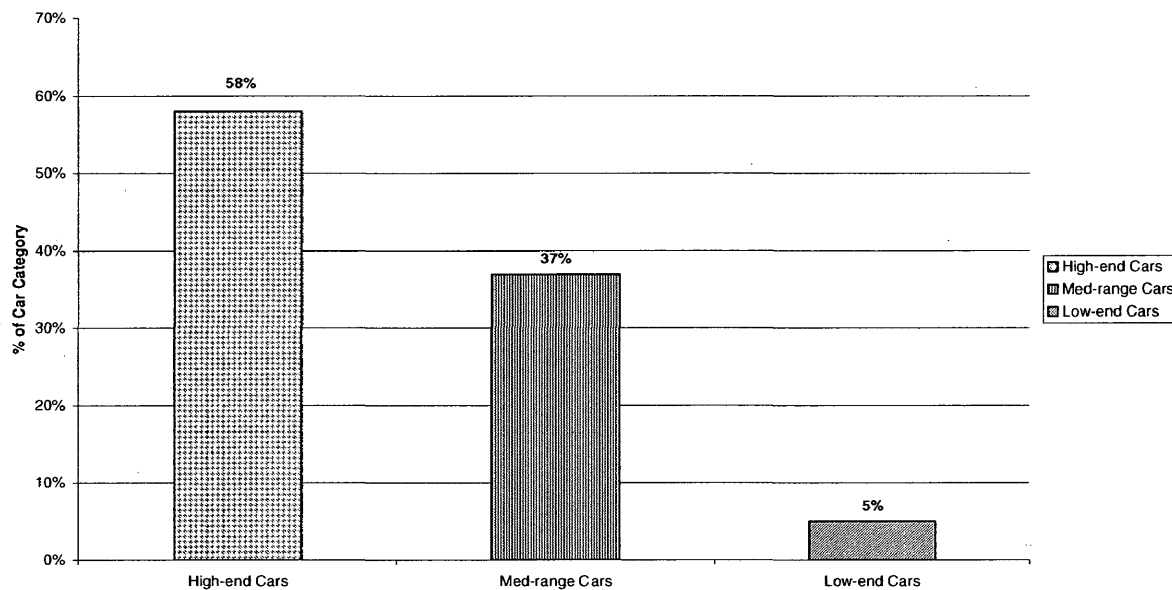


and Dolce & Gabbanna. Advertisers such as Banana Republic, Levi Strauss and Diesel make up the rest of the category at 37%.

The third category of products that suggest class stereotyping is car advertisements, which are perhaps the most telling of a high-income target audience (See Figure 5c). These advertisements include ones for high-end cars such as Saab, Cadillac,

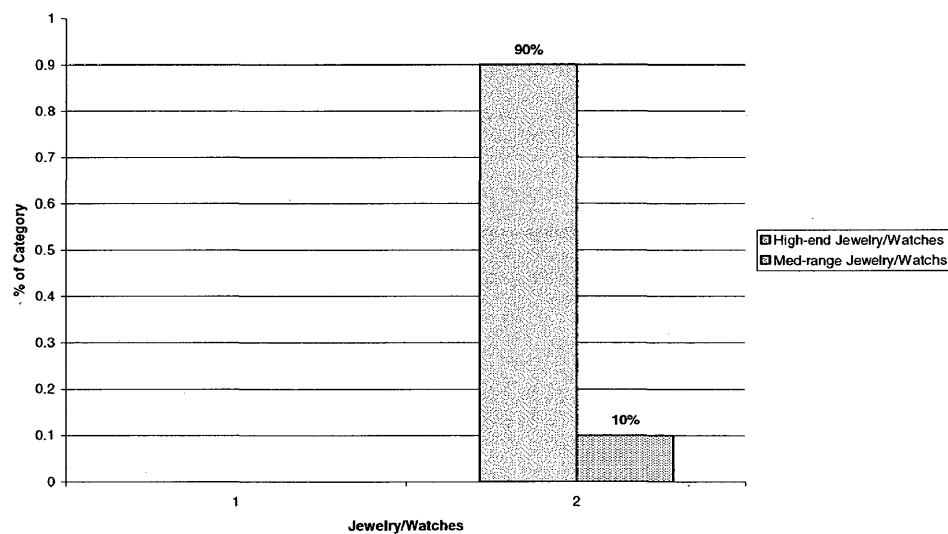
Jaguar, Volvo and Land Rover that make up 58% of the category, while advertisements for Subaru and Volkswagen make up 37% of the category of the mid-priced cars. Saturn makes up the other 5% of the category with their low-end priced car.

Figure 5c "Class"



The fourth category of products that suggest a class stereotyping is jewelry and watch advertisements (See Figure 5d).

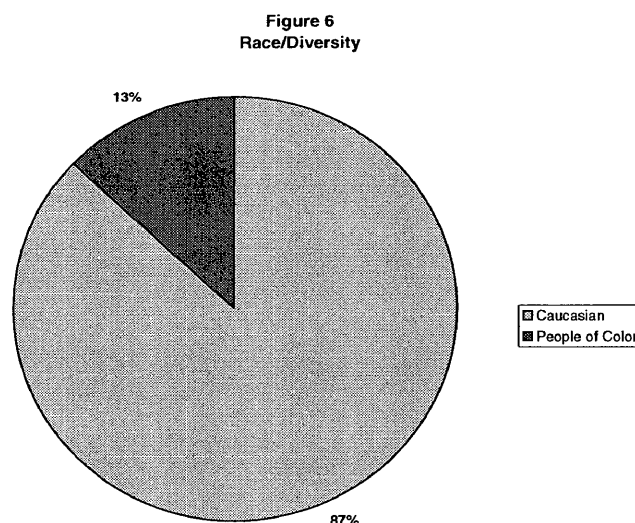
Figure 5d  
"Class"



These advertisements include advertisers such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci and Movado, which make up 90% of this category with Seiko, considered a mid-priced watch compared to the other watches, makes up the remaining 10% of the category.

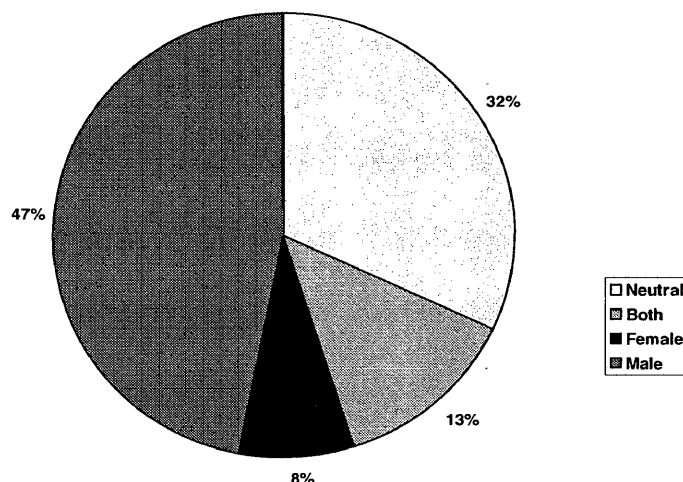
These four category of products show how the advertisers target affluent gay consumers, who for the most part tend to be—or appear to be—white males as seen in the next two examples of stereotyping.

Race, or the lack of ethnic diversity, is the second stereotype that emerged from this study. Of the advertisements featuring people, only 13% of the people were of a distinguishable ethnic background other than Caucasian such as Black, Hispanic, Latino or Asian; the other 87% appeared to be Caucasian (See Figure 6). Gender inequality is



the third stereotype that emerged from this study, which reinforces the “composite sketch” of the gay consumer as predominantly male (See Figure 7). Of the advertisements featuring people, only 21% featured women, either alone (8%) or with

Figure 7  
Gender Breakdown



men (13%), which means there are almost six times as many advertisements with only men in them as advertisements with only women in them.

Another aspect of gender stereotyping in the advertisements was how the women were portrayed. None of the women were overweight. Only one woman in the IBM advertisement, a live-shot of IBM's gay and lesbian workforce, was slightly overweight. Almost without exception, the women, even in the Bud Light animated advertisement, were well endowed. Most surprising, none of the women were cleaning or caring for sick children or spouses, as were none of the men. Only one woman was shopping, albeit in a dark alley for Perrier. Of the 2% of advertisements that even showed gays and lesbians with children—or a child about to be born—only one, the advertisement for Volvos, showed a lesbian couple pregnant with child. For the most part when women were portrayed in the advertisements, they were attractive, well-built and appeared single. Mainly, though, advertisers ignored the presence of the lesbian consumer.

Ignoring of women extends to the readership, too, where the gender stereotyping of these advertisements suggest that the predominant target audience is the gay male reader with the exception of when *The Advocate* featured a lesbian couple, Melissa Etheridge and her partner, Tammy Michaels, on the cover. The Bud Light advertisements best illustrate how the target market changed to include women for this issue. All of the Bud Light advertisements up until this time, except one, are of young men, many with bare chests, big muscles, tattoos and bulging thigh muscles. All the men are smiling and there are no women at the party suggesting a gay men's party. When the Melissa Etheridge cover ran in the January issue of *The Advocate*, the Bud Light advertisement had two women with one woman touching the face of the other woman. It appears to be a subtle intimate gesture. The clothing is very revealing and one woman sports a tattoo on her back shoulder blade. No Bud Light advertisements ran in the *Out* magazines in the timeframe of this study. This switch in advertising strategy seems to suggest the advertisers thought there would be a greater lesbian readership based on the cover with Melissa Etheridge, the popular lesbian icon and openly out rock star.

Based on the overall impression of the advertisements, it appeared that stereotyping was used to peg gay and lesbian consumers into certain gender roles; however, the "typical" gender roles for the most part were not seen in these advertisements. Women, as so often seen in mainstream advertisements, were not shown doing normal household chores such as laundry, scrubbing toilets, dusting or curing colds and fevers. For that matter, men were not shown in these roles either. Dyson vacuum was the only advertiser that suggested gays and lesbians even needed to do housework.

Rather, both women and men in these advertisements seemed to be having a good time, relaxing, traveling or fighting for their civil rights. Only 5% of the total advertisements, all targeting male consumers, suggested that men needed to stop and take time to care for their skin, teeth or to get a good night's sleep. Only one advertisement, Bridgestone Tires, suggested any sort of vehicle repair or maintenance and men were the ones purchasing the tires, not women, which reinforces the gender-specific roles. Oddly enough, there were no gay men, or women, playing sports such as football, softball or soccer, although the majority of the men in the advertisements sported the six-pack abs look suggesting they work out, which is another stereotype of gay men.

This leads to the fourth stereotype of physical attractiveness. While this stereotype was difficult to capture, the impression was that advertisers use people with a particular look that emphasizes the norms for beauty in our culture: not too tall, not too short, not too heavy, not too skinny, not too old or too poor looking, and with not too big of features nor too small of features, but everything is just right. For the most part, these advertisements portrayed the “beautiful” people who fit this norm. Most of the men in these advertisements were young, white and well built, either sporting muscles or well-defined physiques and a full head of hair. The women, the few portrayed in these advertisements, were mainly white with perfect teeth, flawless skin, manicured nails; and, if they were not pregnant, they were slender with perfect breasts. Even most of the cartoon-like people in the advertisements or the sketches of people had these beautiful-people features as in the Bud Light advertisements previously mentioned. Not to be outdone, the babies in the ads were cute or beautiful white and Asian babies.

These four stereotypes that emerged from this study, class, race, gender inequality, and physical attractiveness, suggest advertisers are perpetuating stereotypes of gays and lesbians that may not accurately reflect the true diversity of the community. As Bawer (1997) noted, gays and lesbians come in all sizes, shapes, races, religions, classes and ethnicities, the same as any other market segment of society.

Because of these stereotypes, negative perceptions may emerge from the advertising, and in turn, gays, lesbians and mainstream consumers who see these advertisements, may accept these negative perceptions. From these advertisements, too, spring worldviews that may have implications on how gays and lesbians see themselves and how mainstream society sees them. The worldviews revealed in this study, the visible and the invisible world of gays and lesbians, along with the potential implications of each worldview is addressed in the next part of this chapter.

### **Worldviews and Ideology**

This section of the chapter describes the two worldviews that emerged from this study and addresses **RQ 4:** What are the potential damaging effects of the advertisements in the way of gay and lesbians' perceptions of themselves or society's perceptions of them?

It is important to understand the power of the media, especially advertising, to produce potential harmful effects on gays and lesbians perceptions of reality and their perceptions of their place or role in society. Take the portrayal of heterosexual couples or the lack of same-sex couples in this mainstream advertising in the gay media. This

scenario has the potential to reinforce a dominant heterosexual culture and in turn make gays and lesbians invisible, both in the media and in society by virtue of their absence. This in turn devalues gays and lesbians' contributions to society.

In the visible worldview, too, potential harmful effects can emerge from advertisers portraying gays and lesbians in unflattering ways such as only showing them interested in sexual pleasures or only showing their sexual orientation as their whole identity. By the same token, if advertisers do not portray the sexual nature of gays and lesbians, this may lead to a perception that gay sex is not acceptable or still taboo.

In both worlds, the visible and the invisible, the use of negative stereotypes such as class, gender inequality, race and physical attractiveness can perpetuate a lack of understanding of the true nature and diversity of the gay and lesbian community.

### **Worldview #1—Visible Consumers**

This section will address how mainstream advertisements in this study make gays and lesbians visible. These advertisements do this by showing gay and lesbian relationships, even intimate ones; acknowledging their separate cultural identity; and by stating their support of gay causes and issues. This section will discuss these portrayals, both positive and negative, and their implications.

This positive visibility serves three potential purposes: one, it provides gay and lesbian consumers a sense of validation that their relationships and causes are being recognized and supported, which legitimizes their existence; two, the use of recognizable gay symbols and images acknowledges their separate cultural identity that both validates

their existence and their history; and three, it provides gay and lesbian consumers information about advertisers' stances on gay and lesbian issues, which may entice them to purchase the product and stay loyal to it.

These visible worldview advertisements portray gay and lesbian consumers in several positive ways. The most positive visible way is through the portrayal of same-sex couples in intimate relations such as lying in bed together, holding hands, caressing each other; or in situations such as dating, going on cruises together or purchasing large or high-priced items together such as cars, silverware and financial services. Gays and lesbians are also portrayed with their families as seen in Volvo's two-page advertisement featuring several different types of gay families: two lesbians, one with child; two white men with a young Asian baby, perhaps adopted; and two men with a Yorkshire puppy. These types of advertisements give glimpses into the everyday life of many gays and lesbians and are positive reflections of life within this diverse community. These portrayals also serve to normalize the gay and lesbian lifestyle, so it is not seen as abnormal or out of the ordinary; to focus on the whole person, not just their sexual identity.

However, this visibility also includes acknowledging the sexual orientation or "gay identity" of this consumer group because this sets them apart from other consumers and shows respect for their historical struggles. This is achieved through showing same-sex people exhibiting sexual desires for one another such as seen in the Bud Light advertisements. It is also achieved by the use of gay verbal text such as seen in the Towle silverware ad featuring a gay male couple with the caption: "Celebrate your Life's

Style.” Another way this visibility is achieved is through the use of gay imagery such as recognizable gay symbols, icons or images as seen in several of the advertisements including Sam Adams’ beer ad with the colorful silhouette beer logo in rainbow colors and Tylenol PM’s ad with the “Heritage of Pride” symbol.

The one caution here is that not all advertisers that use gay symbols or images, including gay-specific language, in advertisements are acknowledging the gay and lesbian consumer as legitimate members of society. Instead, the advertiser may only be using these symbols and images to attract the gay and lesbian consumer to their product or service. On one hand, the symbols and images serve as quick recognition as Kendrick & Lazier (1993) noted and serve to acknowledge a separate cultural identity; On the other hand, these symbols and images may lead the gay and lesbian consumer to think there is a shared reality when there is not. This can be seen in the Tylenol PM advertisement where it is also easy to see how the use of a gay-specific symbol can easily convey a hidden meaning that may not be there at all. Tylenol PM’s ad ran eight times and a gay symbol appeared in only two of these advertisements. Tylenol PM simply added a miniature rendition of Keith Haring’s painting to the advertisements with the title, “Heritage of Pride.” Both the recognizable painting by this gay icon and the word “pride,” hold symbolic meanings for many gays and lesbians: Haring, a gay artist who died of AIDS, represents the AIDS struggle; the word pride is associated with the historical struggles of the gay community (Stonewall, 2003). It is unclear if the makers of Tylenol PM share this reality or just used the symbol to grab the attention of gays and lesbians to purchase their product. Unlike Absolut, Volvo, or Clos Du Bois that affirm

support of gays and lesbians and their causes, Tylenol does not affirm their support of gays and lesbians or their causes in any of their other advertisements during the time period of this study.

There is a group of advertisers, however, that affirm a shared reality by their support of gay events, issues or causes such as National Coming Out Day, domestic-partner benefits, AIDS awareness or gay adoptions. Advertisers such as Absolut and Clos Du Bois put a declaration of their long-time support of gay issues in their advertisements. Absolut's ad in the November issue of *Out* (2003) touted the company's advocacy for the community since 1981. It also displayed nine different closets from a billboard promoting awareness of gays and lesbians: The closet is a universal symbol of the "coming-out" process of gay and lesbians and is uniquely associated with this culture. In this ad, there are no comparisons to heterosexuals or of gays and lesbians being an inferior cultural group. It does, however, convey their understanding of gay symbols as having historical importance and value.

Similar to Absolut's ad, Clos Du Bois' ad for their wine in the November 11 issue of *The Advocate* (2003) announced their company as "A proud supporter of the NAMES Project and AIDS Memorial Quilt." This affirmation validates and legitimizes gays and lesbians, their relationships, their values and their causes. Often this declaration is the only way these advertisers acknowledge the gay and lesbian audience.

By supporting gay and lesbian causes, advertisers also help legitimize the gays and lesbians' personal struggles for civil rights to legally marry their partners, to have benefits, and to adopt children. This validation can be seen in the Chereskin clothing

advertisement (#1) with two young men holding three babies, two blue-eyed blonde babies and one Asian baby. The text reads: “R you ready to adopt a new lifestyle?” This advertisement simply promotes the normalcy of the gay family with its unique underpinnings without diminishing its value. W Hotels’ advertisement also promotes the uniqueness of gay men’s relationships in a positive way. The ad shows two men waking up in a hotel bed together. There are no innuendos that this is out of the ordinary, but only natural and acceptable. These ads, as well as others, promote a positive identity for gays and lesbians.

All of these types of advertisements promote a positive and visible worldview of gays and lesbians; it is this visible worldview, too, that has the greatest potential to assimilate gays and lesbians into mainstream as just another consumer. This worldview, though, also includes visible portrayals that have the potential of causing or perpetuating negative stereotypes. However, even these potentially negative stereotypes can validate gays and lesbians’ existence and, as consumers, show they have desires and needs for products and services the same as any other consumer.

This negative visible worldview can be seen in several of the advertisements with sexual appeals such as Bud Light, Calvin Klein and the LifeStyles’ advertisements. These ads use sexually suggestive messages—mostly visual—to attract their gay and lesbian (mostly gay male) audience. Even though these representations may be positive in showing intimate gay and lesbian relationships, they have a greater potential of only showing their sexual orientation as their whole identity.

Another part of the visible worldview that perpetuates negative stereotypes and may have harmful effects is the portrayal of gay consumers as affluent, single, well-built, white males. This part of the visible worldview was evident throughout most of the advertising showing young, white men purchasing everything from skincare products to alcohol. The men in these advertisements such as Towle's silverware, Lufthansa's Airlines, and Bud Light, all elicit all or part of this image of the gay male. These men not only are handsome, tan and well-built, they also seem to have the money and the leisure time to enjoy the luxuries of life such as travel, jewelry and fine cars. Dilallo and Krumholtz (1994) stated it this way: "From dining out and dancing to vacationing and entertaining, gay men lead a lifestyle that would make even Ivana [Trump] blink" (p. 152).

This part of the visible worldview presents a dominant cultural ideal that men should be strong and successful (Wood, 1999; Sapiro, 1999). This portrayal, however, has two potential damaging effects: One, lesbians see that only men, white men, are affluent and worth advertisers' time; and, two, other less handsome, less well-built, less affluent gay men see themselves as less important or inferior to their more affluent gay, white male counterparts. It is as Chasin (2000), Rudd (1996) and Peñaloza (1996) argued, nothing more than an appeal to the composite sketch of the gay consumer based solely on market research of openly-gay, mostly male, consumers. Rudd (1996) contended that it ignored lesbians and closeted gays.

Aside from the obvious physical and class distinctions in these advertisements that have the potential to result in harmful effects, there is an obvious absence of gays

and lesbians engaging in traditional gender roles. There are no tough guy images of men on motorcycles or playing sports. There are no images of men mowing yards or working on cars. Neither are there images of women, nor men for that matter, cooking, cleaning or caring for children or sick family members. The majority of advertisements that make up this visible worldview do so by showing the image of healthy, handsome, well-built young white men in designer clothing with beautiful furnishings and expensive accessories.

The composite sketch appeal and the lack of traditional gender roles are not necessarily negative, but it does show that advertisers' strategies do not take into account the usual day-to-day problems that consumer goods can help gays and lesbians resolve by using their products. After all, normal everyday people purchase items to clean their homes, their bodies and their cars. They purchase products to stop hunger or pain or to get a good night's sleep, but it appears that gay and lesbian consumers only need a good night's sleep as evidenced by the Tylenol PM advertisement. Normal people also purchase items out of desire. While these advertisements did show gay men satisfying their desire to travel, vacation or celebrate, women were virtually absent in these types of advertisements.

The greatest potential harm of these types of advertisements is that the overarching stereotyping of class, and the race and gender inequality stereotyping within that class devalues women and men of color. In addition, portraying gays and lesbians sexual nature only reinforces the notion that this consumer group is a niche market because of their sexual orientation. While these advertisements make gays and lesbians

visible, they do not do it in a diverse, non-stereotypical way. The difficulty in appealing to the gay and lesbian consumer without stereotyping, especially in a negative way, may be why advertisers chose to ignore these types of appeals all together and used a neutral approach only showing their products. However, by promoting a positive identity of gays and lesbians, these advertisers can help assign a better place in the world for them; not only as viable consumers, but also as legitimate members of society.

The second worldview is that of the invisible consumer, which is addressed in the next section.

### **Worldview #2—Invisible Consumers**

This worldview is evident in the mere fact that 71% of the advertisers chose to advertise with a neutral message. There is no appeal to the gay and lesbian consumer being a unique or separate market niche. There is no acknowledgement of same-sex relationships, gay symbols or images. There is no acknowledgement and no validation that gays and lesbians exist inside or outside of the mainstream, except by the advertisements appearing in the gay media. This could, however, support Delozier and Rodrigue's (1996) argument that products that do not specifically target the gay and lesbian consumer such as motor oil, do not need to use a gay-specific message. In the larger picture, just as absence could be harmful to women's self-images, as Sapiro (1999) noted, absence could be harmful to the gay and lesbian audience as well.

Another part of this worldview is in the promotion of a heterosexual dominance as noted in several of the advertisements such as in the Puma ads. These ads ignore the

gay and lesbian culture, while using graphics or text to promote their products through a heterosexual message. This type of worldview helps perpetuate heterosexuality as superior to homosexuality. Wood (1999) wrote that “distorted” representations of older people in the media “deludes us into thinking they are a small, sickly, and unimportant part of our population” (p. 302). The lack of representations of gays and lesbians in the media, especially the gay media, has this kind of potential negative impact.

Aside from reinforcing a dominant heterosexual culture, this type of advertising also has the potential to inhibit assimilation, self-acceptance and social acceptance in this culture. If there are no “others like me,” as Wood (1999) said of the girls, how can they internalize a positive identification? Gays and lesbians, especially young adult gays and lesbians, need positive role models to reinforce their self-approval and acceptance. The absence of gays and lesbians or any gay symbols or images in advertising sends a silent message that it is not okay to be seen or even acknowledged. The absence of symbols and images is also problematic in another way. Wolfe (1999) wrote in her article on the millennium woman, “The Future is Ours to Lose,” that young girls need to know their history to gain “historical self-awareness.” Wolfe admonished women to share the history or women’s struggles with equality, so that the lessons of history would not be forgotten or repeated. Young gays and lesbians also need to be aware of the historical struggle of gays and lesbians who have gone before them, which is symbolized by the pink and black triangles, the rainbow flag, and the heritage of PRIDE. Kates (1998) warned that by making these symbols a tool of consumerism, though, it devalues the

historical meaning behind these symbols, which is why it is important for advertisers to show their support in more than just words.

This invisible worldview also uses ambiguity to ignore gays and lesbians. Chasin (2000) defined ambiguity in advertising as when advertisers use “groupings” of same-sex people to suggest gay identity or activity (p. 140). Reposado Tequila uses ambiguity in their advertisement showing three young men in a bed—appearing to be fully clothed—watching television and eating popcorn. There is no text or gay symbols to suggest this is a gay situation, only the placement in the gay media. Chasin (2000) referred to this as advertising “promoting assimilation and identity differences,” which can be interpreted by different audiences in different ways. This ambiguity can present the idea that there is something wrong with being gay or lesbian, so the issue has to be buried in ambiguity to be acceptable. Again, the absence of same-sex couples or even the acknowledgment of their culture as unique and different reinforces the idea that heterosexual relationships and people are the preferred, acceptable social norm.

### **Duplicate Advertisements**

The discussion of these two worldviews would not be complete without discussing the role duplicate advertising plays in the overall message. As a reminder, the 134 duplicate ads were removed from the study after the original count. These advertisements represented 26% of the original total. Because duplicate advertisements have the potential to reinforce positive, negative or stereotypical messages, it is important to identify which type of messages are being reinforced.

Fortunately in this study, only two of the duplicate advertisements were negative. One ad was specifically negative in regards to gays and lesbians and ran twice in *Out* Magazine, once in August 2003 and once in October 2003. This Jose Cuervo ad reinforced dominant heterosexual relationships. This particular type of message has the potential to cause the greatest harm to gays and lesbians perceptions of themselves and their relationships because it ignores their very existence.

The other negative ad, one for Puma, was not specifically negative in regards to gays and lesbians, but rather women in general. This particular Puma ad ran twice in *Out* magazine, once in November 2003 and once in December 2003. This advertisement had a male-dominance theme of men having greater strength than women in general. This message while negative may have a more direct negative affect on women overall, as opposed to just lesbians; however, lesbians are more likely to be the audience to see this message. This stereotypical gender inequality message, especially when repeated, has the potential to make women—or lesbians—feel inferior to men.

The remaining duplicates have just as great of a potential to reinforce their positive messages, especially when portraying gay and lesbian relationships. Many advertisers, like Volvo, duplicated these types of positive messages. Volvo ran their two-page ad portraying both gay and lesbian relationships a total of eight times: six times in The Advocate magazine and two times in the *Out* magazine. The repeated exposure to this type of advertising has the added potential to send a message of validation of the gay and lesbian lifestyle. Many of the ads that were duplicated, though, were the ads in the neutral category, which only repeated a message about the product or service itself.

Aside from reinforcing the products message, these ads may have ultimately reinforced a message of absence or of gays and lesbians being an invisible consumer, especially when the ad featured people.

Tylenol PM showed how easy it was to send a gay-specific message simply by adding a recognizable gay symbol. Tylenol PM ran the same ad in both magazines for a total of eight times. However, in two of these ads, both featured in the Out magazine, Tylenol PM added a gay-specific symbol or message in it. This simple acknowledgement, especially when repeated, has the potential to legitimize the gay and lesbian consumer and acknowledge their presence. This one recognizable gay logo turned the gay and lesbian consumer from an invisible consumer to a visible one.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Conclusion**

In the end, there were no big “Ah has!” Instead there were the same blaring stereotypes that have existed in advertising for years: class, race, gender inequalities and physical attraction. In addition, there were the usual stereotypical approaches used to attract a targeted consumer group; in this case it was the use of easily recognizable gay icons, images and symbols to attract gay and lesbian consumers. However, given all the stereotypes, the advertising was positive overall in regards to the gay and lesbian consumers themselves. It did not degrade or devalue this consumer group in an overt way—there was no derogatory text, innuendos of anti-gay sentiments or suggestions of immorality—nor did it carve out a niche market based on this consumers’ sexual nature. What it did, however, was show two very distinct worldviews of the gay and lesbian consumer, one as a visible consumer; and one as an invisible consumer. These two worldviews seemed to drive how advertisers approached this consumer both in the strategies they used and in how they positioned their products in their advertising to attract them.

The following section describes how these two very different worldviews shaped mainstream advertisers’ strategies in this medium and the potential implications of those strategies on the gay and lesbian consumer. In the end, this is the answer to the “Big So What?”

These two worldviews, visible consumer and invisible consumer, revealed in the analysis of advertisements in the gay media, specifically *The Advocate* and *Out* magazines, remind us of the social construction of reality theory that tells us these worldviews may have positive or negative effects on how gays and lesbians perceive themselves as part of society and how mainstream society perceives them. Berger and Luckmann (1966) wrote that individuals could internalize these perceptions and in essence these perceptions then would become part of their identity. This internalization in turn could produce a particular understanding of their “place in society.” For gays and lesbians, this assumed identity would be an identity of something other than normal or as inferior to that of the dominant heterosexual society. Likewise, the reinforcement of negative stereotypes in these advertisements serves to perpetuate the disenfranchisement of gays and lesbians in society through inaccurate perceptions of this community.

With 64% of the advertisements in these two magazines coming from mainstream advertisers, it is critical that the worldviews of gays and lesbians presented in these advertisements are positive and accurate reflections of this community. It is too easy for advertisers to use stereotypical approaches that promote negative perceptions of this consumer, which in turn could affect their perceptions of themselves, their perceptions of where they fit into a heterosexual world, and how others see them. Advertisers using this worldview of the visible consumer have the greatest potential for error simply by acknowledging the gay and lesbian consumer, their lifestyle and their heritage. Yet, in this analysis, the visible consumer worldview promoted the gay and lesbian lifestyle and heritage with respect and dignity, often showing their intimate relationships as acceptable

and normal; not only putting gay symbols in their ads, but also by explaining the historical significance behind them. However, when using this worldview approach, many advertisers succumbed to using stereotypical approaches of gender inequality, class and race. Although the advertisers portrayed same-sex intimate relationships in a positive way, same-sex male relationships were shown more often than same-sex women relationships. When it came to portrayals of gays and lesbians in general, gay men were seen in 79% of the ads featuring people compared to 21% featuring ads with women, but with only 8% of these ads exclusively featuring women. This under-representation of lesbians has the potential to make lesbians feel inferior to their gay counterparts and to males in general. This type of stereotype also has the potential to marginalize lesbians in their gay community and in a mainstream society.

Another stereotype that reared its ugly head was that of class, which was apparent in an overwhelming number of these advertisements. The overall sense was that gays and lesbians, especially gay men, are seen as very affluent and have the means to enjoy luxury items such as cruises, high-end cars, designer clothing and expensive liquors. In addition, it was apparent that almost all of the gays and lesbians portrayed in these advertisements were Caucasian. Again, these types of stereotypes perpetuate the myth of the “composite sketch” of the gay consumer as a white male with a highly disposable income (Peñaloza, 1996).

Yet another way advertisers succumbed to using stereotypical approaches was by the use of recognizable gay symbols and images, which is an easy way to make a quick connection to the targeted consumer (Kendrick & Lazier, 1993). The use of recognizable

gay symbols, icons and images, although limited, seemed to signal advertisers' understanding that these symbols, icons and images held some significance to the gay and lesbian consumer; that by using these symbols and images, it did not demoralize or degrade this consumer, but rather it acknowledged a unique cultural market. If the social construction of reality theory holds true, gays and lesbians could internalize the positive messages, especially with repeated exposure, which could in turn legitimize and validate their existence. However, gays and lesbians just as easily could internalize the negative messages, which potentially could in turn produce negative perceptions of their reality and their perceived place in society. This is where the invisible consumer worldview comes into play.

Unlike the visible consumer worldview, the invisible consumer worldview does not acknowledge the gay and lesbian consumer at all, but simply promotes its products and services. This was the advertising coded as neutral advertising; considering this neutral advertising represents 71% of the total mainstream advertising in this medium, it is worthwhile to think about the potential negative implications of these advertisements through the lens of the social construction of reality theory.

While this type of advertising is not negative on the surface, it has the potential to produce negative effects because of the absence of a specific gay or lesbian message acknowledging this consumer's existence. This is true especially when 55% of these types of ads featured people in them and the advertisers made no attempt, visually or verbally, to suggest the people in these ads were gays or lesbians. The message then is simple: The absence of gays and lesbians in these ads reinforces their invisible consumer

status, thereby perpetuating gays and lesbians as a marginalized people. This mediated-marginalization can translate to real-life perceptions of marginalization, especially where civil rights and equality are concerned in areas such as gay marriage, adoption, benefits and other legal matters. The more gays and lesbians are seen as inferior or absent, the more difficult it becomes to gain this equality.

So what do we do? We follow the lead of longtime advertisers in the gay media who have perfected the consumer worldview. Advertisers like Absolut Vodka, American Express and Clos Du Bois employ the strategies that not only attract gay and lesbian consumers to their products and services, but ones that also acknowledge their presence as unique and valuable, thereby validating their existence. These advertisers further recognize the real-life struggles and issues facing gays and lesbians and affirm their support of them in their advertisements. Other advertisers, as Kates (1998) noted, learned the hard way through boycotts of their products not to take the gay and lesbian consumer for granted. Kates (1998) study of the “gay market” showed how gays and lesbians forced the hands of giant advertisers like Marlboro and Coors to acknowledge them as more than just a consumer. Marlboro and Coors both continue to support gay and lesbian events that raise awareness and funds for AIDS research (Kates 1998).

This awareness and acknowledgement of gays and lesbians as more than just a niche market or just another viable consumer, can aid advertisers in doing a better job of connecting with this unique consumer group. Publishers of gay and lesbian media can also play a role by making an effort to ensure the advertising they accept in their publications is responsible and makes the gay and lesbian consumer a visible one. A

recommendation would be to put a stamp of approval on advertising that meets this standard of positive visibility. In addition, an understanding of the diversity of the gay and lesbian community can further advertisers ability to connect with more of this targeted audience. This means not relying solely on the “composite sketch” of the gay consumer, but expanding this sketch to include women, people of color, and people of different economic classes. However, this diversity must include the whole spectrum of this community: drag queens, leather daddies, effeminate males, butch women and “dykes,” as well as people of different ethnicities and races. Then, the perceptions derived from these advertisements would be as diverse as the gay community itself. This accurate view then can promote not only tolerance, but acceptance as well.

Finally, avoiding age-old stereotypes that perpetuate discrimination or the marginalization of this consumer group, or people who make up this consumer group, would go a long way in furthering responsible advertising; thereby, promoting fair and accurate representations of gays and lesbians. Instead of using stereotypes that include portrayals of a dominant heterosexual culture, advertisers could use portrayals of the unique gay and lesbian culture. Simply using an ambiguous message such as three people in an ad with two people of the same sex is no longer acceptable either. Advertisers need to be bold and show gays and lesbians as ordinary people with jobs, relationships, families, pets and friends; who make decisions on what products or services to purchase. These types of advertising messages could encourage the real-life assimilation and acceptance of gays and lesbians as legitimate and valuable members of mainstream society.

In the final analysis, these worldviews, visible and invisible, present themselves for interpretation to the gay, lesbian and heterosexual consumer; even though it is difficult to understand just how these advertisements may be interpreted, the social construction of reality theory helps us understand the potential harm in negative and stereotypical advertising. However, when advertisers have a choice to better connect with their targeted audience, it is the hope of this researcher that they would follow the industry leaders who have gone before them and use advertising strategies that are responsible and inclusive.

This research provides valuable insight for these advertisers into the construction of their messages, the potential positive or negative stereotypes that are embedded in them, and the potential impact on the consumers who view them. Because advertisements have the potential to promote worldviews that are accepted by media consumers as reality, it is critical that the worldviews in this medium be scrutinized. Publishers, as well as advertisers, have the choice to eliminate stereotypes of all kinds and promote a worldview that is representative and respectful of this unique consumer group. This research, through the deconstruction of the advertising was able to identify these stereotypes and could prove useful in discussions to bring about change in the industry.

While limited at best, this study is also a valuable building block to add to the previous research in this area. It is the hope that this study will be valuable to future researchers seeking to better understand this diverse consumer group. One ideal world would be when gays and lesbians would be assimilated into mainstream society with their

cultural symbols and language simply seen as historical artifacts of mainstream culture. Once this ideal is attained, gays, lesbians and heterosexuals could enjoy a world that promoted equality and diversity. Another, and perhaps more realistic world, would be for gays and lesbians to have their own separate cultural identity, but be recognized as a unique culture within the mainstream culture, thereby preserving their heritage and their cultural symbols. However, until one of these worlds is recognized, it is necessary to continue research such as this to achieve this ideal.

### **Limitations**

While this study identified the possible perceptions of reality derived from mainstream advertising in the gay media, it by no stretch of the imagination captured all of the potential harmful effects of the worldviews presented. To do that, in-depth interviews of gays, lesbians and other viewers of these advertisements would need to be undertaken. It could then be determined if gays and lesbians perceptions of themselves were similar to the suggested perceptions in this study; and if other's perceptions of them were the same, too.

The descriptors, especially the sexual appeals and gender, were difficult to keep pure, both from the ideological standpoint of this author and because of the target audience. As an example, an advertisement labeled as a negative sexual appeal because of the intimate heterosexual contact in it may actually be a sex-appealing message to a bisexual or transgender person. The bias of this author could have clouded the interpretations of the sexual appeals of gay men. The waters are very muddy when it

comes to sexual preference and appeal in the gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender world.

Limitations also exist in that the study itself was limited to two gay magazines and, due to the constraints of time and availability, for only a period of six months. A longer study of multiple years on different points in time could produce some interesting results. Also, a longer, more in-depth analysis of past advertising in this medium, especially in these two magazines that have existed for quite some time, could also render some interesting findings. There are also limitations of appeals to the gay and lesbian consumer because of the limited advertising directly targeting lesbian consumers, which more than hinders a complete conclusion of any type.

Finally, this research was hindered by the limited research in the field. Although advertising research reaches back several decades, much of the gay-specific advertising has only been researched and published in the last ten years. Because it is a newly researched area, there are few replicated studies; and fewer studies of actual surveys or in-depth interviews. Part of the problem that exists in the research of this consumer group is that it is not a completely identifiable group. Even if there were studies on this consumer group, the studies would most likely only reflect the “out-of-the-closet” consumer, which would not accurately reflect the whole gay and lesbian community.

### **Future Research**

A suggestion for a follow-up study to this one could be a cultivation analysis of the messages and of the gay and lesbian consumers’ responses to these messages. As

mentioned in the limitations section, in-depth interviews or surveys of gays, lesbians and others exposed to the advertising could help determine actual perceptions of the messages within the ads. This would expand our understanding of the worldviews presented and their harmful effects.

Another potential study could be to research why lesbian magazines typically do not have mainstream advertising in them. Is it because they are seen as minor players when it comes to consumption compared to gay males who are seen as having higher earning capacities or is it by choice? Schudson (1984) observed that advertisers and marketers catered to the upper echelon of society and ignored the poor or low-wage earners for obvious reasons.

This study revealed that there are gender discrepancies even in gay and lesbian advertising. A study focusing on gender issues would also be a worthwhile study. This type of study could be done by comparing mainstream companies' advertisements in mainstream magazines to that of the gay media. Questions about gender could be addressed in such a way to determine the target audience of the advertisements based on the medium: Do the companies resort to targeting a male audience for their products when advertising in the gay media while targeting women in the mainstream advertising for the same product?

Another possible future research would be to analyze the online versions of these magazines and compare mainstream advertising in the hard copy of the gay magazines. It would be interesting to see if the online advertisements, which could be viewed by

audiences of all persuasions, were different from the hardcopy versions. This study could also come from an ideological perspective and seek to identify different worldviews.

One other study could look at the differences of one company's advertising strategies in mainstream magazines and compare that to advertising strategies in the gay media. The McNeill-PPC, Inc.'s advertisement for Tylenol PM is an example of how just adding a gay symbol to an ad changes its target audience. Questions could be asked about how many companies use this type of strategy and if it is effective or not.

Much has yet to be discerned about the marketing practices of advertisers in the gay media, but this study is another step toward answering some of the questions about its lingering effects on people's – gay, lesbian, and straight – social construction of reality.

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## Appendix A: Coding Sheet

Ad	Advoc Issue (s)	Out Issue (s)	# of Ads	Int Rel	Icons Image	Col/ Sym	Vrbl Msgs V / NV	Strt Self	Stereotypes Pos (P) Neg (N) Neut (NU)	Sex Appeal Y=Yes N=No	Gender Neut=NU B=Both F=Fem M=Male
Absolut Vodka #1	10/14		1					X	NU	N	NU
Absolut Vodka #2	8/19		1					X	NU	N	NU
Absolut Vodka #3	11/11		1					X	NU	N	NU
Absolut Vodka #4	1/20		1					X	NU	N	NU
Absolut Vodka #5	9/16	Oct-03	2					X	NU	Y	M
Absolut Vodka #6	12/9	Dec-03	2					X	NU	N	NU
Absolut Vodka #7	9/30	Aug-03	2					X	NU	N	NU
Absolut Vodka #8		Jan-04	1					X	NU	N	NU
Absolut Vodka #9		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Absolut Vodka #10		Nov-03	1			X	X		P	N	B
Absolut Vodka #11		Nov-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
ACLU	11/25		1					X	NU	N	M
ACLU		Oct-03	1					X	NU	N	M
ACLU #3		Nov-03	1					X	NU	N	F
Altoids		Aug-03	1					X	NU	N	M
AmEx #1	9/16, 10/28, 11/25, 1/20		4	X			X		P	N	M
AmEx #2	10/14, 9/11		2	X			X		P	N	B
AmEx #3	1/20		1					X	NU	N	M
AmEx #4	12/9		1	X			X		P	N	M
AmEx #5	10/14, 10/28, 11/25	12/03, 10/03, 11/03	6					X	NU	N	M
AmEx #6	12/9, 12/23		2					X	NU	N	NU
AmEx #7		Dec-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
AmEx #8		Aug-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
AmEx #9		Oct-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
AmEx #10		Nov-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Anheuser-Busch #1	1/20		1	X					P	Y	B
Anheuser-Busch #2	10/14, 8/19	Sep-03	3	X		X			P	Y	M
Anheuser-Busch #3	12/23		1	X					P	Y	M
Anheuser-Busch #4	11/11		1	X					P	Y	M
Anheuser-Busch #5	9/2, 9/16	Nov-03	3	X					P	Y	M
Anheuser-Busch #6		Jan-04	1	X					P	Y	M
AnBusch, Bacardi	12/9		1					X	NU	N	NU
Aramis		12/03, 11/03	2					X	NU	N	M
Armani Exchange #1		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Armani Exchange #2		Oct-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Avis Rent a Car	8/19	8/03, 9/03	3	X			X		P	N	M
Bacardi & Co #1 (Lem)		Jan-04	1					X	NU	N	NU
Bacardi & Co #2 (Van)		Aug-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Bacardi & Co #3 (Coco)		Nov-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Banana Republic		Dec-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Banana Republic #2		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Banana Republic #3		Oct-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Bang & Olufsen #1		Jan-04	1					X	NU	N	NU
Bang & Olufsen #2		Dec-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Bang & Olufsen #3		Nov-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Borgata Hotel	9/16	Aug-03	2	X					P	N	M
Bridgestone		Oct-03	1				X		P	N	M
Cadillac	12/9, 12/23		2					X	NU	N	NU
California Closets		Sep-03	1				X		P	N	M
California Closets #2		Nov-03	1				X		P	N	M
Calif Dept of Health #1	9/2, 1/20	Dec-03	3			X	X		P	N	NU
Calvin Klein #1		Dec-03	1					X	NU	Y	M
Calvin Klein #2		Dec-03	1					X	NU	Y	M
Calvin Klein #3		Sep-03	1					X	NU	Y	M
Calvin Klein #4		Oct-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Captain Morgan		Dec-03	1					X	N	Y	B
Chandon	12/23		1	X					P	N	M
Chereskin		Sep-03	1	X			X		P	N	M
Chereskin #2		Oct-03	1						NU	Y	M
Clos Du Bois	11/11, 11/25, 12/23	Dec-03	4				X		P	N	NU
Colehaan		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Colgate		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	NU

## Appendix A: Coding Sheet (continued)

Ad	Advoc Issue (s)	Out Issue (s)	# of Ads	Int Rel	Icons Image	Col/ Sym	Vrbl Msgs V / NV	Strt Sell	Stereotypes Pos (P) Neg (N) Neut (NU)	Sex Appeal Y=Yes N=No	Gender Neut=NU B=Both F=Fem M=Male
Crown Royal #2	9/11	Sep-03	2						X NU	N	NU
Crown Royal #3	10/14		1						X NU	N	NU
Crown Royal #4	11/11		1						X NU	N	M
Crown Royal #5	12/9, 12/23	Dec-03	3						X NU	N	NU
Crown Royal #6	12/9, 12/23	Nov-03	1						X NU	Y	F
Dean for America	10/14		1				X		P	N	B
Delta Airlines #1	10/14		1				X		P	N	NU
Delta Airlines #2	11/11, 12/9		2					X	NU	N	B
Delta Airlines #3	9/2		1					X	NU	N	NU
Diesel #1		Dec-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Diesel #2		Dec-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Diesel #3		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Diesel #4		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Diesel #5		Oct-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Diesel #6		Oct-03	1					X	NU	Y	M
Dolce & Gabbana		12/03, 9/03	2					X	NU	N	M
Dolce & Gabbana #2		10/03, 11/03	2					X	NU	N	B
Dyson		12/03, 11/03	2					X	NU	N	NU
Earthlink	8/19		1				X		P	N	F
Earthlink		Aug-03	1				X		P	N	M
Franklin Mint		Oct-03	1		X				P	N	B
Freixenet		12/03, 11/03	2					X	NU	N	NU
Gucci		Dec-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Gucci #2		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Gucci #3		Oct-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Gucci #4		Nov-03	1					X	NU	N	M
IBM #2	11/11, 11/25, 1/20	Dec-03	4				X		P	N	B
Jaguar #1	8/19, 12/23		2					X	NU	N	NU
Jaguar #2	9/16, 11/25	Dec-03	3					X	NU	N	NU
Jaguar #3	10/28		1					X	NU	N	NU
Jaguar #4		Aug-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Jaguar #5		9/03, 10/03, 11/03	3					X	NU	N	NU
JFK Library	9/2		1	X				X	NU	N	B
Jilsander		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Jocko		Dec-03	1					X	P	Y	M
Jose Cuervo		8/03, 10/03	2	X					N	Y	B
Kenneth Cole #1		Sep-03	1	X					N	Y	B
Kenneth Cole #2		Oct-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Key west	1/19		1	X		X	X		P	N	B
Kodak	10/14		1					X	NU	N	F
Land Rover	9/16		1					X	NU	N	M
Land Rover #5	12/9		1					X	NU	N	NU
Land Rover #2		Dec-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Land Rover #3		Aug-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Land Rover #4		Nov-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Levi Strauss & Co		Aug-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Liberty Travel	12/9, 1/20		2	X		X	X		P	N	B
LifeStyles	10/14, 28, 11/11, 12/9, 23, 1/20	1/04, 8/03, 10/03	9				X		P	Y	M
Louis Vuitton		Dec-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Louis Vuitton		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Louis Vuitton		Nov-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Lufthansa	12/9	Nov-03	2	X					P	N	M

## Appendix A: Coding Sheet (continued)

Ad	Advoc Issue (s)	Out Issue (s)	# of Ads	Int Rel	Icons Image	Col/ Sym	Vrbl Msgs V / NV	Strt Sell	Stereotypes Pos (P) Neg (N) Neut (NU)	Sex Appeal Y=Yes N=No	Gender Neut=NU B=Both F=Fem M=Male
Marc Jacobs #1		Sep-03	1	X					NU	N	M
Marc Jacobs #2		Oct-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Mastercard		Dec-03	1				X		P	N	B
MBNA America	8/19, 9/16, 11/25, 1/20	Sep-03	5		X	X	X		P	N	F
McNeil-PPC (Tylenol)	8/19, 10/14, 11/11, 12/9	12/03, 10/03	6					X	NU	N	M
McNeil-PPC (Tylenol)		8/03, 9/03	2			X	X		P	N	M
Miami Conv & Visit Bur		Dec-03	1			X	X		P	N	M
Miller Brewing #1	8/19	12/03, 8/03, 9/03	4				X		NU	N	NU
Miller Brewing #2	9/30, 10/28	Oct-03	3					X	NU	N	NU
Miller Brewing #3	10/14	Nov-03	2					X	NU	N	NU
Mitchell Gold (chairs)	11/25, 12/23		2					X	NU	N	NU
Miu Miu		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Movado #1	12/23, 10/28	Oct-03	3					X	NU	N	M
Movado #2	9/16, 11/25, 12/9	12/03, 9/03	5					X	NU	N	NU
Movado #3		Nov-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Nautica		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Neutrogena	8/19, 9/16	9/03, 10/03	4					X	NU	N	M
Nivea #1	9/2, 9/30		2					X	NU	N	M
Nivea #2	11/11, 12/9	10/03, 11/03	4					X	NU	N	M
Nivea #3		Aug-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Nolet Spirits (Vodka)	8/19, 10/14, 11/25	12/03, 9/03, 10/03, 11/03	7					X	NU	N	NU
Nutraceuticals		Jan-04	1					X	NU	N	NU
Orbitz	9/16	Oct-03	2				X		P	N	M
Orbitz #2		Aug-03	1				X		P	Y	M
Panasonic	11/11, 12/9		2					X	NU	N	M
Paramount Pictures	8/19	Aug-03	2		X		X		P	N	B
Pennsylvania	9/16		1		X	X			P	N	M
Perrier #1		Sep-03	1	X					P	N	F
Perrier #2		Nov-03	1					X	NU	N	F
Pfizer	10/14		1				X		P	N	B
Prada		Aug-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Progressive Auto Ins	10/14		1					X	NU	N	B
ProvinceTown	9/16, 9/30, 10/14, 10/28		4	X			X		P	N	M
Puma #1		12/03, 11/03	2					X	N	N	M
Puma #2		Aug-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Puma #3		Sep-03	1	X					N	N	M
Puma #4		Oct-03	1	X					N	N	M
Reposado Tequila		8/03, 9/03	2	X					P	Y	M
RJR Tobacco #1	1/20		1					X	N	Y	B
RJR Tobacco #2	9/30, 10/14, 11/25		3					X	NU	Y	B
RJR Tobacco #4	12/9, 12/23		2					X	NU	N	M
RJR Tobacco (new) #5		1/04, 8/03	2					X	NU	N	M
Saab	11/25		1					X	NU	N	M
Sam Adams		Aug-03	1			X			P	N	NU
Saturn	9/16, 10/14, 11/11, 12/9	12/03, 10/03, 11/03	7					X	NU	N	M
Seiko	11/11, 11/23, 12/9, 12/23		4					X	NU	N	F

## Appendix A: Coding Sheet (continued)

Ad	Advoc Issue (s)	Out Issue (s)	# of Ads	Int Rel	Icons Image	Col/ Sym	Vrbl Msgs V / NV	Strt Sell	Stereotypes Pos (P) Neg (N) Neut (NU)	Sex Appeal Y=Yes N=No	Gender Neut=NU B=Both F=Fem M=Male
Sisley		Sep-03	1					X	NU	Y	M
SKYY Blue #1		Sep-03	1					X	NU	Y	F
SKYY Blue #2		12/03, 8/03	2					X	NU	Y	M
SKYY Blue #3		Oct-03	1					X	NU	Y	F
Smirnoff		Dec-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Smirnoff #2		Aug-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Sonoma County	1/20		1					X	NU	N	B
Subaru #2	1/20		1					X	NU	Y	NU
Subaru #3	11/11		1				X		P	N	NU
Subaru #4	10/28		1			X	X		P	N	B
Subaru #5, #6, #7	8/19, 9/2, 9/16	Aug-03	4			X	X		P	Y	F
Subaru #8	9/30, 10/14		2		X		X		P	N	NU
Swiss Army		Dec-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Swiss Army #2		Nov-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Tanqueray	8/19, 12/23	Jan-04	3					X	NU	N	F
Tanqueray		Aug-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Terra (veg chips)	11/25	Dec-03	2					X	NU	N	F
Target		Aug-03	1					X	NU	N	M
Tommy Hilfiger		12/03, 11/03	2					X	NU	N	M
Towle (sterling)		Dec-03	1	X					P	N	M
Versace		Sep-03	1					X	NU	Y	M
Visa	8/19, 11/11	Dec-03	3					X	NU	N	NU
Volkswagon #1	8/19		1					X	NU	N	NU
Volkswagon #2	12/9		1					X	NU	N	NU
Volkswagon #3	10/28		1					X	NU	N	NU
Volkswagon #4		Dec-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Volkswagon #5		8/03, 9/03	2					X	NU	N	B
Volkswagon #6		Nov-03	1					X	NU	N	B
Volvo	8/19, 9/2, 16, 10/14, 11/11, 25	8/03, 9/03	8	X		X	X		P	N	B
Vox Vodka		12/03, 8/03, 9/03, 10/03, 11/03	5					X	NU	N	NU
W Hotels		Dec-03	1					X	NU	N	M
W Hotels #2		Aug-03	1	X					P	Y	M
W Hotels #3		Sep-03	1					X	NU	N	NU
Wilton Station (RE)	1/20		1				X		P	N	NU
Xerox	10/14		1					X	NU	N	F
Youthful Essence	9/30		1					X	NU	N	F
YvesSaintLaurent		Sep-03	1	X				X	N	Y	B

<b>Category Breakdowns:</b>		<b>*Total Ads: 331</b>	<b>Sex Appeal:</b>	
Intimate Relationships	29	<b>w/o Dups: 197</b>	<b>Yes: 31</b>	<b>No: 166</b>
Icons/Images	5	*Of 514 original ads from both magazines The 197 ads are used for this study		
Colors/Symbols	13	<b>Stereotypes</b>	<b>Gender Breakdown:</b>	
Verbal Messages	35	<b>Positive: 51</b>	<b>Neutral: 63</b>	<b>Male: 93</b>
Straight Selling	140	<b>Negative: 8</b>	<b>Both: 26</b>	<b>Female: 15</b>
(Some ads have multiple categories)		<b>Total Neutral: 138</b>		